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This literature review is concerned with defining comparative politics as a discipline. Its main purpose is to try to depict views of various authors presented in texts such as “ Comparative Government and Politics” by Rod Hague and Martin Harrop (V. Wright ed., 6th ed., Palgrave MacMillan), “ Theory and Methods in Political Science” by David Marsh and Gerry Stoker (eds., 2nd ed., Palgrave MacMillan) and in the handout from Dr. Mark Pennington (L2, QMUL, 2004) to compare different perspectives of perceiving the comparative approaches. At the very first point I will try to define what comparative politics actually is and its purpose according to various authors and their perspectives I am about to discuss. Comparative politics, as its name suggests consists in comparing different kinds of politics, its ways of application in particular. The fact is that the purpose of existence of comparative politics has been wrongly aimed for a long time to study each country on its individual merits, separately.

Mark Pennington defines the main objective of the discipline as “ to overcome the shortcomings of approaches focused purely on case studies of individual countries and of those that build purely abstract theoretical models of decision-making.”(2004) Hague and Harrop come with a bit different definition, which is to “ encompass the major political similarities and differences between countries... (and) ...the comparative approach is simply the family of strategies and techniques which advance understanding within this field. The truth is that only “ comparison brings a sense of perspective to a familiar environment and discourages parochial responses to political issues”. (Hopkin,) In order to study politics comparatively, we have to use a certain approach in order to have a theory tested. At first M.

Pennington tries to clarify what institution is and given this definition “ a rule that has been institutionalized” (2004) we may consider two different kinds. We live in a society which is based on two kinds of institution, two ways how to influence a human behavior in order to avoid disorder, disobedience or eventually, “ state of anarchy”.

The first is formal-hard institution which gives us a sort of frame by which we and the state are able to control ourselves. The other kind is soft, which importance may differ from one country to other. I believe that though formal rules are the only legal obligation we have got to be “ oppressed” by, soft institutions are the most influential ones. The reason is the innermost want of human being to belong to a certain group of people, to be accepted and tolerated by others. So, it is, assumingly, not our need to favor any sort of institution, nor to understand the real meaning or aim of such an institution, but it is based on listening to our needs solely, to our selfish, self-interested nature. This is the main point of rational choice theory “ whose central focus is the purposeful individual and his motivation and beliefs.” (Pennington, 2004) Whenever we talk about this approach we have to come back again to the nature of human being, its behavior, needs and wants, which seem to be the constant cause of i. e. free-riding/collective action problems too, which evolves from this theory.

Human being is, according to M. Pennington, “ a maximiser of benefits over costs”, (2004) while struggles to “ derive benefits from a particular good without paying their full personal share of the costs.” (Pennington, 2004) The second theory stemming from new institutionalism is a culturalism, which is,

by definition a theory consisting in “ individuals who always make decision in a manner which reflects prevailing ideas and beliefs that are widely shared...” (Pennington, 2004) This is the base of the argument I made about soft institutions; to keep the informal, cultural, rules to avoid separation of yourself from the community. Marxists create the mainstream of the third approach, structuralism and they saw “ society progressing through a series of historical epochs, each with its own mode of production, which would eventually collapse under the strain of contradictions and tensions internal in order to give way to a more progressive social form... (and they believed in) ...replacement with a social order in which people’s interests are unified in pursuit of a common plan.” (Pennington, 2004)

And I think that’s main cause of collapsing system, besides the fact that Marxism has not been practiced strictly by theory, is again our nature telling us to control. People prefer rather knowing there is a chance to succeed (in a capitalistic economy), though it is extremely small, than just getting accustomed to the unsatisfying, accepting the reality, to cease with the status quo and with impossibility of change to take place. Hopkin introduces us to a bit different comparative approaches. There is a “ method of difference”, “ which involves studying two similar cases , whose relationship to each other is studying.” “ The method of agreement” comprises of two different cases and similar variables and the “ method of concomitant variables” “ seeks to identify variables which seem to move more or less contemporaneously in the hypothesized directions” (Hopkin) R. Hague and M. Harrop discuss the reason to study politics comparatively, the risks which come with it and the specific techniques used. Globalization is one of the

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examples which pose a risk and a challenge simultaneously, but the reason is perceived by Green as “ nation is a cell of a larger entity with a life all its own.”

All the authors try to bring an understanding of studying comparative politics. Each technique the discipline is based on has its advantages and weaknesses. M. Pennington’s summarizes the main approach within a new institutionalism, but obviously, there is no only one approach which should be used. Hopkin’s method are generally about the risks each of them brings considering variables and case studies, importance of number we study. Hague and Harrop’s theory talks about variables, their particular use, when the outcome may be successful. I am assuming most of the theories have to be put together in order to generate a realistic and true outcome, what is the purpose, to understand the processes and their influence. Comparative politics is about studying the practical use of a theory to create a theory more likely to succeed.

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