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National Parliaments After Lisbon: Towards Mainstreaming of EU Affairs?

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Abstract

National parliaments in the European Union initially responded to the challenge of scrutinising EU legislation by establishing European Affairs Committees (EACs). This paper argues that further integration, combined with the opportunities and challenges presented by the Lisbon Treaty and financial crisis, create pressure to expand the scrutiny process beyond EACs. In this new phase of Europeanization, parliaments are increasingly ‘mainstreaming’ EU affairs scrutiny, blurring the distinction between national and European policies and involving larger numbers of MPs. We identify four indicators capturing the extent of mainstreaming: the rise of sectoral committees; the adaptation of parliamentary staff to European policy-making; the growing salience of European affairs in plenary debates and increasing inter-parliamentary co-operation beyond European affairs specialists. Although parliaments will adopt mainstreaming at different speeds and to varying extents, we argue that this trend will have significant implications for the roles of national parliaments in the democratic functioning of the EU.

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Introduction

Effective scrutiny of EU affairs has traditionally been a challenge for national parliaments. According to the ‘deparliamentarization’ thesis, national parliaments initially lost power through the transfer of competences to the European level, losing control over their national executives due to the erosion of the unanimity principle in the Council of Ministers and informational imbalances (Norton 1996; O’Brennan and Raunio 2007). National parliaments themselves have only started to counteract these developments relatively late in the process, and many parliaments initially proved either unwilling or unable to gain a measure of influence over their governments. Thus, according to Maurer and Wessels’ analysis of the EU-15 in 2001, only Denmark and Finland had ‘strong’ parliaments that could act as multi-level players (2001: 462-3).

From the early 2000s onwards, the scholarship entered a second phase focusing on the Europeanization of national parliaments, i.e. the top-down impact of European integration on the functioning of parliaments² (e.g. Raunio and Hix 2000; Dimitrakopoulos 2001; Auel and Benz 2005; Raunio and Wiberg 2009). This literature has tended to emphasise parliaments’ efforts and adaptation to combat the deparliamentarization phenomenon, with Winzen, for example, arguing that the strength of national parliaments overall increased from 2000-2010 (Winzen 2012: 663-5).³ Many of these studies focused in particular on the role of European Affairs Committees (EACs) in empowering parliaments to scrutinise EU affairs (e.g. Dimitrakopoulos 2001; Auel 2005).

This paper argues that over the past decade a number of factors have come together to trigger a new development in parliamentary scrutiny of EU affairs, a second phase of Europeanization, that sees a diffusion of European affairs scrutiny responsibilities to a wider range of actors. This

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² As captured, for example, by Ladrech’s definition of Europeanization as a top-down process whereby European ‘political and economic dynamics become part of the organizational logic of national politics and policy-making’ (1994: 69).

³ Winzen noted, however, that the pre-2004 Member States generally retained weaker scrutiny systems relative to those of new Member States (Winzen 2012: 663-5)

'mainstreaming' of European affairs scrutiny is the result of three factors: While the transfer of competences to the European level creates an ever-increasing incentive for improved parliamentary scrutiny, the Treaty of Lisbon provides parliaments with new powers and a larger amount of information, while the sovereign debt crisis raises the political salience of EU politics. These changes place a great strain on the time and resources of EACs, especially in the context of the high complexity of crisis-related debates.

We argue that this combination of opportunities and pressures has triggered a trend *away* from the concentration of EU affairs scrutiny in EACs. This trend has been called 'decentralization' of EU affairs by Dutch practitioners (van Keulen, 2012) and mainstreaming in the UK context (ESC, Written Evidence ESI 5, 6 and 7; Carter and McLeod 2006). In debates about potential reforms of the committee system, the intention of the advocates of 'mainstreaming' is precisely to bring EU affairs out of isolation and integrate it into the normal functioning of the parliament, i.e. into the mechanisms used for the scrutiny of domestic policy (ESC, Written Evidence ESI 5, 6 and 7; Tweede Kamer, 2006: 23-24). They argue that the cross-cutting nature of European affairs should be recognized. From the point of view of parliaments that mainstream their EU scrutiny procedures, it is more efficient to ask sectoral policy experts take into consideration the EU dimension, than to ask EU experts to deal with all other policy dimensions.

While the debates among practitioners focus on the mainstreaming of EU affairs scrutiny as a relatively narrow organizational reform, shifting responsibility for scrutiny from EACs to sectoral committees, we expect this act to have more far-reaching consequences where it takes place. The reorganization of the committee work of a parliament also poses challenges to the organization of staff support for committees, as standing committees will then also require EU-related advice and support. In addition, if the competence for EU affairs shifts within a parliament, new groups of MPs are likely to develop an interest in inter-parliamentary cooperation. Finally, we expect mainstreaming to go hand in hand with the involvement of a greater number of MPs in EU affairs scrutiny, which will also have a positive impact on the frequency of and breadth of participation in plenary debates on EU issues, as greater numbers of MPs gain expertise in the functioning and policy-making processes of the EU. We therefore define the mainstreaming of European affairs scrutiny *as the integration of EU affairs scrutiny into the work of a wider circle of MPs of a parliament with a view towards the normalization of the treatment of EU affairs also in terms of procedures.*

At the same time, national parliaments are very diverse in their organization, rules, dynamics and working practices (Maurer and Wessels 2001: 462-3) and the perception of parliaments of their goals varies due to differences in constitutional rights, national cultures, party and electoral

systems and attitudes towards Europe (on the part of both MPs and citizens) (e.g. Norton 1996; Auel 2005; Raunio: 2011; Dimitrakopoulos: 2001). Mainstreaming should thus not be seen as a uniform trend, but as a trend whereby national parliaments – encouraged or pressured by recent developments and events – move at different speeds and reform to different extents, depending on a number of intervening factors.

In this vein, the following sections will first develop hypotheses about parliamentary adaptation with a particular focus on the factors promoting or preventing moves towards mainstreaming. Secondly, with a view to future research, the indicators for mainstreaming are discussed. Finally, the concluding section examines the implication of the trend towards mainstreaming for the capacity of national parliaments and the democratic functioning of the European Union.

Explaining divergence through an institutionalist framework

The ability and willingness of national parliaments to mainstream EU scrutiny are heavily conditioned by their existing procedures, resources, party-political dynamics and institutional cultures. An institutionalist framework therefore provides the ideal theoretical starting point for explaining this variation, enabling us to view national parliaments' approaches to this trend through the prism of the national and international contexts that mediate them. Historical institutionalism, in particular, allows for a temporal dimension that can perceive the trend toward mainstreaming as a process, situating different parliaments at varying stages of that process in ways that reflect their particular domestic contexts. This is bolstered by the concept of path-dependence, which provides a framework for understanding how parliaments have responded to the same broad challenges – Lisbon's new powers, the expansion of EU competences and the financial crisis – in ways that broadly cohere with their existing procedures, cultures and operating methods. Similarly, it allows us to look forward, positing that the reforms made in the context of this particular historical moment (i.e. the aftermath of the Lisbon Treaty, as well as the financial crisis) will affect and constrain the ways that parliaments scrutinise EU affairs in future.

In general, historical institutionalist approaches rely on a broad definition of institutions that encompasses both formal rules and structures and informal but widely-accepted practices (Rosamond, 2000: 114; Hall and Taylor, 1996: 938; Armstrong and Bulmer, 1998). Such a broad definition leaves room for historical institutionalists to employ, in Hall and Taylor's phrasing, both a 'calculus approach' – i.e. a rational-choice paradigm – and a 'cultural approach' emphasising the so-called 'logic of appropriateness' to understanding actor behaviour in the context of institutions (Hall and Taylor, 1996: 940).

This breadth is particularly useful in a study of national parliaments, enabling us to refer not only to the formal powers and roles assigned to them by national constitutions, but also to the political parties operating within them and to the informal practices embedded in their daily operations. These informal practices include a wide range of daily activities, most of which are unwritten and un-codified in the laws and standing orders; from the agenda-setting roles of staff to the typical dynamics between governing and opposition parties. This therefore facilitates a more nuanced empirical understanding of the incentives and disincentives for parliaments and parliamentarians to extend European scrutiny outside the confines of EACs.

Given these assumptions, we can expect that the spread of EU scrutiny mainstreaming among national parliaments will be mediated by their unique histories, formal rules, informal practices, administrative cultures, party-political dynamics, financial and bureaucratic resources, ideas, beliefs and domestic cultures. However, this focus on the individual aspects of each parliament is not antithetical to an analytical framework that recognises the wider, shared context within which the EU's national parliaments operate, and acknowledges the possibility of parliaments actively learning from one another. Formal and informal connections between parliaments and MPs have multiplied as both national parliaments and the EP have taken on greater roles in European governance, particularly in light of the Lisbon Treaty provisions (e.g. the Early Warning System), providing a wealth of opportunities for parliamentarians to learn how their counterparts in other countries scrutinise European affairs. The House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee, for example, explicitly requested information about how other Member State parliaments organise scrutiny of EU affairs as part of its 2012 inquiry into potential reforms of its own EU scrutiny system (HoC 2012a).

To mainstream or not to mainstream?

Applying this theoretical framework to the empirical question of mainstreaming, we can identify a number of external and domestic pressures that may be encouraging national parliaments to spread European scrutiny outside the confines of specialised EACs. At the same time, there remain several potent arguments against mainstreaming that will cause many parliaments to resist this trend.

The first major driver of mainstreaming reflects the long-term trend toward greater EU involvement in an ever-larger number of policy areas. Very few aspects of national policy now have no European dimension at all, meaning that the distinction between 'domestic' and 'European' policies has arguably become blurred across a wide range of issues. For parliaments, effective scrutiny of EU affairs now requires the mobilization of expertise across an ever-larger

range of issues and policy areas. By the same token, the growing range and reach of EU affairs puts the capacity of EACs to deal with all EU matters under pressure, both due to time/resource constraints and because EACs may not have sufficient policy expertise.

The second major pressure for mainstreaming derives from the Treaty of Lisbon. The Treaty's provisions on enhancing the roles of national parliaments, especially the Early Warning System, can be seen to represent a 'critical juncture' in the development of national parliaments' roles in EU scrutiny and policy-making, as they aim to give parliaments a greater say in the policy-making process. However, issuing reasoned opinions to the Commission, coordinating with other parliaments over the 'yellow card' system and coping with the volume of information that parliaments now receive on EU affairs requires a significant commitment of resources, including both time and administrative support. This again puts a great strain on the capacity of EACs to scrutinize European Affairs effectively.

From 2008 onwards, the financial crisis and its effects – including the fiscal compact – have also significantly increased the political salience of the EU in national parliaments, particularly within the Eurozone. Questions regarding 'bailout' packages for struggling countries have become paramount in both rescued countries and rescuers, as austerity budgets have drawn protest in parts of Europe and support in others. As a result, the distinction between 'national' and 'European' politics has become ever more blurred, with even mainstream parties – as opposed to explicitly Eurosceptic groups – fighting elections with explicit reference to European-level issues (e.g. Francois Hollande's promise to re-negotiate the fiscal compact). The need to slash budgets to comply with EU rules even caused the collapse of the Dutch government in 2012, striking at the heart of supposedly 'domestic' political life. In this context, there is pressure for a larger number of parliamentarians to be aware of EU issues in order to participate effectively in the major debates of the day and to respond to the concerns of their constituents. Although the financial crisis itself represents only a particular moment in time – rather than the more open-ended incentives provided by Lisbon – we can expect that the process of developing more effective scrutiny mechanisms to cope with the current situation will shape the contours of parliaments' approaches to scrutiny in future, even long after the crisis has passed.

At the same time, an institutionalist theoretical framework suggests that not all parliaments and chambers will respond to these pressures in the same way and at the same rate. Instead, the concept of path-dependence – including both 'calculus' and 'cultural' logics – leads us to expect that the rate of mainstreaming across parliaments will depend on how these pressures interact with existing practice, and whether the cost of reforming the scrutiny system is perceived as worthwhile (Hall and Taylor, 1996: 491). If parliaments believe that mainstreaming will be cost-

effective *and* will improve their power of European scrutiny – whether by mandating, influencing policy or holding governments to account – then we can expect them to begin the process of scrutiny reform. However, those parliaments with fewer resources and little political will (characterized by low salience of EU issues) are likely to be slower in adapting to the trend. Moreover, those parliaments that already perceive their scrutiny system as ‘strong’ are also likely to have few incentives to reform.

The first disincentive to mainstreaming relates to cost, in terms of both resources and time. Sectoral committees in many countries already consider themselves to have a full workload, and are likely to resent being asked to take on additional responsibilities unless accompanied by significant resource increases. For example, van Keulen has highlighted that a major lesson of the Dutch case – one of the pioneers of mainstreaming – has been that sectoral committees have required both training and support for mainstreaming to work effectively (van Keulen, 2012). Both MPs and staff require at least some degree of expertise in the EU policy-making process in order to scrutinize general policy, specific proposals and legislation effectively. Already burdened with committee, party and constituency affairs, MPs may not welcome the addition of new portfolios to their everyday jobs unless the case for mainstreaming is made carefully and appealingly. .

Mainstreaming also demands extensive cooperation between committees and groups of engaged MPs – between the EAC and sectoral committees, for example. In many national parliaments such cooperation remains fairly weak, and fraught with difficult questions about where responsibility lies for particular policies. Developing both the administrative/bureaucratic structures necessary to implement such cooperation and the cultural change needed to make it palatable to MPs and staff may take a great deal of time and effort. From the perspective of the existing EAC, moreover, objections may arise at the prospect of sectoral committees taking charge of the scrutiny agenda for their own areas of responsibility.

Another factor influencing the relative speed with which parliaments choose to mainstream scrutiny relates to the political salience of EU issues. This may be affected by two elements: Although the financial crisis has generally increased the visibility of EU affairs, there remain several countries in which the effect of the crisis has been more limited – for example because they are outside the Eurozone (e.g. the UK). Also, the degree of pro-Europeanness of important MPs may play a role, as scrutiny of EU affairs may be regarded as unnecessary or because the EU remains overwhelmingly popular and thus is not seen as deserving of significant scrutiny (Raunio 1999: 190). In such cases, we expect the pressure for mainstreaming to be less than in ‘creditor’ states like Germany or ‘debtor’ states like Ireland and Greece, where the Eurozone crisis has permeated almost all aspects of national policy, including domestic party politics.

The final major disincentive to mainstreaming relates specifically to parliaments in which existing scrutiny procedures, though centralised in the EAC, are already perceived as highly effective. The Danish *Folketing*, for example, is regularly cited as one of the EU's 'strongest' parliaments; scrutiny work there remains largely concentrated in the EAC (Winzen, 2012: 666). In cases like these, where the parliament in question considers itself to be very effective in controlling and monitoring its government and European legislation despite the relative lack of involvement of sectoral committees, we expect the costs of reform to outweigh the perceived benefits, at least for the foreseeable future.

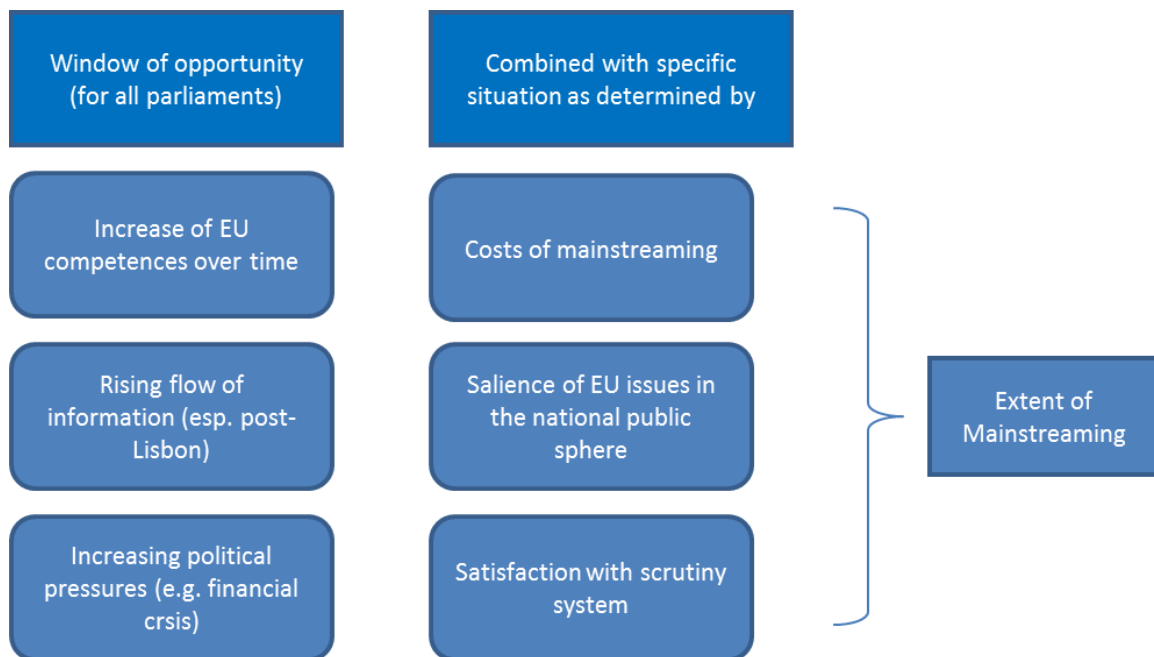


Figure 1: Factors influencing mainstreaming

Measuring mainstreaming of European affairs in national parliaments

The previous section established our understanding of mainstreaming of European affairs in national parliaments as intra-institutional diffusion. In this respect, we do not regard parliaments as unitary actors but as 'multi-actor assemblies' (Kiiver 2007). This distinction considers parliamentary committees, political parties, individual legislators and support staff. In the following section, we propose four indicators that allow us to measure the extent to which such mainstreaming of European affairs takes place *inside* national parliaments: (1) the growing number of specialised committees dealing with European affairs; (2) increasing adaption of

parliamentary staff to European policy-making; (3) increasing inter-parliamentary co-operation (IPC) beyond participation of EACs and their members; (4) a gradual increase in the number of plenary debates focusing on European issues. All of these indicators are part of parliamentary scrutiny. However, the former three indicators are rather secluded from the public and take place behind closed doors, fostering shared responsibilities across parliamentary groups and legislators in European affairs. The fourth indicator falls under open scrutiny of national parliaments in European affairs, as plenary debates take place in public with direct access by the media and citizens. All of them indicate a greater involvement of committees, support staff, political parties and ultimately MPs in European affairs.

(1) The involvement of sectoral committees

Committees constitute the heart of legislative work in parliaments: legislation can be dealt with more efficiently and effectively by specialised legislators as opposed to the full chamber. The committee structure indicates the legislative strength of parliaments (see Mezey 1979: 64). Indicators include, among others, the number of standing committees and the jurisdiction of individual committees (see Mattson and Strøm 1995). Standing committees are considered stronger than ad-hoc committees as they are more institutionalised in their expertise and working modes. Furthermore, a committee is considered stronger the more legislative rights it holds vis-à-vis the full chamber. These include the right to vote on behalf of the plenary, and the stage at which the committee becomes involved in the legislative process, e.g. before or after the reading in the full chamber. These prerogatives also apply for the scrutiny of European affairs in national parliaments.

Maurer and Wessels (2001: 436) observed that the EU-15 member states' parliaments responded to changing institutional settings at the EU level – triggered by the Single European Act (SEA) in 1986 and the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 – by setting up specialised committees to deal with incoming EC/EU legislation. Parliaments' establishment of EACs in an attempt to regain control over legislation was understood as one indicator of active Europeanization (Auel 2005: 306-308). For a long time, EACs were regarded as one of the most important tools of parliamentary scrutiny of EU affairs. Specialized committees, on the other hand, were hardly considered to play a particular role in European affairs in academic research and the scholarly interest in these standing committees is rather recent (see Raunio and Wiberg 2009). Nowadays, every parliamentary chamber has an EAC, even though competences and activities vary to a considerable degree across Europe (see Raunio 2009: 319).

Following further European integration, sectoral committees should become increasingly involved in the scrutiny of European affairs (see MacCarthaigh 2007: 38). Not only are EACs likely to be swamped by the growing amount of EU legislation, but one way to re-gain or maintain powers at the national level is to share the burden of incoming EU documentation and information across specialised committees. However, until 2000 sectoral committees were hardly involved in the scrutiny of EU affairs in the EU-15, with the exception of the committees in the German Bundestag and the Finnish Eduskunta (Bergman et al. 2003: 175). Raunio (2009: 319) also observed that specialised committees ‘in most parliaments [...] remain effectively sidelined or become only sporadically involved in EU matters’. However, in the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxemburg sectoral committees are now fully responsible for European affairs scrutiny in their policy areas (cf. www.cosac.eu/). In addition, recent developments in the Portuguese and Irish parliaments might be representative of future changes amid the new pressures from Lisbon and the financial crisis for national parliaments (www.cosac.eu/ireland/). Following an amendment of the rules of procedure in the Assembleia da República in May 2012⁴, the EAC now shares competences in the scrutiny of European affairs with other committees and the plenary:

‘The European Affairs Committee is the parliamentary committee with the competence to monitor and assess European affairs in overall terms, without prejudice to the competence of the Plenary and the other parliamentary committees.’ (Art. 6.1)

There are many potential methods to measure the extent to which mainstreaming of sectoral committees takes place in national parliaments. Raunio (2009: 326) suggests estimating the share of committee time spent on EU legislation to assess the degree of Europeanization. Another study could investigate the number of EU issues on the agenda of sectoral committees alongside the resources invested in scrutinising them, e.g. invitations to government representatives and European politicians to report before the committee, hearings with experts, and collaboration with other committees both within and outside the domestic parliament (see further below). A closer look at their composition would also answer questions about whether a new group of cross-issue EU specialists is emerging. This could be accomplished by tracing the relationship between individual MPs’ career paths and legislative behaviour.

In general, one can expect variation both within and across national parliaments. First, some sectoral committees are more active than others, not least due to the type of legislation involved

⁴ Law no. 43/2006 of 25 August 2006, as amended by Law no. 21/2012 of 17 May 2012 (see http://www.en.parlamento.pt/Legislation/Law21_2012EN.pdf - last accessed on 18/09/2012)

in their respective policy areas. Some competences, such as taxation, remain in the jurisdiction of domestic legislation, while many other policy areas, including the regulation of the internal market and Common Agricultural Policy, are dealt with at the European level. Secondly, cross-country variation is likely to depend on the power of the EAC. Sectoral committees are unlikely to experience the effects of mainstreaming when the EAC is sufficiently well-equipped and already considered highly effective, such as in the case of the Danish Folketing: its EAC benefits from reoccurring minority governments and its mandating power prior to EU summits. Reform is most likely when a parliament seeks to play a stronger role in EU affairs but is dissatisfied with the current committee system (e.g. as was the case in the Netherlands after the failed referendum on the Constitutional Treaty, Högenauer forthcoming).

Regarding the degree of mainstreaming, one can distinguish between: full mainstreaming, where sectoral committees are fully responsible for EU affairs scrutiny in their policy-areas; partial mainstreaming where sectoral committees are only responsible for document-based scrutiny but the EAC remains in charge of mandating and/or drafting reasoned opinions as part of the Early Warning Mechanism; partial mainstreaming where the sectoral committees only play an advisory role to the EAC; and no mainstreaming with the EAC remaining fully in charge.

(2) *Inter-parliamentary co-operation*

Vertical and horizontal IPC between (national) parliaments has been a long standing tradition in the EU. The ‘Conference of Speakers of the Parliaments of the EU’ is the oldest form of IPC, having first met in 1975 and then annually thereafter. Its main function is to oversee the coordination of IPC within the EU.⁵ Perhaps the most established form of IPC is the ‘Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs of Parliaments of the European Union’ (COSAC), accompanied by meetings of the chairpersons of EACs. It serves as a forum for MPs and members of the European Parliament (MEPs) to exchange views, information and expertise on EU matters.

Furthermore, over the last few years, different forms of IPC have emerged between the EP and its national counterparts. These include, among others, joint parliamentary meetings and joint committee meetings which are co-organised by the EP and the parliament of the respective Rotating Presidency. Conferences as well as inter-parliamentary committee meetings are convened in Brussels. While the frequency of these meetings has increased over the years, the extent to which participants benefit from this kind of co-operation has come under increasing

⁵Guidelines for Inter-parliamentary Co-operation in the European Union’ (Conference of Speakers of the Parliaments of the EU, 2008)

question, with fewer MEPs having taken part recently (see Gattermann 2013a). One reason might be that no binding decisions are being taken at these meetings. Their primary objective is to offer a forum for political deliberation alongside the exchange of information and expertise. Yet, one can observe an increased participation of non-EU specialists from national parliaments, since more MPs from sectoral committees, rather than EAC members, now participate in inter-parliamentary committee meetings (Gattermann 2013b). At the same time, new forms of IPC are emerging, such as regular exchange between chairpersons and/or rapporteurs of sectoral committees (see European Parliament 2012). A new ‘Inter-parliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security Policy’ was also established in 2012, replacing the pre-Lisbon Conference of Foreign Affairs Committee Chairpersons. IPEX facilitates all this cooperation by providing an online platform for document exchange.

Turning away from the institutional level, Miklin and Crum (2011) argue that political parties are more important in IPC than formal inter-parliamentary institutions. Miklin (2013) finds for Austrian parliamentary parties that the extent of IPC is dependent on a party’s parliamentary status and its ideology. At the same time, one can expect that individual legislators have varying motives for becoming active in IPC – both via formal institutions and informal channels of cooperation, which are likely to depend on electoral incentives. While more research is needed to understand individual and party level behaviour in IPC (see Gattermann 2013a, 2013b), higher levels of awareness of IPC on the part of parties and MPs serve as an indicator for the mainstreaming of EU affairs in parliamentary behaviour.

To measure the extent to which mainstreaming of IPC takes place among national parliaments, future research should trace the developments individually for each parliament over time. This provides information about who attends these meetings, how often and why. Ultimately such research would determine whether (initial) non-EU specialists become involved more often in IPC, or whether the same faces show up every time, rendering European affairs accessible only to a few experts in national parliaments. Here, variation across parliaments is likely to be linked to the relationship between EACs and sectoral committees. Surveys would furthermore provide insights about attendance at informal meetings and the individual motives of MPs to take part in IPC.

(3) Reorganization of Parliamentary Staff

The mainstreaming of European affairs scrutiny brings a greater number of MPs into contact with the EU, as sectoral committees scrutinize EU documents, mandate ministers or send MPs to inter-parliamentary meetings. As a result, politicians who normally deal with domestic policies suddenly have to operate in the context of EU policy-making processes and their tight deadlines, and organize a common parliamentary response with colleagues from other member states. This process inevitably results in pressures on the support system, an aspect that is rarely considered in the literature on the Europeanization of national parliaments (van Keulen 2012).

Ideally, each committee should have access to staff trained in EU affairs so that it can focus on policy content while staff advises on the EU context. This support can either take the form of specialized EU-staff amongst the committee staff or a sufficiently large common EU unit with staff who specialize in different EU policy areas. However, this means that the process of mainstreaming would not only involve a reorganization of the support staff but also an increase in staff, as a greater number of committees and MPs need assistance. Such investments may exceed the capacity of some parliaments, especially smaller parliaments and particularly in the context of an economic crisis.

As a result, we expect that only few parliaments will fully reform their staff structures to support mainstreaming (e.g. the Dutch Tweede Kamer, cf. Högenauer 2013). Instead, parliaments may follow two paths. Some parliaments may simply transfer EU support tasks to 'ordinary' committee staff (e.g. the Dutch Eerste Kamer, *ibid.*). The advantage is that each committee would have a specific contact person, but there is also a risk that the staff will be overwhelmed if no additional training is offered. Other parliaments may rely on existing EAC staff to advise sectoral committees on EU affairs, which would be problematic in that the EAC staff would be very thinly spread and only in a position to offer basic procedural advice (e.g. the Belgian Senate, cf. Högenauer and Neuhold 2013).

(4) Plenary debates and European affairs

Plenary debates serve to publicise legislation and policy-making. In addition, the parliamentary opposition may use it as a forum to inform citizens about the government's wrongdoings. As opposed to (most) committee meetings, plenary debates take place in public. Hence, the media and citizens have direct access to them. Auel (2007) argues that debates also serve as a tool of parliamentary scrutiny in European affairs – by means of holding the government to account and by public deliberation of EU issues. Furthermore, de Wilde (2012) argues that, rather than through control via the Early Warning Mechanism, national parliaments have the potential to

contribute to combatting the EU's democratic deficit by providing a link to EU citizens through their communication function. Hence, the more plenary debates in national parliaments deal with European affairs, the more likely citizens become aware of EU politics and EU policy-making.

The extent to which European issues are debated in national parliamentary plenaries is in fact interlinked with the competences of the EAC. Most EACs are granted the right to debate and vote on European issues on behalf of the whole parliament (see Raunio 2009: 319). Thus, in parliaments where the EAC remains the central body for European affairs scrutiny, the likelihood of the plenary debating EU issues diminishes. Bergmann et al. (2003: 175) show that before the Nice Treaty came into force in 2000 plenary meetings were hardly used for European affairs scrutiny in the EU-15. But Lisbon might have triggered a shift in responsibilities over European affairs in national parliaments as we have seen with the relationship of the Portuguese EAC and the plenary elaborated above.

Few studies have investigated the salience of EU issues in national plenary debates, even though, as de Wilde (2010: 27-28) points out, the literally transcribed, changeless nature of plenary debates facilitates the study of political behaviour and opinions. A content analysis, either of qualitative or quantitative nature, offers a key opportunity for the study of parliamentary debates. A quantitative study could, for instance, investigate to what extent plenary debates deal with European affairs by proportional measures. It could also assess which parliamentary actors become publicly active in European affairs. Both queries could be furthermore enriched by investigating cross-country, cross-issue and inter-temporal variation. Such studies would answer questions about the visibility and salience of European affairs in national parliamentary plenaries. A qualitative analysis, on the other hand, would answer questions about the framing of European issues or the tone of parliamentary actors towards the EU in debates.

A mixed-methods approach probably proves best for understanding the underlying dynamics of parliamentary debates. In this respect, de Wilde (2011a) applies a claims-making analysis in a study of the scope of conflict and visibility of parliamentary debates on multiannual EU budgets in the Dutch Tweede Kamer and the Danish Folketing. Thereby, the claim itself represents the unit of analysis measuring 'WHERE and WHEN, WHO makes a claim, on WHAT, HOW, addressing WHOM, for/against WHOSE interests and WHY' (de Wilde 2011a: 678). Apart from providing quantitative results by comparing the visibility of EU budget debates over time and across country, de Wilde (2011a) develops indicators of scope of conflicts and estimates a mapping of the partisan conflict lines in each debate.

Related to parliamentary debates are parliamentary questions addressed to the government, which are also recorded and accessible through parliamentary archives. Many parliaments reserve particular question times on days when the plenary meets, which improve their media and public visibility. Furthermore, questions may enrich or spark parliamentary debates on certain issues. Vliegthart and Walgrave (2011), for instance, measure the number of parliamentary questions and interpellations on certain issues in relation to those on other issues in order to assess whether media coverage has any impact on the parliamentary agenda in Belgium and Denmark. Such a method could also be applied to study the prevalence of European issues in parliamentary questions. De Ruiter (2012) codes oral and written questions from plenary and committee meetings in the Dutch and British Parliaments referring to reports that deal with the Open Method of Coordination to assess whether opposition MPs criticise the government in public. Variation in the extent of mainstreaming of European affairs in parliamentary debates and questions might depend on the type of parliament under study. For example, one may distinguish between debating chambers and more policy-oriented legislatures with an established committee structure. Given that the latter's strength lies in the scrutiny of European affairs through committee work, European issues are less likely to be debated in the plenary. Debating chambers, on the other hand, might allocate more time and resources to deal with European affairs in the open chamber. However, research has also shown that such a straightforward distinction might not always be applicable (Auel and Raunio 2012; de Ruiter 2012).

Instead, it can be expected that the extent to which plenary debates deal with European affairs is dependent on the issue (see also Auel and Raunio 2012). Highly salient issues are likely to receive more attention in plenaries than policies for which there is less at stake for political parties and citizens alike. One would expect MPs to pay more attention to highly salient issues which are already on the media agenda (cf. Vliegthart and Walgrave 2011; Veen et al. 2012). But issue salience is also likely to vary across countries as different issues have a different impact on domestic politic systems – though the financial crisis has become a highly salient pan-European issue in the European public sphere in recent years.

In conclusion, we can expect a lot of variation on the extent of mainstreaming measured by the proposed four indicators. And it is likely that the intensities to which each of the above factors occur are interlinked with each other. Sectoral committees are less likely to become actively involved in European affairs scrutiny if they are unable to draw on sufficient resources, i.e. support staff. Similarly, in parliaments where the EAC has a strong institutionalised position, undermining the role of sectoral committees in European affairs scrutiny, the chances are lower that European affairs are frequently debated in plenary. Nevertheless, mainstreaming is a process and does not necessarily happen immediately. Rather, mainstreaming is likely to evolve over time

– either from mainstreaming of the secluded scrutiny activities, i.e. the greater involvement of sectoral committees in legislative scrutiny, broadened IPC and more versatile staff in EU affairs, towards an external communication function that includes debates– or vice-versa from open scrutiny towards efficient involvement in EU policy-making.

At the same time, there are activities *outside* the immediate parliamentary arena and related to the communication function of parliaments and their members that could also be affected by mainstreaming: most notably parliamentary election campaigns over EU integration and constituency services of individual MPs. While the constituency service provides a direct link between MPs and citizens, parliamentary elections represent the entry ticket for MPs into the national legislature. Those MPs who stand for another term are likely to advertise their achievements in the previous term(s), and the campaigns of all candidates provide a forecast regarding their subsequent parliamentary behaviour. Both activities are linked to the four indicators presented above. Put differently, parliamentarians who do not invest resources in becoming more involved in European affairs by means of their committee membership, via IPC or by contributions in plenary debates are unlikely to fight electoral campaigns over European integration or exchange their views directly with their constituents. Conversely, those who are EU specialists in their national parliaments are constrained in their communication function, if mainstreaming does not take place across parties and committees or in plenary debates. Hence, future research might also consider these additional indicators as part of mainstreaming effects; especially since they serve as a means of making EU citizens more aware of EU policies and politics.

Conclusion: Mainstreaming - An Opportunity for Change?

Thus far, this paper has argued that – after a long period of limited interest in EU politics and a phase of active Europeanization that saw the emergence of EACs – a number of trends have come together to steer NPs in a new direction. European integration has reached a point where the participation of national parliaments in EU affairs is not only motivated by the growing transfer of competences to the European level. The Treaty of Lisbon has created new opportunities for NP participation; the financial crisis has made at least some aspects of EU affairs politically and electorally salient. We now expect a trend towards the mainstreaming of EU affairs in national parliaments, i.e. the diffusion of EU affairs to a greater number of actors and activities. In particular, we expect the mainstreaming of EU affairs to have an impact on the division of labour between committees, participation in IPC, the organization of parliamentary staff, the use of and participation in debates.

At the same time, not all parliaments are expected to embrace this trend with equal enthusiasm and move at equal speed. In line with historical institutionalism, we assume that national parliaments embrace this trend depending on the presence of a number of intervening factors: time and resource costs, levels of barriers to effective intra-institutional cooperation, the political salience of the European politics in that country, and perceived success of the existing system.

However, mainstreaming can be seen as more than just a change in the organization of parliamentary business and arguably presents opportunities for the EU and parliaments alike. From the perspective of national parliaments, mainstreaming can be a way to increase institutional capacity. As sectoral committees take on an increasing share of the responsibility for EU affairs, the people who are the most expert in the *substance* of EU policies become involved in the scrutiny process. They are arguably better equipped to judge the impact of a policy on the domestic system and can provide better feedback than MPs who have to deal with every aspect of EU policy from environmental policy to defence policy. If these specialized MPs are further supported by trained staff, there is potential for parliaments to increase the quality of their engagement with EU affairs and, also, to manage the quantitative challenges of increased information provision after Lisbon. We expect mainstreaming to be embraced most by parliaments that occupy the middle-ground in terms of strength in EU politics, and are further motivated by a number of domestic factors. If the strongest parliaments are slow to change because of high satisfaction with their existing system and if the weakest parliaments are reluctant to change because of a lack of interest in EU affairs scrutiny, but parliaments in the middle ground try to increase their institutional capacity, we may well move to a clearer distinction between parliaments that are ‘passive bystanders’ and parliaments that are ‘independent actors’.

On the European side, better feedback could be seen as an asset in itself. However, especially in the current climate, there is also an opportunity for mainstreaming to improve further the breadth of democratic engagement of national politicians and citizens with EU affairs. Extending the reach of the EU scrutiny system beyond the small groups of specialized MPs currently responsible for it in most national parliaments can increase the visibility of the Union at the domestic level. Moreover, it will equip far larger numbers of MPs to explain to their constituents how the EU affects their lives – both via direct contacts, parliamentary debates and electoral campaigns. Above all, EU citizens are likely to become more aware of European affairs. In the EU’s ‘multilevel parliamentary field’ (Crum and Fossum 2009) whereby representation of EU citizens follows two channels, via the national parliament and the EP, the latter would also benefit from higher levels of awareness for EU-level representation.

Thus, to conclude, mainstreaming is an important trend to study and analyse. It has critical and potentially far-ranging implications not only for the organization of parliamentary business, but also for the potential prospect of improved European affairs scrutiny and greater public visibility of EU affairs.

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