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An ever closer inter-parliamentary network? National parliaments' priorities in inter-parliamentary cooperation in the EU

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In the EU democratic deficit debate inter-parliamentary cooperation has gained attention in its function to link the two levels of representation: the European Parliament and the national parliaments. Ideally we would witness the mutually supportive cooperation in an ever closer “multi-level parliamentary field” (Crum and Fossum, 2013). The aim of this paper is to understand motivation for inter-parliamentary cooperation on EU issues in cross-country comparison. What factors explain how national parliaments set their priorities in the various formal and informal channels of inter-parliamentary cooperation?

Inter-parliamentary cooperation has been found to benefit the opposition parties more than the majorities of a parliament, as an alternative source of information to better control the own government. One assumption of this study is that the strength of opposition parties in the domestic context determines a parliament's approach to inter-parliamentary cooperation. The paper further tests the relevance of resources, the size of a member state and the strength of formal EU scrutiny rights.

Four member states selected as most-different cases serve to test the hypotheses: Denmark, Germany, France and Portugal. Empirically, the paper follows both, a qualitative and quantitative approach. Evidence gained from interviews with parliamentarians and administrators is combined with an analysis of participation in bilateral, regional and EU-wide inter-parliamentary meetings. The advantage of the study lies in its comparative perspective and the mixed-method approach which allows for linking the factual participation rates with the evaluation of the cooperative practices by the interviewees.

Introduction

Since the beginning of the 1990s a debate on the democratic deficit of the European Union (EU) has evolved and is still ongoing. One fundamental critique points to the lack of the possibility to organize opposition to EU policies within the system (see Mair 2007: 6) which risks detaching the citizens from the polity. If the channel of opposing certain contents is not available, the risk is that dissatisfaction may turn into opposition to the system as such. The increasing number of votes for Eurosceptic parties in the European Parliament elections may indicate such a development. Mair (2007) argues that agreements at EU level reduce the number of policy alternatives available at the national level. In the intergovernmental negotiations in the Council of the EU and the European Council opposition views are not represented. Due to the second order character of the EP elections and the lack of a coherent EU public sphere the European Parliament cannot by itself serve as a sufficient substitute for voicing alternatives to EU policy choices. Thus, the basic function of opposition to voice criticism and demonstrate alternatives to government decisions is not fulfilled for EU decision-making.

The attention for the role of national parliaments in EU affairs in academia and political debate stems from the concern of a lack of control over national governments. National parliaments, which host the plurality of perspectives induced by national elections, have been understood as the “losers” of EU integration (see Maurer and Wessels, 2001). Their scope of influence is directly affected by the pre-agreements at EU level which only need to be transposed to the national legislation. However, parliaments cannot be understood as unitary actors opposing the government, as the cleavage runs along majority–opposition lines. While the majority parties in parliament may still have fairly good access to information through informal channels and some influence within the party, opposition parties suffer severely from being cut out from EU negotiations.

Inter-parliamentary cooperation is seen as one possible solution in the search for a better democratic order of the European Union. It could be a platform to balance intergovernmental decision-making. The exchange at the transnational level can provide members of national parliaments (MPs) with valuable information about interests and perspectives of their colleagues in other EU member states. The knowledge about the positions of other member states would enhance MPs ability to assess the governments’ win-set in EU negotiations allowing for better parliamentary scrutiny (see Benz 2011). Thus, inter-parliamentary cooperation (IPC) could not only strengthen parliaments position vis-à-vis their governments, but also give opposition parties an opportunity to voice their criticism at EU level.

While closer interaction among parliaments in the EU is desirable from a normative perspective, there are a number of practical constraints for cooperation as rivalries over current (and future) competences, the lack of resources or political will (see Herranz-Surrallés 2014, Costa and Latek 2007, Westlake 1995). Research on IPC started out from a description of different forms of formal meetings (Bengtson, 2007; Costa and Latek 2007), and case studies on different policy fields such as Ruiz de Garibay (2013) and Mitsilegas (2007) on Justice and Home Affairs or Huff (2013), Wouters and Raube (2013) and Herranz-Surrallés (2014) on cooperation in Common Foreign and Security Policy. Recent publications have explained the motivation for cooperation and to analyse actual practice (see Crum and Fossum, 2013; Miklin, 2013). On the side of theory, Crum and Fossum (2009) have developed the idea of a ‘multi-level parliamentary field’ and argue for a more comprehensive analysis of parliamentary control.

The heterogeneity of interests and ideologies in an EU of 28 member states becomes especially relevant for parliamentary institutions whose defining characteristic it is to give voice to diverging points of views in a society. Considering the differences of each representative body, one crucial question is the overlap in interests in IPC. A coherent approach across all parliaments would allow developing structures for effective coordination and exchange much faster, than very diverse understandings. Therefore, this paper aims at explaining the participation of national parliaments in the various channels of IPC in the EU. Based on a mixed-method approach the analysis covers the practices and evaluation of IPC of four country cases: Germany, France, Denmark and Portugal.

The following section defines the potential benefit of IPC for MPs and lays out the formats of cooperation and their functions. Second, the paper derives expectations on the variation in parliaments` use of these means of cooperation. The empirical part is based on a quantitative analysis of MPs and officials` participation in inter-parliamentary meetings, expert reports and interviews. The conclusion summarizes the results and links them back to the question of IPC` s relevance for the democratic legitimacy of the EU.

Functions of inter-parliamentary cooperation

In the literature on national parliaments scrutiny of EU affairs, information access is seen as precondition for any influence on legislation. Especially studies based on the principal agent approach stress the problem of information asymmetry between parliament as the principal and government in the role of agent (for example Auel 2007). Since the introduction of the Lisbon Treaty all parliaments receive official EU documents directly from the Commission. Thus, they have equal access to EU documents independent from their government. However,

the numerous documents and their often rather technical nature require an efficient sifting procedure within parliament to make use of this information (Winzen 2012: 660). Furthermore, the knowledge on positions of member states and negotiation processes must be achieved from other sources than the Commission. Naturally the own government is the first address to receive complementary information. For parliamentarians from governing parties the informal exchange with government will in many cases be the most efficient access to information. For the parliamentary opposition, however, information access may be limited to the requirements defined in laws or rules of procedure on the kind and timing of information government needs to provide to parliament.

Inter-parliamentary cooperation can be a valuable tool for national parliamentarians to achieve independent information from third parties on the upcoming EU legislation and to understand the negotiation process at EU level. The exchange of information is probably the most relevant function of IPC since inter-parliamentary forums lack any decision-making capacity.

The literature on IPC identifies the coordination of common positions in relation to EU legislation or subsidiarity control in the Early Warning Mechanism (EWM) as another function of IPC (see Miklin, 2013; Knutelska, 2013, p. 38; Bengtson, 2007). The coordination of reasoned opinions to achieve a “yellow card” within the Early Warning Mechanism is probably more frequently practiced than coordination on NPs positions on policy positions (see Cooper 2013 for coordination for the first “yellow card” on Monti II). However, Miklin (2013) has shown for the Austrian parliament that the Green party group coordinates positions with its EU counterparts to a certain extent. For other party groups the coordination was less relevant.

Furthermore, formal IPC has the important function to establish a network of EU representatives who hold similar responsibilities within their parliament and can profit in the long term from their personal contacts (see COSAC 21st biannual report, 2014). Networking can be seen as a first step towards access of information. The personal contacts of a network are latent connections, which can be activated when information on a specific question or the position of another institution is required. Thus, network building is closely linked to information access.

In sum, three functions of IPC may benefit MPs scrutiny of EU issues: the access to information on negotiations at EU level and other MP positions independent from the own government, the coordination of positions on subsidiarity questions or policy content and networking among MPs with shared interests and officials across chambers.

Channels of inter-parliamentary cooperation in the EU

As this paper aims at analysing the intensity and the kind of cooperation national parliaments embrace, this section provides an overview of channels of IPC.¹ Depending on the format of cooperation, the functions of IPC described in the previous section have different weight.

A broad range of formal inter-parliamentary meetings has evolved since the first conference of presidents and speakers of national parliaments in the EU (in the following “EU Speakers’ Conference”) in 1963 and the first Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs (known under its French acronym COSAC) in 1989. COSAC and the EU Speakers’ Conference are the most established forums for general exchange on EU issues and exchange of best practice in EU scrutiny. The annual EU Speakers’ Conference task is to represent a ‘forum for the exchange of opinions, information and experiences among the Speakers’ and to ‘oversee the coordination of inter-parliamentary EU activities’ (Art. 2, see EU Speakers’ Conference 2010). It is the only arrangement with some formal decision-making capacity i.e. on new structures of IPC.

The biannual COSAC is anchored in Protocol No. 1 of the Lisbon Treaty (Art. 10) which defines its purpose to “promote the exchange of information and best practice between national Parliaments and the European Parliament“. Due to the longevity and prominence of COSAC, one would expect that parliaments see a clear benefit of the format: in terms of information access and networking among the participating EAC chairs and members. It may furthermore serve the coordination of positions on subsidiarity questions. Cooper (2013) has shown in an analysis of the process leading to the first yellow card within the Early Warning Mechanism that the submittal of reasoned opinions was coordinated at a COSAC meeting in April 2012 under the Danish presidency.

Within the realm of formal cooperation, the European Parliament and the parliament of the member state holding the rotating presidencies organize further inter-parliamentary meetings. These are focussed on contents of specific policy areas and address MPs from the respective specialized committees and take place on average twice a month. To Inter-parliamentary Committee Meetings (ICM) the EP invites committee members from the respective specialized committees in national parliaments to their session.² Inter-parliamentary meetings organized by the parliament of the member state holding the rotating presidency of the EU

¹ For a detailed review of the formal rules, meeting location, organization and tasks of the different inter-parliamentary meetings, please see Heffler and Gattermann, 2015.

² Another format are Joint Committee Meetings which are co-organized by the parliament of the presidency and the EP and up until 2012 Joint Parliamentary Meetings (see European Parliament, 2014). Since the number of meetings is very low, they are not included in the analysis here.

focus on committee chairs of the various policy areas.³ Compared to the COSAC or EU Speakers` Conference, both forms of inter-parliamentary meetings are more focused in terms of content. They treat specific policy areas and bring together experts of the respective fields. Miklin (2013: 32) argues that these meeting formats have the highest benefit in terms of information access on upcoming EU policies.

At all formal inter-parliamentary meetings, administrators from the national parliaments are present in support of the MPs (or as substitute). One important link among parliaments in the EU are the permanent representatives of national parliaments in the EP. Most often one member of staff is located in Brussels as an “antenna”, thus, for early information on the proceedings in the EU institutions and for organizational support for visits of MPs in Brussels. Currently all national parliaments have a permanent representation in Brussels. The permanent representatives of national parliaments hold regular Monday morning meetings to exchange on the on-going proceedings in their home parliaments and to coordinate on the EWS.

Beyond the formal meetings at political level and the administrative structures, there is of course informal cooperation among parliamentarians and officials. Informal contacts can take any form ranging from multi- or bilateral meetings, phone calls and emails. One structuring factor for informal cooperation is the organization along party lines on the vertical (EP-NP) and horizontal (NP-NP) dimension. MEPs of the same nationality and party are often a first point of reference for informal inter-parliamentary contacts (see Miklin and Crum 2011, Raunio 2009). The informal contacts will surely serve most directly specific needs for information. However, they are more difficult to measure.

Variation across parliaments

For any parliament – and especially the parliamentary majority – the own government will be the first point of reference for information on EU affairs. Derived from this logic, I expect parliaments with strong prerogatives on scrutiny of EU affairs to be less inclined to invest their resources in IPC. The information rights are relevant. The capacity to influence the government position before (European) Council meetings as through mandating rights should further reduce the incentives for IPC since the direct influence on the government may be judged to be more effective. Cooperation among parliaments is after all an indirect instrument where no direct policy impact is possible. Thus, as resources are scarce, MPs will be less

³ To avoid confusion the term inter-parliamentary meetings is used to cover both meeting types: Inter-parliamentary Committee Meetings by the EP and Chairpersons meetings organized by the rotating presidency. The Inter-parliamentary Conference on CFSP and CSDP is included within the chairpersons meetings. The European Parliamentary Week which takes place since 2013 is summarized under ICMs of the EP.

willing to spend their time and budget on travelling to inter-parliamentary meetings, if information flow and degree of influence over the government position is satisfactory.

H1: A national parliament with strong scrutiny rights over EU affairs, will less frequently engage in inter-parliamentary meetings/cooperation.

In his study of the Austrian parliament, Miklin (2013) argues that the incentive for opposition parties to engage in IPC is higher due to increased interest in information from third parties. Based on the assumption of an overall interest in cooperation from opposition MPs, I expect that they will be more present if their parliament has formal rights which strongly protect the parliamentary minority. For example, the organization of committee membership and appointments to committee chairs will partially determine the extent in which opposition MPs participate in inter-parliamentary meetings.

H2: Opposition parties with strong position in their domestic parliament will be more present at formal inter-parliamentary meetings.

A basic condition to be able to participate in inter-parliamentary meetings with high frequency is the parliament's resources. The overall size of the parliament in terms of number of MPs and its should determine to a significant degree the participation rate in formal meetings.⁴ In a large parliamentary chamber it is more likely that one or several MPs can fit the inter-parliamentary meetings in their schedule.

H3: A parliament with higher resources in terms of number of MPs and overall budget available will be more likely to send MPs to all forms of inter-parliamentary meetings. The three factors of the hypothesis, strength of scrutiny rights over EU affairs, the role of opposition parties and resources, may interact with each other. Thus, they either reinforce or balance each other. For a small parliament with limited resources but weak EU scrutiny rights the interest in IPC could be so high that it is more active than a parliament with extensive resources but strong scrutiny rights. When taking just the overall parliamentary budget and number of MPs as indicator (not the budget allocated for travelling), the political will could supersede the material constraints.

Data and method

The case selection of the four member states aims at a most-different case design to test the hypotheses. The aim is to cover variation on the three dimensions of the resources of the parliament, the scrutiny rights in EU affairs and the formal rules on power sharing with the opposition parties (see Table 1).

⁴ Yet, political will should enable even small parliaments to allocate their resources with priority on cooperation.

	France	Germany	Denmark	Portugal
No. of chambers	Bicameral	Bicameral	Unicameral	Unicameral
Political system	Semi-presidential	Parliamentary	Parliamentary	Semi-parliamentary ⁵
Type of government	Jun 2007 to Jun 2012: single party Since Jun 2012: coalition	Nov 2009 to Aug 2013: Coalition Since Sep 2013: Grand coalition	Oct 2007 to Sep 2011: minority (coalition) Since Oct 2011: minority (coalition)	Sep 2009 to Jun 2011: minority Since Jun 2011: coalition
Size (Total no. of seats)	AN: 577 SE: 348	Bundestag: 622 Bundesrat: 69	175	230
Resources (overall budget and staff) ⁶	AN: 606.1 mio PPP \$/ 1.238 staff SE: 382.8 mio PPP \$/ 1.143 staff	BT: 795.1 mio PPP \$/ 2.788 staff BR: 26.1 mio PPP \$/ 204 staff	NN / 726 staff	180.6 mio PPP \$/ 380 staff
Strength in EU affairs ⁷	AN: medium SE: medium	BT: high BR: high	high	low

Table 1: Overview on case study countries. AN = Assemblée Nationale, SE = Sénat, BT = Bundestag, BR = Bundesrat.

The chambers selected for in-depth analysis vary significantly in terms of size and resources. The German Bundesrat is composed of only 69 delegates and a very limited budget, while the German lower house is the best equipped in terms of resources (795.1 mio PPP \$/ 2.788 staff) and number of MPs (currently 622). Portugal and Denmark range both roughly around two hundred MPs. However, Danish MPs can rely on a higher number of staff than Portuguese ones. The two French chambers have about the same number of staff at hand (the Assemblée 1.238, the Sénat 1.143). But the significantly larger Assemblée National with 577 MPs has an almost double as high budget available than the French upper house.

The Danish parliament, the Folketing, has been treated as the textbook model of parliamentary scrutiny of EU affairs due to the mandating rights for the government's position in the Council (Christensen, 2015). The German Bundestag is similarly famous for its strong position vis-a-vis the government (at least since the recent revisions of the formal control rights initiated by the German Constitutional Court) (Höing, 2015). On the other hand Portugal and France represent two political systems of a large and a small member state where the power of parliament is rather limited (Jancic, 2015; Tacea and Thomas, 2015).

⁵ See Jancic (2015).

⁶ Information on the budget and number of staff was retrieved from the IPU website: <http://www.ipu.org/parline/parlinesearch.asp>.

⁷ According to OPAL institutional strength score, see Auel et al. 2015.

The logic of opposition in a bicameral system differs in so far as a potential majority in the upper house of non-government parties may allow for some leverage for opposition parties (Tsebelis 2008). The study covers two bicameral (France and Germany) and two unicameral systems (Denmark and Portugal), coinciding with the size of the respective countries and their parliaments. Furthermore, France represents the rare case of a semi-presidential system within the EU which is considered to leave opposition in a weaker position (Thomas and Tacea, 2015). In view of the type of government, parties in coalition compose most governments. Some variation can be found due to the minority governments in Denmark in the legislative period from Oct 2007 to Sep 2011 and the current one, the minority government in Portugal from September 2009 to June 2011 and the single party government of UMP in France before June 2012.

To understand the function of the different channels of cooperation and to test the hypotheses, this study relies on a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods. As indicator of the participation in formal IPC the registration of MPs and officials are analysed from Denmark, France, Germany and Portugal in inter-parliamentary meetings in Brussels and those organized by the rotating presidency in the time span from 2011 to 2013.⁸ The lists of participants are available on the European Parliament website (European Parliament, 2014) and on the websites of the rotating presidencies. As the Lisbon Treaty has aimed at strengthening the cooperation among parliaments, the time of the Post-Lisbon phase is deemed most adequate for analysis. The lists of participants have to be considered with some caution, as last minute changes and absences may not be included in the registration list. The lists should, however, indicate the rough trends of the variation among member states' participation according. They allow differentiating by meeting type, party affiliation of the members and their function. All officials are included in the registration lists.

To answer the question on the intensity and kind of IPC of a national parliament the following indicators are assessed: the overall participation rate of MPs and officials and the participation according to different meeting types. Beyond mere frequencies the repetition of participation is a crucial indicator for MPs' and officials' ability to form a network. Thus, for the three years under analysis the paper assesses who comes repeatedly.

The quantitative analysis is complemented by interview data from the four case study countries. On the one hand this allows putting the quantitative data into perspective in its perceived relevance compared to informal cooperative practices and, on the other hand, it

⁸ Data is missing for the Inter-parliamentary meeting organized by the Irish presidency on 16 and 17 June 2013 of the Chairpersons' Communications, Education and Transport and for the Inter-parliamentary meeting organized by the Danish presidency on 7 and 8 June 2012 of the chairpersons of agriculture.

allows assessing the evaluation of the different channels of IPC. The interviews on which the analysis is based were conducted in the framework of the OPAL project in the time period between May 2012 and June 2013. Overall, this study can draw on 41 interviews (see Table 2).

Country	Date and place of interview	Interview partners from government parties	Interview partners from opposition parties	Interview partners from administration	Total number of interviewees
Denmark	Nov 2012 in Copenhagen	5	1	8	14
France	May 2012 in Paris	4	0	8	12
Germany	May 2013 in Berlin	4	5	10	19
Portugal	June 2013 in Lisbon	3	1	3	7
Total number of interviewees					52

Table 2: Overview of the number of interviewees and roles of interview partners.

In each member state, members of parliament – in most cases with a specialization on EU issues – were interviewed as well as a number of administrators engaged in EU affairs.⁹ The interviews were semi-structured. Interview partners were asked for the form of participation of their legislature in IPC in the EU, their personal experiences and their judgement on the relevance.

A third source to cross-validate the findings is the COSAC biannual reports (the 21st report from June 2014 and the 18th from April 2012) and expert reports as available in chapters of the Palgrave Handbook on National Parliaments and the EU on the respective member state (Heftler et al. 2015).

Results

This paper aims at understanding the functions various channels of formal and informal IPC perform and the use thereof by four case study countries. After an overview of the overall engagement in IPC of the four member states under analysis, the presentation of the results is organised along the channels of IPC: the general conferences on EU affairs (EU Speakers' Conference and COSAC), inter-parliamentary committee meetings (organized by the EP) and meetings of chairpersons (organized by the rotating presidency), the administrative level (esp.

⁹ Interviews were conducted with the assurance of the anonymity of the interviewee. References therefore follow the system of abbreviations for “country/chamber/political or administrative level/number”, for example PLSEP01 for Poland, Senate, Political level, First interview.

the permanent representatives of national parliaments) and informal links to the EP and across national chambers or parliaments.

Overall participation in formal inter-parliamentary meetings

For a first assessment, the overall participation rate for the three years under analysis (2011 to 2013) indicates the intensity with which the six chambers are present at formal inter-parliamentary meetings (see Table 3). Overall, almost one hundred different inter-parliamentary meetings have taken place within the time period under investigation.

The German Bundesrat has by far the lowest overall turn-out, followed with some distance by the French Sénat and the Danish Folketing. The two upper chambers are both less engaged than the lower houses of the respective member state (especially in the German case this may be explained by the nature of the Bundesrat composed of *Länder* representatives and the limited size). The German Bundestag, as its resources would lead to expect, is represented strongly. However, disconfirming hypothesis 3 on the relevance of resources the Assembleia da República of Portugal has an even higher participation rate of MPs than the Bundestag. For Portugal the idea to voice its position and to be present at meetings seems to be a motivation to participate with such high frequency (PTP01). It is important “not to leave an empty chair” (PTA03). Thus, despite the budget cuts during the Euro crisis the Portuguese parliament made a sustained effort to send at least one MP to all inter-parliamentary meetings. Thus, the overall participation of MPs does not strictly follow the rule of the resources available as laid out in H3. The political will of how to allocate resources may be more relevant.

	SUM MPs	officials	SUM MP & official
Denmark	76(56)	100(99)	176(156)
France-NA	85	87	172
France-SE	73	80	153
Germany-BT	126	167	293
Germany-BR	39	38	77
Portugal	160	69	229

Table 3: Participation rate in inter-parliamentary meetings all formats¹⁰ from 2011 to 2013. Numbers in brackets indicate the participation rate for Denmark excluding meetings during the Danish presidency.

Looking at the number of officials participating in the meetings the factor of resources seems to play a stronger role. The Bundestag clearly sticks out with a number of 167 officials present at the meetings. In most chambers the rate of officials participating is equal or higher

¹⁰ That is the EU Speakers Conference – including the preparatory meetings at administrative level –, COSAC, Inter-Parliamentary Meetings organized by the EP or the rotating presidency incl. the Inter-Parliamentary Conference on CFSP and CSDP as well as the European Parliamentary Week in 2013)

than the number of MPs. Except for Portugal where almost double as many MPs participate in relation to the number of officials.

Another dimension of the intensity with which national parliaments cooperate is the frequency with which MPs participate in formal meetings. While an administrator from the Portuguese parliament indicates that her points of contact in other national parliaments administrations have evolved from COSAC meetings (PTA01), a member of staff from the French Assemblée experienced the opposite: the exchange of business cards did not feed into any follow up or long term exchange (FSEA01). The bilateral and informal contacts which may evolve from contacts established at formal meetings is difficult to measure (see however Miklin and Crum 2011). Yet, the repeated participation in inter-parliamentary meetings can serve as indicator for network building. Table 4 shows the number of times with which MPs or officials have participated at any inter-parliamentary meetings of any format in the time period from Jan 2011 to Dec 2013.

Frequencies	1 time	2 to 4 times	5 to 10 times	more than 10
Denmark	40	23	7	3
France-NA	57	24	8	0
France-SE	51	23	4	2
Germany-BT	75	54	10	3
Germany-BR	21	9	4	0
Portugal	64	19	7	2

Table 4: Repetition of participation at inter-parliamentary meetings of any format.

These numbers are rather disillusioning. For all chambers half to two-third of persons only participated one single time. The fact that they did not return to this kind of exchange suggests that they did not experience it as an effective use of their time. However, a relevant group of MPs and officials (between 20 and 30 per cent of all participants of the respective chamber) does participate around once a year (i.e. 2 to 4 times within the investigated time period). For the Bundestag this share is even higher with around 40 per cent. Interestingly, all chambers have about ten MPs or officials who are very frequently at inter-parliamentary meetings.

Considering the share of government versus opposition MPs participating in inter-parliamentary meetings two points become apparent: from the two upper houses the parties which are not in government are equally strong represented as the one's from government parties. For Denmark and Portugal the distortion in favour of governing parties is only minimal, while for the lower houses of France and Germany government parties are much more frequently at the events than opposition parties. For the Assemblée National the governing party is twice as often present as the members from parties in minority (see Table

5). This finding supports the expectations from H2 that opposition parties in a strong position at domestic level will participate more frequently in inter-parliamentary meetings.

	GOV	OPP	SUM MPs
Denmark	42	34	76
France-NA	63	22	85
France-SE ¹¹	37	36	73
Germany-BT	77	49	126
Germany-BR ¹²	20	19	39
Portugal	85	75	160

Table 5: Frequency of participation in all formats of inter-parliamentary meetings by majority and opposition parties for the time period from 2011 to 2013.

The general conferences: COSAC and EU Speakers` Conference

Disentangling the type of meetings, the various priorities in formal cooperation of the chambers become clearer. For COSAC meetings and the EU Speakers` Conference the participation rate of MPs indicates that parliaments always send a delegation except for Bundesrat delegates not being represented EU Speakers` Conference (see Table 6). The biannual COSAC meetings are highly frequented: the German Bundestag, the French chambers and Denmark send on average roughly two MPs. Portugal is present with a quote of 3.42 MPs per meeting. For the participation of officials the high number for Denmark at COSAC stands out. The effect is moderated, if the two COSAC meetings in Copenhagen during the Danish presidency are not included (where 16 officials participated). Still there is a strong base of support by Danish officials working on EU affairs at the COSAC meetings. The staff members return repeatedly to COSAC.

The EU Speakers` Conference is strongly supported by the administrative level for all chambers. Similarly, the continuity of the staff members preparing the EU Speakers` Conference and supporting their presidents is very high. Portugal is the only country to send more than one parliamentarian to the EU Speakers` Conference, at times including MPs from the opposition.

¹¹ Please note that for the upper houses I have coded the party which does not hold the government as opposition party – not the minority necessarily the minority in the chamber.

PARTICIPATION rate	COSAC		EU Speakers` Conference	
	MPs	officials	MPs	officials
Denmark	23	47	3	21
France-NA	18	23	4	14
France-SE	21	13	4	21
Germany-BT	25	18	3	28
Germany-BR	13	13	0	13
Portugal	41	17	9	14

Table 6: Participation rate at COSAC and EU Speakers` Conferences in the period from 2011 to 2013. A total number of 12 COSAC meetings, three EU Speakers conference and three preparatory meetings at administrative level took place.

According to the 21st COSAC biannual report all six chambers evaluate COSAC positively in terms of networking. However, the content of the conference – the agenda and the quality of the debate – is criticized by most chambers. Information from the interviews is in line with these findings. Interview partners termed COSAC to be “not really interesting” (PTP05), to leave you “with empty hands” (FANA10) or even as “a waste of time” (PTP01). The Portuguese interview partner explained the criticism on the quality of the debate with a lack of dialogue among the speakers. The following statement of a French Senator summarizes the criticism towards the quality of debate at COSAC: “The institutionalised fora that we have, e.g. COSAC, are much too general and formal. You go there and you listen to a long speech of Commissioner 1, then to a long speech of Commissioner 2, and so on. This takes a lot of time and is not very productive... Having said this, I do not say that there are not bilateral meetings at the margins of COSAC that may be very good.” (FSEP07) Thus, the networking effect and informal exchange on the side of the event seems to be relevant enough to participate despite the perceived low quality of debate. Participation rates show that MPs are present despite their criticism of the official agenda. COSAC is the one conference with the highest return rate of its participants. Interview partners in Denmark valued COSAC as a very well established platform for exchange which has allowed a network of personal contacts to grow which can be used in daily practice (DKA01).

The EU Speakers` Conference and the COSAC chairpersons meetings are quite firmly in the hands of government parties. Denmark is the only member state where opposition MPs regularly send the one delegate to the COSAC chairpersons meeting. For Denmark, the look at repeated participation reveals that EAC Chair (and prior Vice-Chair) returns with high continuity to COSAC meetings. Thus, her continued presence in parliament and focus on EU issues may in part explain the presence of opposition MPs at the COSAC chairpersons meeting.

In general, the COSAC chairpersons meetings are attended by one MP of the government party only (holding the EAC chair), whereas MPs of government and opposition parties are equally present at plenary sessions of COSAC. For all chambers the EAC chairs – usually from governing parties – take part very continuously. In the French Sénat one MP of UMP and one affiliated with the PS are both present at all COSAC plenary sessions. In other chambers the opposition members change more frequently than the EAC chairs stemming from the government. Thus, the networking effect is stronger for members of governing parties.

In sum, regarding the EU Speakers' Conference and COSAC the participation of national parliaments is fairly similar. Denmark is the only parliament to be at times represented by a member of opposition at COSAC meetings. This is in line with the expectation on higher leverage of opposition parties under minority governments (H2).

Inter-Parliamentary Meetings organized by the EP or the rotating presidency

Compared to COSAC and the EU Speakers' Conference, the inter-parliamentary meetings organized by the EP or the rotating presidency show a lower level of participation and more variation across chambers (see Table 6). For each format of inter-parliamentary meetings – ICMs organized by the EP and chairpersons' meetings by the rotating presidency – an average of about one meeting per month has been organized in the time period of investigation.

Type of meeting	ICMs (EP)		Chairpersons' meetings (rotating presidency)	
	MPs	officials	MPs	officials
Denmark	10	14	40(20)	18(17)
France-NA	24	23	31	21
France-SE	22	23	22	18
Germany-BT	48	77	46	36
Germany-BR	13	4	13	8
Portugal	44	27	58	8

Table 7: Participation rate inter-parliamentary meetings from the EP and the rotating presidency in the period from 2011 to 2013. Numbers in brackets indicate the participation rate excluding meetings during the Danish presidency.

The German Bundestag and the Assembleia da República both participate intensively in these inter-parliamentary meetings. For the Bundestag the high number of officials present at ICMs at the EP stands out. It can be explained with the size of the permanent representation of the Bundestag (see below, section on permanent representatives). The two French chambers range in the middle on participation in ICMs organized by the EP and meetings of chairpersons.

The Folketing is the only chamber to demonstrate a significant difference between the participation at ICMs at the EP (10) or those of the presidency (40). If taking out the meetings

organized during the Danish presidency the share decreases to 20 MPs present at meetings of the rotating presidency during the three years investigated. Yet, it is still twice as high as the participation at ICMs at the EP. In the 21st COSAC biannual report Denmark indicates that the quality of debate, especially the time for interventions of MPs, at ICMs at the EP is lower than those at ICMs of the rotating presidency. Danish interview partners explain the low priority with the fact that the parliament is too small to send MPs to each ICM despite the lack of actual decision-making at those meetings. Rather the participation of Danish MPs is issue dependent (DKA01, DKA02, DKP06).

Whereas participation from the side of German Bundestag's MPs is comparatively high, interview partners did not value this form of IPC as a very relevant or effective channel. Thus, the high participation rate may rather be explained by the higher amount of resources available to parliament than the political priority supporting H3.

The share of governing and opposition MPs is only slightly in favour for the majority at ICMs for most chambers (see Annex). At the chairpersons' meeting government parties are more dominant except for Portugal which shows a strong representation of opposition members at these meetings as well. Interestingly, non-government MPs of the two upper houses are about twice as often present as members from governing parties at ICMs. They make intensive use of this link to the EP. On the opposite, MPs from the French lower house who are in opposition are barely present at chairpersons' meetings. The presence of members of opposition parties at these meetings seems to be roughly in line with H2 which regards the strength of opposition as explanatory factor. The upper houses may represent some leverage for non-government MPs.

In regard of the hypotheses formulated above, the strength of parliamentary control over EU affairs (H1) may in part be an explanation for the engagement in IPC. The low priority of the Danish parliament for participation in ICMs at the EP and the negative evaluation by German MPs of the benefit of these meetings, indicates that these parliaments have more effective channels of information and influence available. The French Sénat and the Portuguese parliament are very active on the other hand and have been rated to have weak formal rights over EU issues.

Informal contacts to EP and among national parliaments

Beyond these formal channels of cooperation, MPs and parliamentary administrators interact informally. Here, the vertical links to MEPs and the horizontal connection to other national parliaments is of interest. Interview partners from all member states indicated that the

connection to MEPs of the same nationality and along party lines is most important source of information and coordination on EU issues.

The Danish MEPs travel monthly to the Folketing for meetings with the EAC. Of the four case studies the Danish Parliament is the only to have structured this contact on an inter-parliamentary level in this form, thus, not along the line of party families. However, the thirteen Danish MEPs are not able to cover all EP committees. Here, non-national contacts to EP committee members serve as a substitute (DKP07).

For members of the Bundestag, the contact to MEPs is focused on contacts with parliamentarians from the same party family and primarily with German MEPs. The European party groups play an important role as some organize regular meetings. The party contacts are described to have an 'early warning' function as MEPs draw attention to developments at EU level at an early stage in the policy making cycle which may become relevant for their domestic colleagues.

For vertical cooperation, the contact to MEPs which hold the rapporteurship on a certain proposed legislation is important. The rapporteurs from the European Parliament are often invited to committee meetings in the Bundestag or contacted in form of video conferences (DBTA09). However, most often, only if the rapporteurs are German. Here the Bundestag is in clear advantage to be able to use this source of first-hand information on the ongoing negotiation process, since the high number of German MEPs in the EP leads to more frequent rapporteurs where the national ties play in favour of the Bundestag. This opportunity seems to make the formal channels of cooperation less interesting. The German interview partners were the most coherently critical ones towards formal IPC.

The Assembleia da República invites the Portuguese MEPs once a year to a large public hearing. Here, the most relevant upcoming EU initiatives which should be scrutinized in the next year are tried to be identified (PTA02). The bilateral contacts to the EP are clearly structured along party lines and nationality. The governing party of the legislative term beginning in June 2011 (CSD-PP and PSD) can benefit from a well-established network within the EPP (PTP06).

Both French chambers have regular exchange with the French MEPs. The Assemblée Nationale holds three to four meetings per year between EAC members and ten to fifteen MEPs. The permanent representative supports visits of MPs to Brussels on a weekly basis (FANA09). The French Sénat is involved in joint meetings of the Assemblée, French members of the EP twice a year (FSEA03). Increasingly Senators are travelling to Brussels to inform themselves. The permanent representative of the Sénat accounted of 28 visits in the

parliamentary session from 2010 to 2011 and 29 between 2011 and 2012. However, evaluations of the relation to the EP by French MPs are ambivalent. Some interviewees perceived a lack of sufficient cooperation. Regarding the relationship between MEPs and French parliamentarians the sense of competition and superiority of one level of parliamentary representation over the other is still present (FSEP06) those understood to be ameliorating (FSEP05). Some prefer the vertical cooperation with the EP (FSEP04) while others see bilateral contacts to other national parliaments as more efficient (FANA12).

National parliament permanent representatives

All parliaments have sent one member of staff as permanent representative to the EP. Danish, and Portuguese interview partners describe the national parliament representative in the EP is the most important contact and source of information at administrative level (FANA09, FSEA08, FSEA03, PRP06, PTA02, PTP05). Similarly, the permanent representatives of the Assemblée Nationale and the Sénat are considered a very important tool to be informed on other parliaments positions on subsidiarity questions and coordination (FANA09, FSEA08, FSEA03). The analysis of the lists of participants reveals that permanent representatives are present repeatedly at many inter-parliamentary meetings.

A specialty of the German case study is also linked to the size of the member state and its resources. The Bundestag's entire EAC travels to Brussels once per year where they also meet with EP committees (DBTA09, DBTA10). However, the contact to the EP is not the priority for the German committees which rather focus on the connection to the Commission on these occasions (DBTA09).

Germany is the only country to have located the office of the national parliamentary representative outside of the EP building and to have staff from the political groups located there as well. Each party group present in the Bundestag has one or several staff in Brussels. Furthermore, the parliamentary representative is supported by several administrators, each responsible for a number of policy areas. National parliaments' permanent representatives from most of the other member states do not have more than a secretary or intern for their support. The capacity to have an administrative unit instead of a single person in the liaison office in Brussels is clearly linked to the amount of resources available (H3). The higher number of staff of the parliamentary representation, and even more so the presence of staff from the national political groups, changes the logic of inter-action with the MPs of the Bundestag in comparison to other national parliaments. In general the contact of permanent representatives from all member states with the domestic parliament is concentrated on the administrative level. For the German case, this further differentiates further due to the party

group offices in Brussels. The administrative unit of the Bundestag and the EAC secretariat are in frequent contact with the permanent representative. However, staffs from MPs are in touch with their party's representatives in Brussels, more than with the permanent representative (DBTA06, DBTP03). An assistant of an EAC member in the Bundestag defined the party's office in Brussels as the most important channel to receive information on EU issues (DBTA06).

Conclusion

This paper has set out to explain the participation of national parliaments in IPC in cross-national comparison. Thereby the channels of IPC are understood to perform to different degree the functions of cooperation such as information access, networking and coordination of common positions.

It is a common assumption that parliaments with good access to information and comparatively strong influence on the government position will be less inclined to invest in links beyond the national arena such as IPC. Hypothesis 1 can partially be confirmed based on the findings of this study. The Danish parliament, considered the textbook model of strong EU scrutiny, and the MPs from the German Bundestag who holds strong formal rights are both rather sceptical of formal IPC. The Folketing does, however, value the transnational links as through COSAC and informal contacts. On the opposite, the Portuguese parliament and the French Sénat with limited influence are willing to invest their resources in IPC.

A second hypothesis expected that the room of manoeuvre for opposition parties will depend on their domestic strength as indicated by the type of government, the political system (presidential or parliamentary) and the logic of bicameralism. The presence of opposition MPs is strongly dependent on the overall number of MPs which a parliament or chamber sends to the formal meetings. The strongest presence at all kinds of meetings – even the EU Speakers' Conference – have member of the opposition in Portugal. The Danish case of minority government allows for some leverage, as it is the only country where opposition MPs are frequently present at chairpersons' meetings. Furthermore, members of non-government parties of the upper houses use the possibility to connect to the EP in ICMs frequently. Future research should further assess the interrelation of opposition parties in bicameral systems.

Resources in terms of the time of MPs, staff and travel costs are a precondition for the participation in IPC. However, H3 on the relevance of the size of parliament in number of seats and the overall budget can only partly explain the frequency of participation in inter-parliamentary meetings. The Portuguese Assembleia clearly defies the budgetary restrictions and has a high priority for presence at all inter-parliamentary meetings often with several

MPs. The Bundestag on the other extreme does not stand out in terms of participation of parliamentarians at the meetings. However, the capacity to establish an independent well-staffed permanent representation and the high presence of staff at meetings indicates that resources matter at the administrative level. Size matters as well in the link to the EP: German MPs can benefit from the higher number of German MEPs who in consequence more frequently hold the rapporteurship on an EU policy proposal. Thus, German MPs have good access to the political dimension of EU developments.

Overall, the use of the different channels by the investigated parliaments show quite some coherence. COSAC is attended with high frequency and continuity despite the negative evaluation of its content and seems to provide an important networking opportunity for EU specialists of all MS. Similarly, the permanent representatives are evaluated as an important link to the Brussels arena by all interviewees. The inter-parliamentary meetings of the EP and the rotating presidency and the link to the MEPs show more variation. While the MEPs of the same nationality and party family are the first address in most cases, the frequency of contacts is structured differently across chambers. The Danish case with regular monthly meetings at the Folketing is probably the most structured approach. For German parliamentarians the contact to German rapporteurs and MEPs in all committees is an excellent opportunity for access to information.

The similarity in the approach to IPC by the parliaments analysed suggests that the inter-connection in the parliamentary dimension evolves to a denser network. However, the critical views on the content of official agendas and debates at many kinds of inter-parliamentary meetings indicate that IPC still has room to develop into forum for the “voice of opposition” within the EU political system.

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Annex

	COSAC		EU Speakers` Conference
	gov	opp	gov opp

Denmark	9	14	3	0
France-NA	13	5	4	0
France-SE	10	11	4	0
Germany-BT	16	9	3	0
Germany-BR	9	4	0	0
Portugal	25	16	5	4

Table 8: Participation rate of MPs at COSAC and the EU Speakers' Conference in the time period form 2011 and 2013 in view of party status. Overall 12 COSAC meetings, 3 EU Speakers' Conferences took place.

PARTICIPATION rate	ICM (EP)		Chairpersons' meetings (rotating presidency)	
	gov	opp	gov	opp
Denmark	5	5	25(11)	15(9)
France-NA	14	10	26	5
France-SE	7	15	13	9
Germany-BT	27	21	29	17
Germany-BR	5	8	6	7
Portugal	23	21	27	31

Table 9: Participation rate of MPs at ICMs and chairpersons' meetings in the time period form 2011 and 2013 in view of party status. Overall 35 ICMs and 38 meetings of chairpersons took place.