

## **Parliamentary Reform: Building a Professional Parliament That Plays an Effective Role in the System of Checks and Balances**

After Taiwan's democratization, the role the parliament plays has become increasingly important. Today, the Legislative Yuan, which used to be mocked as the Executive Yuan's "Legislative Bureau," has become a major focus of media attention. The legislature has undergone tremendous transformations. However, with the intensifying competition between political parties, the soaring number of legislative proposals, and the increasing diversification of issues, the past operation mode of the Legislative Yuan could no longer cope with the current needs. Although various political parties and factions have proposed numerous ideas for reforming the parliament, hoping changes in the rules of procedure and in the parliament's organization could improve the efficiency and quality of legislation, these efforts have only yielded limited results so far. In the light of this situation, the Taiwan Brain Trust (TBT) believes that the reform of the parliament should start with reforming the constitutional system, because parliamentary reconstruction won't go very far if the constitutional system remains unclear. The TBT's plan asserts that the future Legislative Yuan shall be a unicameral parliament.

That said, the public's ongoing doubt about and distrust of the parliament is an issue that we cannot cover up or avoid talking about. The public's dissatisfaction with the parliament mainly arises from the following six problems in the institution: 1. inadequate professionalism; 2. lack of supervisory capacity and means; 3. frequent conflicts during parliamentary sessions; 4. insufficient transparency; 5. unresolved questions of corruption; 6. the parliament's failure to function as a platform for debates about important policies. Therefore, the TBT maintains that the future parliament, under the model of the separation of powers into three branches, shall attain professionalism, execute supervision, bolster the system of checks and balances, and be rational, transparent, ethical, diversified, and efficient, so that it can implement self-supervision. Meanwhile, outside supervision of the parliament can be carried out by two groups—private organizations and the media.

As far as the electoral system is concerned, the number of legislators and legislative elections are both regulated by the Constitution. Therefore, reforming the electoral system will require constitutional amendments, yet constitutional amendments involve various dimensions and are difficult to get through. If the process of making amendments to the Constitution can be successfully started in the future, the TBT will suggest that the number of legislators, constituencies, and the electoral system be

regulated by the Civil Servants Election and Recall Act rather than by the Constitution. At present, Taiwan's parliamentary elections adopt the single-district, two-vote system. However, future elections in single-member districts should conform to the principle of "one person, one vote; each vote has the same value." Of course, in order to give minor parties room in the proportional representation system, the TBT recommends that legislative seats be increased to 160, among which at least 70 to 80 seats shall be proportional representatives. The threshold for a party to be distributed seats shall be reduced from 5% to 3% of the votes.

There is no right of interpellation under the presidential system, but the right of interpellation exists under Taiwan's current political system. However, there is no control over or restrictions on legislators' questions and the premier does not have enough time to prepare and think before answering legislators' questions. The contents of the questions could be every subject under the sun and have no bounds, which makes the interpellation process rather time-consuming and often fruitless. Interpellation becomes a mere platform for legislators to stage shows. As interpellation occupies excessively long periods of time, government officials have to spend half of their working time on interpellation sessions that are unutterably painful to them. The parliament should spend more time on reviewing legislative drafts and budgets; it should be able to improve the interpellation system within a short period of time.

Under the current system, it would be difficult to change the system of legislative elections because it is regulated by the Constitution. If no amendments are made to constitutional articles, then very few changes can be made to the electoral system. But the internal reform of the parliament can be carried out in the near future without constitutional amendments. Basically, the present parliamentary messes that displease and disgust the public are mainly caused by the unclear positioning of the role of the parliament, the ambiguous boundary between the executive branch and the legislative branch, the parliament's lack of complete right of investigation, the unsound system of legislative elections, and the parliament's internal problems. Yet the parliament remains a very important institution in a democracy, so parliamentary reform is a must-do project. Our vision is to build a professional parliament that plays an effective role in the system of checks and balances.