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**DEMOCRATIZATION, ECONOMIC POLICYMAKING,  
AND  
PARLIAMETARY ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE  
REPUBLIC OF KOREA**

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“To govern a state well requires much more than strictly scientific knowledge. Governing is not a science in the sense that physics or chemistry or even, in some respects, medicine is a science. This is true for several reasons. For one thing, virtually all important decisions about policies, whether personal or governmental, require ethical judgments. To make a decision about the ends that government policies should be designed to achieve (justice, equity, fairness, happiness, health, survival, security, well-being, equality, or whatnot) is to make an ethical judgment. Ethical judgments are not “scientific” judgments in the usual sense.”

Robert A. Dahl, 1998

“Democracy’s claim to be valuable does not rest on just one particular merit. There is a plurality of virtues here, including, first, the intrinsic importance of political participation and freedom in human life; second, the instrumental importance of political incentives in keeping governments responsible and accountable; and third, the constructive role of democracy in the formation of values and in the understanding of needs, rights, and duties.”

Amartya Sen, 1999

“In repressive regimes, there is not much talk about injustices. In authoritarian regimes, poverty is hidden. In nondemocratic regimes, information tends to be unclear. In open and democratic regimes, in contrast, the insistence on revealing what is wrong, revealing injustices, revealing inequalities, and urging that all this be corrected paves the way for finding solutions to these problems, even if they cannot be solved immediately.”

Fernando Henrique Cardoso, 2001

## INTRODUCTION

The current, “third wave” of global democratization has established a large family of new democracies in regions that were once widely viewed as inhospitable to democratic political development. Of the over five dozen in this family, the Republic of Korea (Korea hereinafter) is one of the most influential and analytically interesting. Unlike many third-wave democracies in other regions, this country has fully restored civilian rule and has made steady progress in expanding political rights and civil liberties. Of all the new democracies in Asia, it is the first country that has peacefully transferred power to an opposition party. Korea is also the only Asian new democracy that has recently been admitted to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). It has politically weathered a devastating financial crisis at the end of 1997 and is now rebounding economically. As the most vigorous democracy in East Asia and the eleventh largest economy in the world, the country has often been described in the Western media and the scholarly community as an “East Asian model of prosperity and democracy.”

What has been done to promote economic prosperity and political democracy? Which institutions have played a critical role in the process of economic development and democratization? These questions to date have not been examined from the perspective of democratic governance in which the legislature provides for genuine accountability of government (Schedler, Diamond, and Plattner, 1999). In a democracy, the people are sovereign. They exercise their sovereignty through their representatives in parliament. Collectively, the parliament and its members are accountable to the people. Executive agencies are obligated to give accounts of their actions to the parliament. Democratic governance, therefore, can be achieved to the

fullest extent only when executive agencies are *horizontally* held accountable to the parliament, and the parliament is *vertically* held accountable to the electorate.

This study of Korean democracy is predicated on the assumption that the parliament is the key institution of democratic governance that can ensure both horizontal and vertical accountability. It considers both horizontal and vertical dimensions of accountability, in order to provide a comprehensive and accurate picture of the role the Korean legislature has played especially in the wake of democratic regime change. Part One of this report focuses on horizontal accountability by examining the Korean people's personal experiences of democratization themselves, and its consequences for the quality of their living as citizens of a democracy. As expected, the advent of democracy in Korea has opened the process of policymaking to those groups previously excluded by the military regimes of the authoritarian past, and it has also redirected the goal of economic policymaking toward economic redistribution and social welfare. Yet, a large majority of the Korean population does not perceive the government as being responsive to their preferences, although they experience at least some amount of empowerment in the wake of democratic change. As a result, less than one-quarter judge that the present government is run by the people as well as for the people, like themselves.

Part Two of this report deals with various aspects of horizontal accountability, including the extent to which the executive branch explains and justifies its decisions or actions to the National Assembly. Specifically, changing patterns of legislative-executive relations are ascertained in terms of lawmaking, fiscal control, and legislative oversight. The democratization of military dictatorship is found reshaping the authoritarian character of the legislative-executive nexus featuring the hegemony

of the president over the legislative process. Yet, no discernible changes are found taking place in the pattern of the Assembly's budget review process between the authoritarian and democratic eras.

In Part Three, this report continues to examine horizontal accountability with a detailed analysis of the role that the Korean legislature played in approving the national budget for the year 2001. The Constitution of the democratic Sixth Republic mandates the National Assembly to play the key role in the formulation and implementation of the national budget. For a variety of reasons, including institutional constraints and partisan conflicts, however, the Assembly, as the foremost institution of representative democracy, was not capable of fulfilling such a mandate. As in the authoritarian past, it has little or no real control over the budgetary process. When asked to evaluate their own influence in the process, members of the Assembly's Committee on Budget and Audit were in strong agreement that the National Assembly, and its lawmakers, were not the key players in the budget making process. Obviously, the will of the people is not well reflected in the existing process of formulating, deliberating, and implementing the national budget. Both procedurally and substantively, Korea has a long way to go to democratize the process of budget policymaking to the fullest extent.

In Part Four, the report highlights the problems facing the Korean National

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