

LAW AND DEMOCRACY WEEK

Course n°16: International Comparisons of Democracy and Government (Gàbor Halmai)



Gàbor Halmai is a Professor of Law at the Eötvös Lóránd University in Budapest, Hungary. He received his PhD from Eötvös Lóránd University in 1983, and became a Doctor of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1997. Between 2007 and 2010 he was member of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency's Management Board based in Vienna. Since 2003, he is the National Director of the European Master's Program in Human Rights and Democratization in Venice. From 2006 to 2010, Mr Halmai was the vice-chair of the Hungarian National Election Commission. Between 1990 and 97 he was chief counsellor to the President of the Hungarian Constitutional Court.

Canada's form of democracy is but one among a number of democratic models. A full appreciation of the Canadian version of this political-legal system is impossible without reference to several of our closest allies (U.S., U.K., E.U., France), and indeed without contrast to a number of different countries around the world (Australia, New Zealand). Rather than leave this discussion at a vague and general level, it would be beneficial to focus on a number of specific topics of comparison based on current events:

- Written v. unwritten constitution;
- Constitutional monarchy v. republicanism;
- First-past-the-post electoral system v. proportional representation;
- Parliamentary v. congressional legislative branch;
- Government participation in economic planning v. free market;
- Degree of independence of institutions v. centralization;
- Acceptance v. rejection of the pivotal role of law in democratic development;
- Participation in v. rejection of international legal and judicial institutions.
- Reaction to crises.

Consideration of all these factors can enable a systematic and comparative understanding of the nature and quality of democracy in various states.