



# PADEMIA PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY IN EUROPE

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National MPs speak for citizens in other EU countries,  
too – more in Germany, less in the UK

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# National MPs speak for citizens in other EU countries, too – more in Germany, less in the UK

Lucy Kinski

*It seems straightforward to assume that national members of parliament (MPs) represent national concerns, when dealing with European Union (EU) affairs. Based on a study of 2,099 parliamentary claims by MPs from Austria, Germany, Ireland and the UK during treaty negotiations and the Eurozone crisis, PADEMIA member Lucy Kinski writes that MPs do in fact also represent citizens from other EU member states. She finds a quite remarkable degree of European representation in national parliamentary debate. Among the four member-states, German MPs focus most on other EU citizens, while their British colleagues do so least. She argues that, by Europeanising their representation, national MPs can contribute to strengthening democracy in Europe.*

*‘[N]ational politicians orient themselves ... to their national publics, because effective sanctions can come only from them. ... This shortcoming cannot be made up for even by growing national attention to European policy themes, since the European dimension is just what is lacking here.’*

– Dieter Grimm

According to standard accounts of representative democracy, national MPs represent national constituencies and interests. They are nationally elected and therefore accountable towards an electorate defined by the territory of the nation-state. But can we really still assume this narrow definition of representation to hold in an ever more interdependent European Union in which decisions of one member-state parliament can have far reaching consequences for the fates and fortunes of other citizens across Europe?

Not least since the Eurozone crisis, we have in fact witnessed two trends: On the one hand, we see an increased salience and contestation of EU affairs coupled with growing public Euroscepticism manifesting itself in the rise of (mainly right-wing)

Eurosceptic parties. It seems likely that in such an environment, national MPs are inclined to pit national interests against each other.



**National MPs can contribute to democracy in Europe, if they update their representative portfolios to European realities**



On the other hand, given the growing economic and political interdependence of nation-states within Europe, national MPs may also take into account other national citizens' concerns. When making decisions in the context of EU governance, i.e. decisions that may have, especially negative, effects on citizens in other member-states, MPs may equally be expected to not simply wear their national hats. I argue that such 'Europeanised representatives' could contribute to democracy in Europe because they do remain national representatives, but simultaneously update their representative portfolios to European realities.

Hence, here I ask whether national MPs in fact Europeanise their representation in EU affairs. Do they also claim to represent other European citizens, and, if so, do we see any differences between countries and issues?

The following is based on an elaborate analysis of representative claims by MPs in Austria, Germany, Ireland and the UK during parliamentary debates on the failed Constitutional Treaty (TCE), the Treaty of Lisbon (LT) and the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF), the first comprehensive rescue measure during the Eurozone crisis.

Specifically, this study distinguishes three types of claims that MPs make in their speeches in parliament. First, they represent national concerns only. This is their classic representative role: *'[We need] to find an alternative in the interest of Austrian taxpayers, (...) to adequately represent the Austrian*

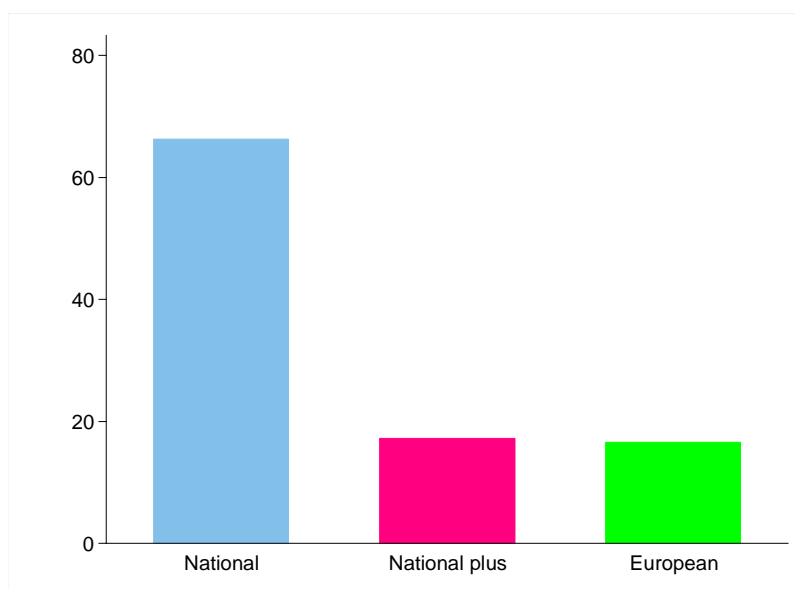
*taxpayers'* – Austrian MP Harald Vilimsky (Austrian Freedom Party, FPÖ).

Second, they may speak for their own citizens, but also citizens across Europe: *'The Bill [EFSF] will have implications for people across Europe and not only in Ireland'* – Irish MP Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin (Sinn Féin).

Finally, they can portray themselves as representatives of people in Europe only, be they nationals of other member-states or all people in Europe: *'The law [EFSF] is bad news for the people in Europe. It is bad news for the employees in Greece'* – German MP Inge Höger (Die Linke).

Therefore, I distinguish between *purely national* (example 1), *national plus* (example 2) and *purely European* (example 3) parliamentary representation. As Figure 1 shows, MPs do have a much wider representative focus in the EU context than classic national approaches to representation would have us believe.

**Figure 1. Focus of representation (N=2,099)**



We see that 34% of claims are Europeanised (national plus or fully European), 17% even refer to European citizens only. Given that according to classic ideas of democratic representation, we should see MPs exclusively orienting themselves towards national

citizens, this is a quite remarkable degree of Europeanisation. They still remain national representatives, of course, but they go beyond representing purely national concerns in an EU context by including other EU citizens in their considerations.



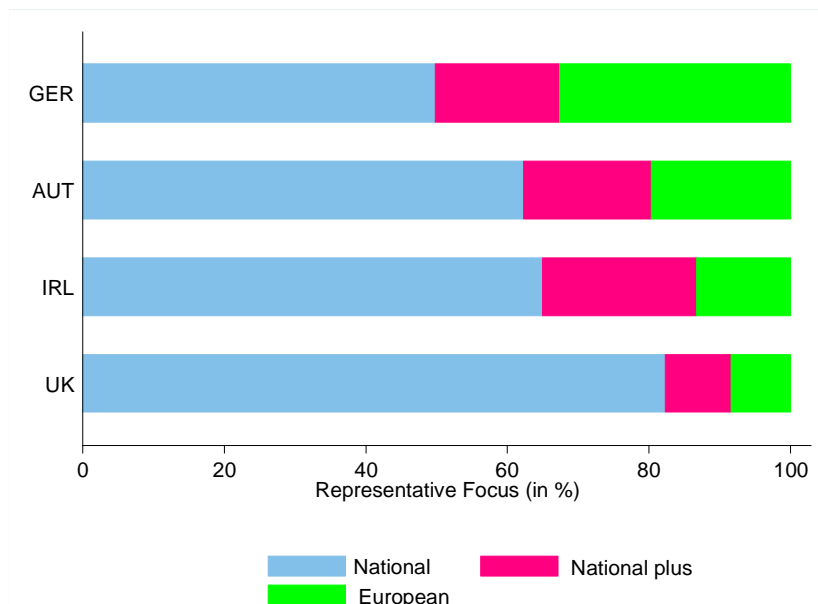
### German MPs are more 'Europeanised' than MPs in Austria, Ireland, or the UK



This Europeanisation is, however, by no means uniform. Instead we observe a differentiated pattern across the four

countries and three topics under study. As Figure 2 highlights, German MPs represent other European citizens most often compared to their colleagues in the other three countries. Half of their claims refer to more than just national interests and one third of claims are even solely about European citizens. On the other side, we have the UK with comparatively few Europeanised claims. Still, even here, 18% of claims go beyond the national context, while 8% are fully European.

**Figure 2.** Focus of representation across countries (N=2,099)



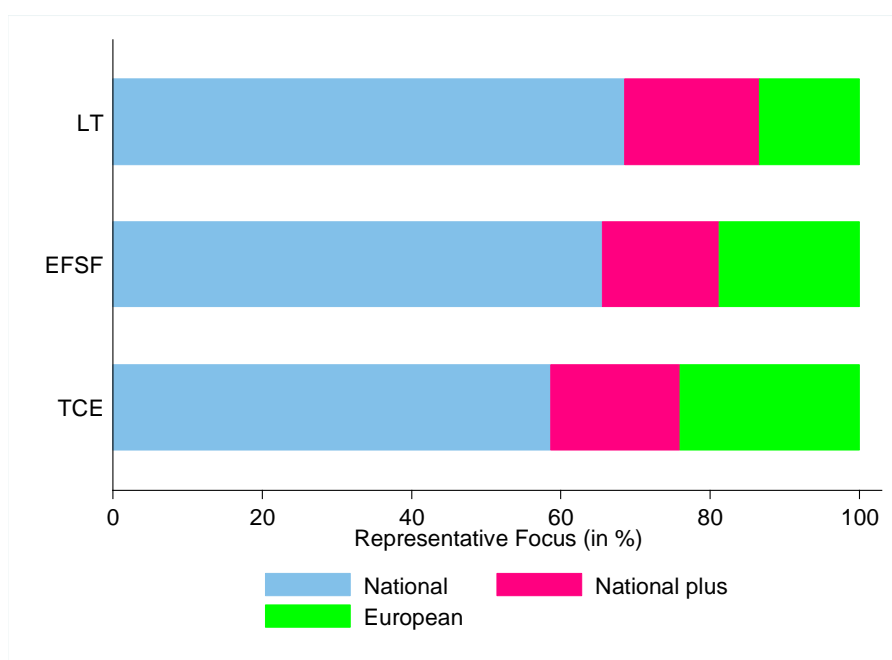
The pattern we observe can be related to the fact that Germany is more involved in the EU structures economically and politically than the UK (Eurozone membership, British opt-outs). Moreover, political contention and public Euroscepticism is higher in the UK than in Germany. These factors may lead to more national representation among British and more European representation among German MPs.

Comparing across topics (Figure 3), we see that representation during Constitutional

Treaty debates is most European, whereas it is comparably national during the Lisbon Treaty debates with the Eurozone crisis debates ranging in the middle.

This fits very well with the framing of the [Constitutional Treaty](#) as a political act '(r)eflecting the will of the *citizens* and States of Europe' (Art. I-1.1, emphasis added). After this 'constitution for all citizens of Europe' had been rejected by these very same citizens, MPs focused more on concerns of their national citizens.

**Figure 3.** Focus of representation across topics (N=2,099)



While some may have expected a particularly high degree of national representation during the Eurozone crisis, we actually see that whether MPs speak for other European citizens relates to their country's status as contributors or recipients of the bailout fund, and – for the UK specifically – its non-membership of the Eurozone. As 'creditors', especially German and Austrian MPs speak on behalf of citizens in 'debtor' countries as well. Both the German and Austrian parliament have a strong role in Eurozone crisis matters, consequently their decisions have a far-reaching impact on those very citizens.

Although quite Europeanised before the crisis had hit their country, Irish MPs markedly shifted their representation towards national concerns the moment they enter the bailout in November 2010. When crisis hits hard, national MPs care first about their national citizens' well-being. As the UK is involved in neither the Eurozone nor the EFSF (although there were bilateral loans to Ireland), British MPs very strongly see the Eurozone crisis through their national electorate's eyes. They are closest to the 'classic' national representative.



**Foreign MPs care about citizens whose own national MPs may not be able to do so**



Overall, in EU affairs, national MPs from Austria, Germany, Ireland and the UK have a much more diverse representative profile than classic electoral and territory-based approaches to representation would have us expect. Taking into account not only the interests of their national citizens, but also those of citizens across Europe, MPs recognise the interdependent nature of European governance. In a system in which national parliaments have lost much of their decision-making power, foreign MPs care about citizens whose own national MPs may not be able to do so. By establishing these new linkages, they become Europeanised national representatives that may ultimately contribute to strengthening democracy in Europe.

*This post represents the views of the author and not those of PADEMIA.*



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