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**PARALLEL STRUCTURES FOR PARLIAMENTARY  
RESEARCH AND STUDIES IN EGYPT**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The ideal value of information lies in the enhancement of parliamentary efficiency and the representative character of the system of government as a whole. Moreover, the legislative process and the making of parliamentary decisions require deep knowledge and systematic mechanisms of data collection and analysis, preparation of reports, and formulation of potential alternatives. Such mechanisms could be formal or informal (i.e. parallel).

Parallel structures of information provision and knowledge creation arise when new developments take place in the structure of parliament, whereby new MPs come aboard, who are interested in data and information. They are then dissatisfied with the quality of information services made available in parliament via formal structures, and so they solicit outside technical assistance. Eventually they seek this kind of assistance repeatedly to the extent that they become dependent on it, alongside the services offered by the parliament' technical apparatus. We therefore begin to face a situation where the external sources become parallel to the internal (official) sources.

This report reviews the parallel information structures of the Egyptian People's Assembly. It seeks to place these structures within a theoretical framework that facilitates a comparison with other cases in the area of performance evaluation and raising alternatives to enhance information efficiency in parliamentary debates.

### **1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

By parallel structures are meant the additional mechanisms and operations that take place inside the institution without any legal commitment to their continuation or outcome. Thus the starting point in defining these structures is its link to the official legal framework which renders them un-obligatory. Being so, these structures may change in intensity, level of performance or outputs without any legal benchmark or official mandate.

Sources of parallel non-governmental information and knowledge used by parallel structures are divided into local and international structures. Local structures are

parliamentary resource and expertise centers that offer consultations or technical assistance to deputies in various areas depending on their request and concluded contract. They may be non governmental organizations or lobbying groups (like trade unions in the case of the discussion of the labor law or the association of graduates of the faculty of commerce during the discussion of the law regulating audit activities). They may also be research centers that offer services for fees in the specialized areas of law and economic studies, or general services that do not require narrow specializations.

International structures may be governmental, United Nations- like organizations, or international NGOs or unofficial organizations that offer recommendations such as human rights organizations. These organizations may offer their services to the Assembly as a whole or alternatively may offer their reports to some members for discussion within parliament.

### **1.1 Criteria of Parallel Information Structures in Parliament**

Seven issues are involved in the expression ‘parallel structures’ and in regulating the relationships between formal and informal structures.

The **first** is that there is no integral or organic relationship between the two types of structures (formal and informal, or official and non-official). The presence of one does not negate or rule out the presence of the other even if the relationship between them is marked by competition and conflicting interests, in the political sense of the term.

The **second** is that the parallel relationship between formal and informal structures does not mean equality or duplication. It is more like the shadow government of a government in power. Decision ‘taking’ remains the official task of the formal structure (de jure), even though the decision ‘making’ can extend or even actually take place within informal structures (de facto). In other words, informal structures are not inevitable (but they are a universal phenomenon), while formal structures are essential for the informal structures to exist. Thus, the origin is the formal structure. Other informal mechanisms, operations and structures that offer research services and parliamentary information are the shadow.

The **third** observation refers to the nature of the equation between formal and informal structures. Despite the statement that most parliaments and MPs deal with parallel structures for research and information services, and regardless of the quality of these services, yet demand for parallel structures rises when the formal structure deviates from its declared intentions and fails to fulfill its institutional duties toward its MPs. This is similar to the shadow of an individual who is standing and the sun-rays fall perpendicular on him/her. In this case the shadow is non-existent. If this individual moves, the shadow appears and its space becomes larger as the deviation angle becomes larger. In other words, there is an inverse relationship between the efficiency of the formal structures and the demand on parallel structures in offering technical assistance to Parliament and its MPs.

**Fourth** is accountability. Official structures are held accountable because they are the institutional and technical base of parliament. They comprise a group of technical staff and professionals who work for the parliament; they are professionally committed to it and report to an administrative manager in parliament. On the other hand, these parallel structures are not accountable to parliament.

**Fifth** is openness to multiplicity and change. On one hand, the formal structures alone represent the parliament; their services and the information they offer are accessible to all MPs (according to regulations of exchange of information and internal regulations and parliamentary traditions), while the services and data of informal structures do not represent the parliamentary institutions even if they are used by MPs. On the other hand, both the formal and parallel structures change, but only the parallel structures are replicable and there is only one formal structure i.e. the technical secretariat of Parliament (This explains why we refer to the ‘formal structure’ in the singular form and to ‘parallel structures’ in plural).

**Sixth** refers to what is meant by ‘structures’, since it is an analytical expression and description that does not necessarily reflect reality. Earlier in this report we defined parallel structures as a set of mechanisms and processes that are not necessarily organically linked in a way that renders them units in a structure with differentiated functions or institutional links within a chain of command that is largely recognized. All

the above descriptions do not apply to the expression ‘parallel information structures’, but may apply to lobbies or at least some of them.

Finally, the **seventh** observation deals with the difference between the parallel structures and lobbies. While the latter often use information services to exert pressure, they are not confined to information. They have other ways to influence decisions like the mutual interests between lobbyists and legislators (this explains why they are called interest groups as well as lobbies). On the other hand, parallel information structures are not necessarily lobbying groups; they may be a small group or people or even individuals who do not have common interests with the legislators and do not seek to influence them through exerting pressure. They may be paid consultants, or voluntary workers; they may comprise individuals who work in formal structures but who offer their services beyond their official roles, voluntarily or involuntarily. For example, a government official who becomes a deputy in parliament might ask some of his/her subordinates to offer him/her information services that support his/her parliamentary activities but that have nothing at all to do with their or his/her work in government.

## **1.2 Classification of parallel structures**

Parallel structures can be viewed from three perspectives that allow us to classify them in different ways. The first angle is the route of the service or its function, which raises the following question: where does the information go and in what ways it will be used? For example, will it be used in parliamentary debates, or used by the MP for another purpose i.e. outside the realm of direct parliamentary activities? The second angle focuses on the requester of service or the receiver of information or knowledge. There are several possibilities. The beneficiary may be an MP or one of parliament’s committees or might be the technical apparatus of parliament (through outsourcing). The third angle is the cost.

## **2. PARALLEL STRUCTURES INSIDE PARLIAMENT & PARLIAMENTARY FUNCTIONS**

By this we mean to what use are the research studies and information geared? Naturally, the first answer that comes to mind is parliamentary discussions, but the

question here is: only inside parliament? Indeed information has two routes: one within parliament and the other outside it.

Inside parliament, MPs use parliamentary research studies and information offered by parallel structures in a variety of ways, such as in legislation, for monitoring, for financial tasks, for political tasks or inside committees for specialized discussions.

## **2.1 Parallel Information and Knowledge Structures in Legislative Functions**

In the case of parallel structures of information for legislation, these structures may be used to offer information and knowledge on issues under discussion, or to offer guidance and counseling to change or amend some articles of a proposed bill presented by the government, or to present comparative studies on the bills submitted by the government.

Most of the MPs do not use parallel structures of information and knowledge to have their own legislative initiatives. MPs' law initiatives are usually blocked in a variety of ways, so that they rarely see the light<sup>1</sup>. Knowing that, MPs prefer to participate in legislation through the easy way of proposing amendments of few articles. They do not propose bills either because they do not wish to make the initiative, do not have the required resources or facilities, particularly the financial means, or they are more concerned with the control rather than the legislative functions – and this is particularly true of the opposition and independent MPs.

MPs often solicit the help of parallel structures in presenting a 'partial' initiative for a comparative study of laws and decrees applied in more advanced countries, and making proposals for similar laws. Some of these initiatives are made by businessmen MPs particularly in the economic domain, such as bills on exportation, and special economic zones. They ask their consultants or translators to prepare proposals using documents of international organizations or treaties like the economic partnership agreements, the custom tariffs agreement etc..

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<sup>1</sup> The Assembly's Bureau does not favor discussing their legislative suggestions. It opts for repeated postponement of the discussion until the parliamentary session comes to an end, and so the issue is dropped unless others decide to submit them again in the new session. Some MPs have mentioned that they submitted their legislative amendments to the Assembly many years back, and were unable to discuss them, until their membership in Parliament came to an end with the termination of the Parliament's constitutional term.

Other initiatives take the form of recommendations or policy guidelines (benchmarks) issued by international organizations, governmental and non governmental such as the International Labor Organization's efforts to maintain the relationship between employers and employees which were mirrored in the arguments made by MPs during the discussion of the Egyptian Labor Law. Some MPs launched some legislative initiatives that were considered amendments to the bills presented by the government.

It is worth noting that the NDP also suggested the establishment of the National Council for Human Rights and abolishing the death sentence based on the recommendations of some international organizations.

Most MPs prefer to take part in the discussion of draft laws more than to suggest fully new proposals. Individual differences between MPs are evident in these discussions and they are usually influenced by the quality and contents of the information and research studies they receive. Some are influenced by the opinions of the groups whose interest is affected by the draft law under discussion and others attempt to find out about the opinions of their electoral constituency, in order to enhance their participation in their work and strengthen the link between voters and their electoral constituency.

The sources of parallel, i.e. non official parliamentary information and knowledge, services offered during the discussions of bills are international organizations, lobbying groups and political parties.

International sources of information and knowledge come from international organizations that offer initiatives or guidance about laws and legislative procedures. Here, the MP may make use of a researcher's skills in translation or summarizing international reports on relevant issues under discussion, like the UN specialized reports. Although these reports are available to all, MPs rarely use them officially and most do indirectly through the services of parallel structures.

Interest and lobbying groups are another source of informal information and knowledge: Although they do not exist in an institutional manner in Egypt, they still play an influential role in providing information, data and parliamentary research. For example, some MPs solicit the assistance of NGOs, particularly those working in the area of human rights, to

find out their opinion about human rights bills. For example, some MPs relied on these institutions as they examined the communications law for 2003/2004, particularly the articles dealing with personal freedom, privacy and surveillance over communications. Another example is the meetings that were held with some business organizations on the draft law organizing competition and preventing harmful monopolistic practices, in addition to soliciting the assistance of some professional associations in examining some laws to regulate their activities, such as the law regulating the auditing and the musical professions.

A third source of information by parallel structures is that of political parties: Each party would have a political trend or orientation which it would try to assert and uphold. It would encourage its MPs to follow the party line inside Parliament. However, this is the weakest chain in the system of parallel structures, for Egyptian political parties are generally poor in their human, technical and material capacities. They are also fragile and not cohesive. With the exception of the ruling party, they are unable to obtain information from public institutions and do not have a real weight inside parliament (opposition MPs form 2-3% of the MPs, without the independent MPs). And so, they are not so much concerned with enhancing the position of their deputies in Parliament as they are concerned with having them speak on their behalf and seem to enhance the parties' symbolic presence in Parliament.

And yet, sometimes political parties play an information role before the bills reach parliament. This takes place through the initiative of the parties MPs in presenting proposals for bills (as did the NDP Policies Secretariat with the National Council for Human Rights and the elimination of the State Security Court, while keeping the emergency law and the exceptional courts that apply it, and granting the nationality of the Egyptian mother to her children). Alternatively, parties may share their views on the bills under discussion with their MPs. They tend to organize regular meetings for their members in Parliament in cooperation with their specialized committees to discuss bills submitted to Parliament and exchange views on them, which helps unify the party's and MPs position before Parliament. The famous example is the regular meeting which NDP members hold every two weeks in the Political Club to reach an agreement on the next agenda of the Assembly. There are also the regular meetings of the Unionist and Wafd parties and the Islamic trend.

From a procedural point of view, bills are presented to all political parties before they are examined by the Cabinet, based on the instructions of the President that have been enforced since 2001. Parties that are not represented in Parliament may express their opinions and participate in the making of laws, although this mechanism is almost absent or at least not effective. Political parties, particularly those not presented in Parliament, lack motivation because of their poor resources or the belief that whatever they do will be futile. Nevertheless, political parties have the right to publish newspapers which they use as a vehicle to present their perspective on the bills.

Besides law bills, the similarly weak role of parallel structures of information and knowledge in legislation is to be observed in the case of international agreements and conventions. International agreements and conventions are the documents which parallel organizations could actively analyze and offer information around because they are often specialized and have a legal character. Moreover, most of these agreements come in foreign languages, particularly English, and it requires the knowledge of both foreign languages and law in order to manage a solid discussion. Knowledgeable MPs often refer to disparities between the original Western language and the translated Arabic version of the law.

In this context services offered by parallel structures take two forms. First is soliciting the assistance of a consultant or legal specialist to provide a legal opinion to the MP who requests the service. The second is collecting and analyzing press materials and media statements about the agreement or convention under study so the MP would have the necessary background information.

Yet, MPs do not have a strong legislative role in the case of agreements and conventions. The modest participation of MPs in the international agreements does not exceed 10-15%. Like in presidential decrees, the role of parliament in international agreements and conventions is to ratify them. It does not have the right to amend these agreements. Because the role of the Assembly boils down basically to ratify (or theoretically reject) an agreement, very few MPs solicit the assistance of specialists to examine these issues. Moreover, voting on international agreements does not require a specific majority and so MPs – particularly those representing the opposition - do not make any effort to discuss them because their efforts do not determine whether or not

the agreement is passed. The discussion is usually marginal and if opposition MPs actually discuss the agreements, they do so only to embarrass the government.

In sum, with respect to the place of information and knowledge for legislation, MPs are influenced by the phenomenon of “quick legislation” and so are unable to invest in the services of parallel structures. Most of the discussions and voting on bills are done in a rush and the majority is discussed in the evening in what is known as the “midnight legislation”. Furthermore, the quality of information and knowledge from parallel structures is weak. The majority of parallel structures for information and research do not conduct studies on the post- law enforcement period. Most of the parallel structures are more legal than political or analytical. They mostly comprise legal experts, lawyers or staff members of consultation offices. In general, they are insufficient and limited in the scope of their activities.

## **2.2 Parallel Information and Knowledge Structures in Monitoring Functions**

As for the role of parallel information and knowledge structures for monitoring, it is important to mention that the official structure in parliament i.e. the assisting technical secretariat, does not assist MPs adequately in performing their control tasks, and so they tend to rely more on parallel structures to obtain parliamentary research studies and information as control tools, in contrast to the legislative role alluded to earlier.

Some examples of the above clarify the point. Inquiries are information intensive means of parliamentary monitoring<sup>2</sup>. To submit an inquiry, one needs many documents that support the MPs allegations in order to list the issue on the parliament’s work agenda. In 2001, the Assembly decided that no inquiry will be examined without submitting all the necessary documentation. During the debates, the government often protests that the information it has is the correct information and insists that the data in the possession of the MP (obtained from parallel structures) are merely speculations and opinions. In fact,

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<sup>2</sup> Inquiries are among the methods that require abundant information and detailed data because of the way they are designed. If the inquiry is discussed, the MP is allowed to speak a good amount of time (not less than 20 minutes reaching possibly 50 minutes). The competent minister is given the opportunity to respond, then the MP speaks again for 5 to 10 minutes to comment on the minister’s statement.

most of the MPs rely on what the press publishes as their source of information on issues of political control. There are other undesired paths to obtain official government documents and that is through buying the documents from sources inside the government like employees in the ministers' offices or the Assembly itself, if data is available at the General Secretariat but not made available to MPs.

Questioning a minister is the second instrument used by MPs. In this case, the MP needs information in order to be able to describe the situation and raise questions or obtain official information from the government. He/she also needs the technical assistance of aides to be able to formulate questions correctly and impressively. Often MPs or their assistants rely in the preparation of their questions on the mass media particularly what the press publishes in their 'letters to the editors' and 'complaints' sections.

The amount of information the MP needs differs depending on whether the question is verbal or written. In case of the former, the MP needs to learn more about the nature of the problem and the query in order to prepare to raise the question in an open session and get into an argument with the government. In case the query is written, the MP must be able to accurately and concisely formulate the question. This often requires the assistance of professional aides, some of whom may be Assembly employees who assist him/her informally. Some MPs may purchase documents from some departments in the government agency or ministry in order to support his/her questions.

Request of information from a minister is the third control method. When MPs submit a request for information, they often assume that the minister does not know the situation and this is why the MP is informing him/her. This kind of request is usually less critical than queries and may be written or verbal. Many MPs depend on the press or personal experiences or reports from the electoral constituency in submitting their requests or expressing the views of their electors and some of their local problems. Some MPs may rely on their private offices or their offices in the constituencies for technical support. The latter offices receive requests of citizens (usually called "the office of MP (name) for the service of citizens"). These offices deal with a rich variety of problems and life situations. Some staff in the consultation and MPs offices are specialized in the preparation of requests for information in different areas.

A fourth control method is requests for information that directly address an urgent matter or an emergency. The MP presents the issue to the Assembly before the agenda is discussed. The preparation of urgent statements requires close monitoring of events. This is where the role of assistants, informal structures and the press becomes important in order to enhance the ability of MPs to respond to urgent issues which erupt suddenly and require direct and prompt attention and contact with parallel structures.

Urgent appeals may also be transformed into another control instrument such as inquiries. This all depends, however, on the ability of the MP is to make a strong case and accuse government or competent ministry of sluggishness or procrastination.

Requests for general discussions are the least used control method. The number of such requests does not exceed four or five throughout the Assembly session, which the Assembly may or may not discuss. It assumes the presence of an important subject and new ideas which require further discussion in order to reach an agreement with the government. Often the general discussions requests deal with issues that had been discussed in inquiries or requests for information. For example, more than 20 inquiries and requests for information had been submitted about the spinning and weaving industry and many others addressed the failure to organize the World Cup Tournament in Egypt (several inquiries and 46 requests for information and urgent appeals. Because the request for general discussions requires the reconsideration of a public policy previously approved by the government and the Assembly, MPs who submit the request (at least 20 members) should be fully aware of the specific details of the issue, and any relevant information and research studies. They often need the assistance of parallel structures to collect data that enhance the ability of MPs to convince the Assembly of the importance of reconsidering a public policy.

Fact finding field visits are another means of monitoring the government. This method requires rich and abundant information particularly in drafting the reports of the fact-finding committees. They rely on the reports of control agencies such as the reports of the Central Audit Department, and witnesses, views of MPs in addition to queries to responsible officials. This particular tool often requires the assistance of parallel

structures. Statements made in the fact finding committees' reports require full knowledge of the issue under discussion i.e. research and information<sup>3</sup>.

### **2.3 Parallel Information and Knowledge Structures in Specialized Committees**

Parallel information and knowledge structures may also be required to complement MPs competence inside specialized committees. Committees are considered the main 'kitchen' of the Assembly and most of the Assembly's legislative tasks take place inside the committees and are presented to the Council, supplemented by the opinion of the committee, until the final decision is reached. Deliberations and documentation related to decrees that are presented by the MPs take place inside the committees and the role of the Assembly is ultimately to unanimously approve the views of the committee<sup>4</sup>.

Committees rely on specialized information and research studies. They resort to the parallel structures in the following ways: a) Experts and specialists, on a full time or part-time basis, to perform a specific task; b) Some reports produced by specialized international agencies; c) Research centers and universities which provide specialized academic studies on some issues that facilitate the tasks of the committees; d) Some

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<sup>3</sup> In this connection we refer to the example of the fact- finding committee formed by the Assembly end of 2003/2004 on the failure to organize the World Football Cup Tournament 2010. The committee interrogated the competent officials but was unable to discuss the report because of the delay in sending the report of the Central Audits Department on the subject and obstacles created by the government until the latter was re-shuffled and the competent minister of youth was ousted. The subject was closed. When the fact- finding committee discussed the report in parliament, the government did not respond to the questions of MPs and at the end of the debates, the Assembly agreed to refer the report to the government to implement the recommendations.

<sup>4</sup> In performing their tasks, the committees solicit outside assistance such as legal expertise or specialized political, economic and social expertise. The committees have consultants that help them perform their tasks. They also rely in a large part of their work on their relationship with ministries and the information and studies the latter supply them. In this context, one raises a question about the transparency of the exchange of information and data between the Assembly and the government. We also question the possibility of obtaining the information or data from ministries given the conflicting data issued by some government agencies, such as the figures on imports and exports and the number of population.

reports of governmental agencies including the reports of some control agencies like the Administrative Control or the Central Audits Department. While the reports of the latter should be made available to all MPs, this does not take place in reality. In all these cases the requester of information or knowledge is the committee as an institution. There are, however, cases when the MP is the service requester. If the MP is the head of the committee, he/she relies on his/her private office for the preparation of the committees' reports, or on a group of permanent consultants at the expense of parliament, or may rely on a group of consultants or private offices to help him/her or the committee in discussing a specific topic.

## **2.4 Parallel Information and Knowledge Structures in Financial Functions**

There may be a place for information and knowledge in the financial matters of state budget. This refers to the competence of the Assembly to examine the public plan for economic and social development and the state's public budget, the final accounts, the budget of the public prosecutor and the budget of the People's Assembly. In fact, MPs tend to participate less in the discussion of final accounts. Their participation in the discussion of plan and budget is also modest compared to the discussion of the government statement. As the financial role requires accuracy and specialization, MPs are encouraged to resort to parallel structures particularly those specialized in public finance. It is observed, however, that most of the discussions of MPs revolve around local demands for their constituencies; they ask for increases in the allocations or budgets without linking these demands to public policies or attempt to influence the government through this financial role.

## **2.5 Parallel Information and Knowledge Structures in Responding to Government's Annual Statement**

Information and knowledge obtained from informal (parallel structures) may also be employed during the Assembly's discussion of the cabinet's statement and the

preparation of a report to respond to the statement of the government<sup>5</sup>. This is a task that attracts MPs most (The percentage of MPs who participate in discussions reaches 85%). Indeed, the Assembly's discussions continue for weeks and offer the largest number of MPs the opportunity to participate in them. Here again comes the need for parallel structures. The time allocated to MPs to present their argument ranges on average between 5 to 10 minutes and they need the assistance of specialists to help them use the available time properly. Thus MPs need to spend much time discussing and analyzing. They make available reports to their assistants and ask them to prepare brief statements and memoranda with all the detailed observations to be included in the minutes of the session. The MPs' private offices play an important role in the reading of the government statement and following up the fulfillment of the promises it made.

### **3. PARALLEL INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE STRUCTURES BY RECEIVER**

Requesters can be divided into three main groups: MP, Committee, or General secretariat. The latter is the most formal of the structures of information and knowledge<sup>6</sup>.

The MP may occupy a leading position in Parliament, like the Speaker who has the right to ask for reports from the Central Audits Department on some issues and approves the requests of other MPs to use such documents. Also, in some cases, the Speaker depends on a large group of consultants in various areas. For example, he has a media, legal and economic counselor. However, appointing a consultant may be a complementary act that does not pertain to the assigned role. The speaker also depends on international agencies in what is dubbed as "parliamentary diplomacy", and these agencies may in fact become one of the main sources of information for him. On the

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<sup>5</sup> The government presents its annual statement before the Assembly, which forms a special committee under the deputy speaker to examine the statement and respond to it. The Assembly's general secretariat also presents a comparative review of the government's statement and the report of the responding committee.

<sup>6</sup> Assembly's general secretariat may request research services from technical local or outside agencies in areas of training for staff or MPs. An example in point is the technical services offered to staff and MPs through the US AID, and the program to enhance human capacities in the People's Assembly and Shura Council. The General Secretariat might also maintain relations with other secretariats in other parliaments so they can arrange to exchange visits, reports and expertise. They could offer training programs to staff in other parliaments or arrange for them to receive outside technical assistance.

other hand, the deputy speakers may rely on a syndicate or institution that is close to them (like the Egyptian Trade Union in the case of the deputy speaker represents workers). They may also receive requests and complaints from these institutions because of their privileged position which might be perceived as being “close” to the Executive, and not necessarily in their capacity as parliamentarians or deputy speakers. If the requester is head of one of the permanent thematic committees, he/she relies on assistants who may be permanent or temporary staff members and may be affiliated to his/her own office. The Assembly’s general secretariat solicits the assistance of some part-time consultants to work for the committees. They are usually legal or technically professional staff. Heads of committees also depend on assisting offices and on some of the studies and research presented by different universities and research centers.

If the MP does not occupy a leading position, it will depend then on whether he/she is member of the majority or opposition parties or an independent member. MPs affiliation will also determine the type of parallel structure he/she will rely on. NDP members tend, for example, to rely on government structures or university and research centers. On the other hand, opposition and independent members are more receptive to independent opposition or critical centers. NDP members might also avail themselves of some party guidelines to follow, which are not always available to opposition members.

MPs may also rely on meetings, seminars and conferences to access information. Again this depends on whether the deputy is from the opposition or majority party or if he/she is independent.

If the receiver of the information or knowledge is a committee member, a lot will depend on the parallel structure the committee deals with. One way would be to approach experts or consultants from outside the Assembly and this could be on continuous or on a temporary basis. Another way is to obtain studies and reports from a government agency, or a civil society or professional association. Additionally, the committee might consult some NGOs or syndicates on some issues, or invite consultants and specialists to discuss bills under debate.

#### **4. THEIR COST**

Financial remuneration greatly affects the quality of information and studies. Quality is also influenced by the expertise of the service provider and his/her specialization, ability to analyze information, and the accuracy of presented data. In turn, all the above is conditioned by the availability of data and hands-on expertise.

Examples:

-Parliamentary staff. Some MPs may solicit the assistance of parliamentary staff to provide services in their private offices for fees. They may also use the assistance of researchers working in parliament and their expertise in commenting on the trend and directions of discussions within parliament.

-Experts and consultants (full time or part-time). MPs (ex. heads of committees) may approach some consultants. Those may be permanent staff members in the MPs office or are merely there to perform a specific task. The MP or committee may also rely on a consultancy office. However, these offices are generally lacking, which in turn affects the quality of services and analyses offered by the existing offices.

-Full-time assistants for fees. The MP may approach a private office for technical assistance. This is different from offices of services and public relations in the electoral constituency.

-Research centers (ex. in universities). MPs may solicit the assistance of official research centers for a research service. They may depend on findings of the public opinion polls they organize or participate in conferences in universities and benefit from their recommendations. MPs may also commission research on an issue discussed within parliament.

-NGOs. In principle these are non-profit organizations but they offer their services for a fee on contractual basis, or they may be voluntary organizations that fulfill certain tasks or technical services to facilitate the work of deputies in Parliament.

-Organizations may play the role of lobbying groups within Parliament (e.g. professional associations).

-Organizations may achieve their own interests by offering information services (such as mass media, or some governmental agencies); these may also be in the private interest of leaders of these organizations (like rendering assistance during elections).

-Various mass media may be considered parallel structures that greatly influence the trend of the discussions within parliament. MPs rely on mass media, particularly the press in adopting a number of views. They may also help in providing MPs with parliamentary control tools. -Mass media may guide public opinion on certain controversial issues and may also play an important role in promoting MPs during the elections. Some journalists are often the undeclared sources of information. This kind of service may be used to exchange favors with MPs.

## **CONCLUSION**

To conclude, parliamentarians need information services. However, MPs are not legally obliged to go to official and unofficial sources to obtain them and undertake research and studies. Most MPs in Arab parliaments are content with interacting with the data offered to them by the government as attachments to the bills or documents under discussion. This interaction is usually an individual effort, i.e. MPs do the additional homework of enhancing their knowledge about a specific issue and approach parallel sources of information to meet the gaps in the official information they receive from parliament as a personal initiative.

In the final analysis, we should view the MPs motive in using parallel structures in light of their wish to achieve parliamentary or political reform (without delving into the question of which comes first). We wish to emphasize in this context that addressing parliamentary reform was not possible a few decades ago. Parliaments did not occupy a genuine position in the project of political modernization, nor were they part of any project for democratic development in the Arab world. The main emphasis of the political projects in the Arab world was - till recent years – how to change the objective economic, cultural and political conditions so they would be conducive to political

modernization, or perhaps call upon the political regime to soften its grip, or get rid of the control of foreign powers in order to open the door for independent and free development of the Arab societies.

Political life in the Arab world has changed considerably to the extent that one can really speak about activating parliamentary life not only as an important issue, but also as a critical and objective pre-requisite for political transformation.

Parliamentary reform as the base for political reform:

Some may think there is no need to be reminded of the “theory of democracy” or the “principle of separation of powers” as a guarantee against abuse of authority. However, what we need to remind ourselves of is the agenda of political reform. The institutional approach to political reform is in my view the most critical and sound of all approaches.

Some people call for fighting corruption (political, administrative and financial) as a prelude to reform and a pre-requisite for transparency. But this is a long- term option and has considerable costs. Others call for changing faces in order to have hope and revive political life, but there is no guarantee that any change would enhance democracy i.e. that the new ruler would be better than his predecessor.

Another group believes that political reform means diversifying the elite and representing groups or categories that are deprived, disadvantaged or marginalized (like women, minorities and ‘professional’ opposition). However, the policy of expanding the democratic margin is not genuine democracy because the power to tighten things still remains in the hands of the power that expands them. We would ultimately be speaking of some sort of sharing private interests instead of an expression of public interests.

There are also those who call for economic reform and are content with postponing political reform either because they are doubtful that it can ever occur or for lack of concern about what’s happening on the political front. However, this is a utilitarian and unrealistic view which may result in more social imbalances. Economic reform would continue to be vulnerable to the ups and downs of political life which are abundant.

Parliamentary reform is an approach that presents less costly and risky mechanisms and procedures that are guaranteed at the same time to bring more revenues. It would ensure the integrity of election process, enable MPs to exercise control and legislation tasks, ensure the independence of the parliamentary institution, help form governments according to genuine election results (whether this is a parliamentary or presidential system of government or a combination of the two).

It is the parliamentary system that can accommodate the highest degree of diversification and can contain conflicting interests. It has a high ability to adjust and adapt to change if compared to other political institutions (like the executive power, political parties, the judiciary etc) because it is the base for all institutions and the democratic society.

Gaining the citizens' trust is an easier task for parliament than the government. MPs are closer to their electoral constituency than others and an MP who has the trust of his/her constituency is more capable of mobilizing them than others. The fact that some opposition members still win despite the control, domination and intervention of the government implies that truthfulness and sincerity with voters can indeed be useful to the whole political body, or at least enhance the possibilities of secure political reform.