

# Working Paper on Interinstitutional Relations in the EU

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# Working Paper on Interinstitutional Relations in the EU

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## Content

<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>2. The changing role of the European Parliament in EU interinstitutional relations</b>	<b>13</b>
2.1 Continuity and change. The Treaty of Rome as a basis for the changing role of the EP	14
2.2 The conferral of budgetary powers on the EP	15
2.3 Legislative powers	19
2.4 Supervisory Powers	23
2.4.1 The Commission	23
2.4.2 ECB and Eurogroup	24
2.5 Concluding remarks	26
<b>3. The legislative process: a view from the European Parliament</b>	<b>27</b>
3.1 State of the art: legislative practices in a changing interinstitutional environment	28
3.2 The MEP survey: data and methods	30
3.3 Results: how MEPs view and work on legislations	32
3.4 Discussion	38
<b>4. Parliamentary scrutiny of the ‘executive’ through parliamentary questions</b>	<b>39</b>
4.1 Parliamentary questions: what for?	40
4.2 The various types of parliamentary questions in the EU	43
4.3 Quantitative trends	44
4.4 A focus on parliamentary questions to the ECB	48
4.4.1 The context: the monetary dialogue between the ECB and the EP	48
4.4.2 The salience of monetary policy and the parliamentary accountability of the ECB	49
4.5 Discussion	53
<b>5. Representativeness and effectiveness? MPs and MEPs from opposition parties in inter-parliamentary cooperation</b>	<b>54</b>
5.1 Inter-parliamentary cooperation: functions and challenges	56
5.1.1 The functions of inter-parliamentary cooperation: the issue of representativeness	56
5.1.2 The effectiveness of inter-parliamentary cooperation and its limits	58
5.2 The composition of delegations to inter-parliamentary conferences: in particular, the presence of the opposition parties	61
5.2.1 The case study: Inter-parliamentary Conference on stability, economic coordination and governance in the EU	63
5.2.2 The selection of national parliament’s delegations	66
5.2.3 The representativeness of the delegations to inter-parliamentary conferences on stability, economic coordination and governance in the EU: the place of opposition parties	67
5.3 Attitudes and behaviours of parliamentarians toward inter-parliamentary cooperation	73
5.3.1 A (brief) qualitative analysis: the effectiveness of inter-parliamentary cooperation through the behaviour of the parliamentary delegations’ members	74
5.3.2 The attitude of MEPs toward inter-parliamentary cooperation: a new viewpoint	77
5.4 Conclusion: opposition parties in inter-parliamentary conferences between representativeness and effectiveness	80

<b>Bibliographical references</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>100</b>
Appendix 1: Supplementary material for Section 3	100
3.1 List of questions in the MEP survey used in Section 3	100
Appendix 2: Supplementary material for Section 4	107
4.1 List of MEPs asking questions to the ECB (EP7)	107
Appendix 3: Supplementary material for Section 5	110
List of questions in the MEP survey used in Section 5	110

## Figures

Figure 4.1 Yearly number of parliamentary questions since 1979.....	45
Figure 4.2 Mean number of questions per MEP. ....	46
Figure 3.3 Share of written questions to the European Commission and to Council of the EU.....	47
Figure 4.4 Yearly number of questions to the ECB and other financial institutions.....	50
Figure 5.1: Overall number of MPs of the 7 national delegations analysed, divided by majority and opposition, attending the conferences.....	68

## Tables

Table 4.1 Number of questions to ECB and other financial institutions by legislative term. ....	49
Table 4.2 Questions to the ECB by party group. ....	51
Table 4.3 MEPs asking the most questions to the ECB. ....	52
Table 4.4: Number of authors per question .....	53

## Executive summary

1. Working paper 6.2 looks at the organisation of the interconnection between institutions and its evolution overtime, trying to unveil the complex network of relationships that is often held responsible for the alleged disconnection between citizens and the EU political system. The focus is directed in particular at the European Parliament (EP) as central to the representation-accountability mechanisms and major beneficiary of interinstitutional shifts of power at the EU level.

2.a. The thorough historical review we conduct (Section 2) of the development of interinstitutional relations shows that **the empowerment of the EP** throughout the integration process can be understood as being the result of several complementary phenomena: a perceived need to tackle the democratic deficit as the Union has widened and deepened, informal practices frequently being institutionalized through treaty reforms, as well as a dose of institutional creativity.

2.b. At the same time, a major finding is that although the formal powers of the EP increased overtime through treaty changes, this has not been equally matched in scope by the growth of **its informal influence**. Its relative position in the so-called interinstitutional triangle has advanced, but not to the extent that some had expected. A general conclusion in that regard is thus that the EP's role in interinstitutional relations depends on its own perception of its powers as much as on its ability to use granted powers in an innovative manner and on the consent of other institutions.

Thereafter, our study of current interinstitutional decision-making adopts an original point of view, namely that of the MEPs and – to a lesser extent – of the members of the National Parliaments. Starting with legislative practices (Section 3), we build on the assumption that contemporary developments may influence representatives' perceptions and ultimately their work, which in turn bear consequences for the EP and EU democracy beyond it. We explore this issue employing a new original dataset, namely the 2020 ESPOL-EPRG MEP survey.

3.a. A first finding – which situates **legislative activities** within the broader realm of all activities carried out by MEPs – points at the work on legislation as being the single activity we identified most often cited as being of great importance in the minds of the EU representatives.

3.b. Second, we consider **voting recommendations** as they provide a good insight as to the attempted influence that other institutions and actors seek toward the EP. The political group leadership and the national party delegation are recognized as most often issuing recommendations. The analysis further provides a preliminary answer to the question as to how much other institutions encroach upon the prerogative of MEPs; while the European Commission is found to be largely remote of voting decisions in the EP – or at least issuing few recommendations –, the situation is less clear for national governments with respondents being equally split between those never receiving recommendations and those seldom or sometimes receiving some from their national capital.

3.c. Third, a more general outlook of **how MEPs view their role as legislators** within the interinstitutional setting is given through the power they set for themselves in the EU decision-making. Somewhat unsurprisingly, MEPs are evidenced to be overall favourable to granting

more power to the EP itself, be it at the expense of the other two main institutions. In particular, the main power they claim for themselves is that of initiative; MEPs thus seem inclined to encroach upon the powers of the Commission.

**3.d.** A complementary view to the overall legislative picture is given through perceptions on the issue of disputes between the EU and member states' authorities. This is important as it allows assessing **how MEPs view the overall interinstitutional hierarchy**. Yet, in the MEPs' views, the final say in disputes seems to be highly dependent upon the issue itself. Hence, the highest share of MEPs grant to themselves that final say only for matters regarding the environment and democratic principles, while agreeing to leave the member states in charge of social security, and granting the CJEU the final word in disputes over the rule of law. Overall this points at the MEPs' agreement with the idea of a differentiated integration as well as their pragmatism, which is also apparent in their assessment of **new legislative tools and instruments**. Indeed, while most MEPs are positive about trilogues both in terms of their democratic credentials and efficiency, MEPs seem to perceive a trade-off between democracy and efficiency for early agreements and citizen initiatives. In concrete terms, early agreements are seen by a majority of respondents as contributing to the efficiency of the legislative process but at the detriment of democracy; reciprocally, citizens' initiatives are seen as beneficial to democracy in the EU, but only a minority of respondents describes them as efficient.

After having examined current legislative practices, the working paper delves into the other side of the EU decision-making coin, namely non-legislative practices (Section 4). The chosen and justified approach used is that of parliamentary questions, allowing both for **an assessment of the EP's effort to scrutinise EU executive institutions and agencies** and an appraisal of the day-to-day work of the Parliament, while other instruments of scrutiny are often seldom used.

**4.a.** The quantitative analysis of all **parliamentary questions** since the first direct elections to the EP reveals that MEPs are taking the exercise increasingly seriously, with a sharp increase in the number of questions raised, despite the introduction of limiting rules.

**4.b.** Relatedly, the range of institutions to whom MEPs can and have addressed their questions has broadened over time. Yet, we find that MEPs have increasingly concentrated their efforts on the European Commission at the detriment of the Council of the EU.

**4.c.** Focusing on the **parliamentary scrutiny of the ECB**, our empirical data shows that MEPs are more inclined to ask questions to the Frankfurt institutions at times when monetary and financial policies are higher on the public agenda. More clearly, we evidence that MEPs' 'questioning activities' in this policy field obey to strategic and partisan considerations, with most of the co-authored questions being signed by MEPs from the same party group, as well as MEPs from the smallest groups and from Eurosceptic parties tending to ask more questions to the ECB than others do.

Finally, the working paper examines **inter-parliamentary cooperation** (Section 5). Although the subject has been granted much scientific attention in recent years, we offer here an assessment of the representativeness and effectiveness of this cooperation, in part by analysing more specifically the involvement of MPs and MEPs from (majority and) opposition parties in the Inter-parliamentary Conference on Stability, Economic Coordination and Governance in the EU (SECG).



**5.a.** Regarding **representativeness** and starting from the assumption that the representation of the opposition forces at supranational level is an added value to inter-parliamentary cooperation in terms of democratic deliberation and accountability, the issue is explored empirically through an analysis of membership in successive SECG conferences. And indeed, we find that the participation of the oppositions has been ensured by all parliaments considered (including the EP) and in some cases the representation of opposition forces has equalled or even overcome, in terms of size, that of the majority within the delegations. Representatives from Eurosceptic parties, even when in opposition, were also frequently included in the national delegation.

**5.b.** As far as the assessment on the **effectiveness** dimension is concerned, our qualitative analysis produces much more mixed results. The ability of the inter-parliamentary conference under examination to channel national oppositions' viewpoints, to foster an inclusive process of deliberation or to echo the domestic discontent on the governments' positions on EU affairs is ultimately impaired by the very limited participation of opposition members in the actual debates. This is in line with our evidence from the EP which shows that MEPs have frequent contacts with their national counterparts and are positively inclined toward inter-parliamentary cooperation, but that cooperation between the two levels follows overwhelmingly a national logic rather than a partisan one.

**5.c.** In the same vein, it could be noted that the presidency summaries of the inter-parliamentary conference still refer to national delegations and not to the positions of European political families or parties, possibly denoting an attitude turned more towards the position of the single national parliament as a whole.

All in all, the two-fold initial hypothesis which predicted a positive correlation between representativeness and effectiveness is partially denied in the case of SECG conferences: while the former can be considered as assured, the latter is hardly so. Improving the effectiveness of inter-parliamentary conferences appears to depend to a large extent on the politicization of their debates, through the confrontation of majority and opposition views. The risk otherwise is to impair also representativeness, which remains purely nominal if opposition parties are not willing or are not in a condition to participate effectively in the debates.

## 1. Introduction

A conventional wisdom about the European Union (EU) is that its institutional architecture is particularly complex, which is one of the reasons why citizens fail to connect, identify or relate with how decisions are taken at this level, and ultimately with these decisions themselves. For years, students of the EU have relentlessly introduced their papers stating the *sui generis* nature of the polity, or overusing Delors' famous 'UPO' (unidentified political object) quote. This is somewhat paradoxical: in many respects, connecting Europe with its citizens can be seen as part of the initial *rationale* of the development of the EU architecture and of the intricate network of interinstitutional relations that makes the bulk of the decision-making system at that tier of government. In other words, it is to try to 'reconnect' the people in the first place that the linkages between institutions were created and developed, oftentimes with the explicit aim of fostering democratic practices.

In the EU institutional framework, two channels of delegation ensure that the EU is formally representative of and accountable to the citizens of the continent. On the one hand, citizens elect directly the members of the European Parliament (EP), an institution that, among other prerogatives, approves the nomination of and can censure the European Commission. On the other hand, national parliaments which are also directly elected, control national governments sitting in the Council of the EU and, to a large extent, are in charge of implementing EU law. The legitimacy of the EU, however, does not rely solely on the *vertical* (direct or indirect) delegation of power from the citizens all the way to supranational and intergovernmental institutions. Vertical mechanisms of delegation and accountability combine with *horizontal* relations of interdependence whereby institutions can check on each other (Cheneval *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, even though there is no real separation of powers (Conway, 2011) as well as no clear distinction between legislative and executive acts (Hofmann, 2009), in principle 'a myriad of checks-and-balances ensure that there are few losers from EU policies' (Hix, 2007: 142).

Analytically, if the EU constitutes a complex network of institutions and actors (Peterson, 1995) characterised by a 'confusion of powers' (Fabbrini, 2019), its institutions should not be seen as separate or autonomous entities. The overarching argument underlying this working paper is indeed that the behaviour of each institution depends upon the behaviour and the decisions of others. In sum, investigating the relations between institutions essentially consists in scrutinizing the political side of striking the institutional balance of powers within the EU (Jacqué, 2004). While a legal perspective would require to inspect instances of convergence and divergence of the role established to each institution by the Treaty, we instead consider the organisation of the interconnection between institutions and its evolution overtime. To be clear, the checks-and-balances are an important component of any politico-legal system, but the call made in this working paper is that their specific and continuous transformation at the EU-level should be granted specific academic attention.

And indeed, major shifts have occurred, including changes in the number and nature of institutions over time. Both institutional (formal) changes as well as more informal ones may be the source of evolution of these interinstitutional relations, and a great deal of the questioning surrounding this issue is thus which came first – the chicken or the egg (*e.g.* Olsen, 2002). A recent example is the late institutional recognition of the European Council in the Lisbon Treaty, following decades of describing the institutional structure as a 'triangle' between

the Council of Ministers, the EP and the Commission at its apex, while acknowledging a role of the European Council ‘in the shadow’ of the Council. Among these various changes that are explored in Section 2, a sizable one (and arguably the most important one) concerns the role of the EP.

Parliaments in general, and the EP in particular, effectively link governments to citizens, thus providing an incomparable legitimacy mechanism. Indeed, parliaments represent the citizens who have elected them; in return, they are accountable to them. At the European level, the existence of an elected parliament serves to legitimise both the European integration process as a whole (and the corresponding supranational institutions) and the policy process thanks to its legislative role. Attempts to democratise the EU (and thereby to increase citizens’ support) have thus involved a ‘parliamentarization’ of the EU, evidenced by the growing influence of the EP over decision-making in general and within the legislative procedure in particular (Hix & Høyland, 2013). Taking a step back, parliamentary institutions – including national parliaments – have made a spectacular comeback in EU politics after having been tangibly sidelined.

One of the most visible and commented traits of the EU parliamentarization has consisted in conferring more powers to the EP, be it in the legislative or non-legislative fields. On the other side, the parliamentarization process has also led to a greater involvement of national parliaments adding to the complexity of EU decision-making. In both cases, changes in the interinstitutional balance of power within the EU do not exclusively result from formal arrangements (starting with the reform of EU treaties), but also from bottom-up initiatives and routinized practices of individual and collective actors. On the informal side, some major innovations have profoundly affected the spirit as much as the letter of the co-decision procedure. The introduction of early agreements (that is, the adoption of legislative proposals at the 1<sup>st</sup> or early 2<sup>nd</sup> reading) as well as that of trilogues are cases in point as they have affected the balance of power both at the inter- and intra-institutional levels. The *Spitzenkandidaten* process is another illustration of the importance of practices and political power relationships, in contrast to formal arrangements. It was indeed anticipated in the Lisbon Treaty (though not explicitly provided for) but was not upheld after the last EP elections. Here, it is the combined reluctance of the European Council to propose the winning Europarties’ candidate as president of the European Commission and the lack of willingness of the largest political groups in the EP to block the nomination process that resulted in the election of a European Commission president outside the pool of *Spitzenkandidaten*. Consequently, one of the most significant changes that had been anticipated regarding the relationship between the EP and the other EU institutions simply did not (so far) produce the expected effect.<sup>1</sup>

More generally, however, many authors as well as political observers have come to recognize the ‘large discrepancy between the formal rules and the practice of politics in the EU as far as the EP is concerned’ (Thomson, 2011: 288). This discrepancy is not the mere consequence of the imprecision or ambiguity of some institutional arrangements. Rather, it often stems from their contrasted – and even sometimes their conflicting – interpretations by the actors involved. In analysing the interinstitutional dynamic, it is therefore highly important to know how proponents of EU politics view the institutional framework in which they evolve and what specific political goals they pursue. Their behaviours and practices are indeed closely related to

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<sup>1</sup> The *Spitzenkandidaten* process is analysed in-depth in another RECONNECT working paper (Kelbel, Navarro & Sandri, 2020) and will therefore not be dealt with here.

their subjective representations, norms, and values (Navarro, 2009). Regarding the parliaments and more specifically the EP, our approach therefore commands to take into consideration how their members view and value their different functions and what motivates them when fulfilling their role. This is why, in the remainder of this working paper, a lot of emphasis is placed on parliamentary actors' attitudes and behaviours as a leverage for the analysis of interinstitutional relations.

In sum, WOP6.2 aims at considering and reforming practices of democracy in the EU. It looks empirically at three different (but complementary) types of interinstitutional relations involving the EP. First, some decisions require the consent of all (institutional) actors implicated. For the EP, such 'joint decisions', epitomized by the participation in the legislative process, involve a negotiation or bargaining with the other institutions (*i.e.* the Commission and the Council of the EU). Second, the scrutiny and oversight of other institutions' activities is another way through which institutions interact. Typically, in a parliamentary system, parliaments are in charge of examining and challenging the government. In the EU, similarly, the EP holds a power of scrutiny over 'executive' institutions and agencies. Thirdly, even if they have no formal right to take part in the decision-making process or to hold other institutions accountable, institutions may attempt to influence each other, notably by sharing and disseminating information.

The working paper proceeds as follows. It starts by a historical review of the development of interinstitutional relations, with a focus on the EP. The third section of the working paper deals with legislative practices. It employs a new original dataset, namely the 2020 ESPOL-EPRG MEP survey, to explore how MEPs view and participate in the EU decision-making in the legislative domain. Then, we shed light on non-legislative practices by focusing on parliamentary questions, taking an original approach that looks at questions asked to the ECB. In a next and final step, we consider inter-parliamentary cooperation, in part by analysing more specifically the involvement of MPs and MEPs from (majority and) opposition parties in the Inter-parliamentary Conference on Stability, Economic Coordination and Governance in the EU.

## 2. The changing role of the European Parliament in EU interinstitutional relations

Lise Rye (NTNU), Charlie Fox (University of Cambridge) and Julie Smith (University of Cambridge)

Connecting Europe with its citizens can be seen as part of the original *raison d'être* of the European Parliament (EP), which began life in 1952 as the Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). In some ways an afterthought to the institutional foundations, the Assembly was initially an appointed chamber whose sole function was to oversee the High Authority, the precursor of the European Commission, which had been granted executive powers in the limited fields of coal and steel. Since Member States had conferred executive powers on a supranational body, it was felt appropriate that some oversight be provided by a parliamentary body. The Assembly had a tiny role but in the best traditions of Historical Institutionalism (Pierson, 1996; Pollack, 2019), this agent of the Member States became established and developed a life of its own, with members (MEPs) pushing to secure more powers, initially in the budgetary sphere and subsequently in the legislative and scrutiny fields.<sup>2</sup> The initial method of appointment raised questions about the Assembly's claims to a democratic status, since citizens had elected its members to national parliaments, not to represent them at the European level, but from 1979 MEPs enjoyed an elected status and could champion their democratic legitimacy.

Despite its limited formal role and appointed status, the Assembly swiftly began to press for increased powers, citing its democratic credentials as a reason to grant it new powers. As this section will demonstrate, this logic would become a constant theme in the history of European integration: as the Communities (EC) and later European Union (EU) widened and deepened, with Member States conferring ever more powers to the European level, so the EP sought to enhance its role, arguing that as a democratic deficit emerged through the conferral of powers to the European level it was the obvious solution to this deficit – and broadly the key institutions allowed this to happen, albeit at times reluctantly. As this section makes clear, some of the changes to the EP's powers, for example in the budgetary sphere, came via formal treaty change but often they started with MEPs' creativity in interpreting the rules to maximize their role and the role of the EP as an institution, whether in the legislative arena or through the appointment of the European Commission and other institutions. The EP's evolving role inevitably led to changes in the interinstitutional balance within the Union, as the weakest component of the Council-Commission-Parliament triangle saw its powers increase. Yet, as this section also shows, an apparent increase in formal powers does not necessarily strengthen the EP in practice, as in the case of changes to the budgetary powers under the Lisbon Treaty where the formal powers have not translated into the EP's increased strength vis-à-vis other institutions (see also Benedetto, 2017).

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<sup>2</sup> A degree of 'path dependence' is assumed by Historical Institutionalists. It is also considered by Consociationalists such as Costa & Magnette (2003: 8).

Drawing on a range of archival and other primary sources,<sup>3</sup> including treaties from the 1951 Treaty of Paris establishing the ECSC through to the Lisbon Treaty that came into effect in 2009, as well as current EU documents, Council minutes and the abundant relevant academic literature, this section outlines the evolving role of the EP and its relations with other EU institutions. It argues that the EP has acquired an array of powers thanks to its persistent lobbying, creative approach to using both the *de jure* powers that it already enjoys and its *de facto* influence to press for further powers. All this has been possible because of the Parliament's status as the democratic body of the EU, especially after the introduction of direct elections in 1979 and because Member States have repeatedly conferred more powers on the EU, thereby widening the EP's potential sphere of influence. These changes will be discussed in the context of budgetary, legislative and supervisory powers respectively.

## 2.1 Continuity and change. The Treaty of Rome as a basis for the changing role of the EP

The 1957 Treaty of Rome (establishing the European Economic Community) is a good starting point for analysing the changing role of the EP in the EU interinstitutional architecture. The European parliamentary assembly envisaged was partly a continuation of an established practice in 20<sup>th</sup> century international cooperation and a clear expansion of the Common Assembly of the ECSC.<sup>4</sup> Compared to the 1951 Treaty of Paris, the Rome Treaty also included unique provisions that provided a basis for the subsequent empowering of the parliamentary body. Following the January 1958 entry into force of the Rome Treaty, the European Parliament first convened in March 1958, under the name of the European Parliamentary Assembly (EPA) (Palayret, 2009: 13). The Assembly essentially reprised the role of the ECSC Common Assembly. Its rules of procedure were amended only insofar as the new treaties rendered this necessary and the 1953 division into three transnational political groups that had distinguished the Common Assembly from other international assemblies of the time remained unchanged (Mény, 2009: 53).<sup>5</sup> The Common Assembly's main function had been to exercise control over the supranational High Authority (Rittberger, 2005). In contrast to the deliberative assemblies of the WEU and the Council of Europe therefore, it possessed supervisory power (Smith 1995: 26). The Treaty of Rome maintained the Assembly's control function and extended its role in various ways (Hix & Høyland, 2013: 172).

First, the Treaty of Rome introduced a new consultation procedure, which granted the EPA a role in the Community's legislative process. The Treaty of Rome's Article 137 reiterated the wording of Article 20 of the Treaty of Paris, stating that the Assembly should consist of 'representatives of the peoples of the States brought together in the Community'. However, while Article 20 of the Treaty of Paris further declared that the CA should 'exercise the supervisory powers which are conferred upon it by this Treaty', Article 137 of the Treaty of Rome said that the EPA should 'exercise the *advisory and* supervisory powers which are conferred upon it by this Treaty' (emphasis added). In practice, the Assembly was largely

<sup>3</sup> The Covid-19 pandemic curtailed the archival research originally envisaged for this Deliverable. However, the section draws on the unpublished doctoral thesis of one of the authors (Smith, 1995), which was based on extensive archival research covering the relevant period of the origins and early years of the EU.

<sup>4</sup> For a contextualized analysis of the ideas and interests that inspired the international assemblies of the post-war, as well as of the causal link between their creation, see: Smith, 1995.

<sup>5</sup> For a historical study of European transnational party cooperation in the period 1979-2019, see: Salm, 2019.

ignored under the consultation procedure and scholars were thus dismissive of its role, which fell far short of meaningful legislative power.<sup>6</sup> From a historical-institutionalist perspective, the treaty-based role in the legislative process that this procedure conferred upon the EPA, nevertheless constituted a foot in the door that helps explain why the EP eventually gained such power (as discussed in subsection 4 below).

Second, the Treaty of Rome offered a stronger legal basis for the introduction of direct elections to the European Parliament. Whereas the Treaty of Paris provided for the voluntary introduction of direct elections, the Treaty of Rome (Article 138.3) required the EP to ‘draw up proposals for elections by direct universal suffrage in accordance with a uniform procedure in all Member States’. Indeed, Kreppel (2002: 58) has claimed that this change was the most significant difference between the two assemblies. Certainly, the eventual introduction of direct elections in 1979 bolstered the EP’s democratic legitimacy and paved the way for a subsequent expansion of its powers (Piodi, 2009: 5; Ripoll Servent, 2018: 11).

Third, the Treaty of Rome provided for common policies in the areas of agriculture and external trade, extending the scope of supranational policymaking. Previous research traces the creation of the Common Assembly to political elites’ concerns with the declining legislative role of national parliaments and the corresponding need for a mechanism that could supervise the supranational institutions, primarily the High Authority, and keep them accountable (Rittberger, 2005: 5; Smith, 1995: 25).<sup>7</sup> The decision to develop new common policies accentuated the need to hold the supranational institutions accountable and prepared the ground for further delegation of authority to the EP.

## **2.2 The conferral of budgetary powers on the EP**

The conferral of new powers on the EP started with the Budget Treaties of 1970 and 1975. The Treaty amending Certain Budgetary Provisions (henceforth the Luxembourg Treaty) was signed in Luxembourg in April 1970 and distributed budgetary power between the Council and the European Parliament. Under this treaty, the European Parliament had the final word in the adoption of non-compulsory expenditure – a term that entered the Community vocabulary with this treaty, denoting expenditure that was not laid down in the treaties or in already adopted legislation. The Council kept the final say on compulsory expenditure, retaining control of funding to politically sensitive areas such as the common agricultural policy (CAP), which represented the vast majority of Community spending at that time; non-compulsory expenditure amounted to just eight percent of the budget (EP, 2020). Before the Luxembourg Treaty entered into force, the EP’s role in the budgetary process was limited to consultation at the second reading of the draft budget, and the Council was free to overrule the EP’s proposed amendments without any justification. The new treaty obliged the Council to deliberate over the EP’s proposed amendments to the draft budget in consultation with the Commission, and to vote on each proposal using qualified majority. If the Council failed to agree, the draft would

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<sup>6</sup> According to Kardasheva (2009: 387), ‘The existing studies of EU decision-making in the consultation procedure neglect the role of the European Parliament due to its lack of ‘true legislative powers’’. See also Crombez (1996), who disregards the role of the European Parliament in his analysis of the consultation procedure.

<sup>7</sup> Smith cautions against simple explanations, pointing out that there was not one set of thoughts that informed the creation of the EP. The Monnet-style technocratic approach and the Spinelli-style federalist approach both made their mark on the creation of this body.

go back to the EP, which could modify the Council's counter-amendments, if it managed to marshal a majority of its members and 3/5 of their votes.

Smith (1995: 2) has argued that the empowering of the EP had a twofold origin, reflecting both democratic aspirations and the EU's gradually broader policy scope. The story of the Luxembourg Treaty is illustrative of the link between democratic aspirations and policy development on Community level. The 1957 Treaty of Rome did not envisage any budgetary powers for the Assembly. It did, however, instruct the Commission to examine the conditions under which direct contributions from the Member States to the EC budget could be replaced by the Community's own resources, 'in particular by revenue accruing from the common customs tariff' when it had been finally introduced.<sup>8</sup> The Commission started this work in 1958 and the process gained traction in the context of the implementation of the CAP (Knudsen, 2008). A key event in this process was the adoption of Regulation 25, which established that agricultural levies stemming from imports from third countries would go to finance the CAP. The decision formed part of the January 1962 agreement on CAP financing for the period 1962-65. The European Parliament referred to the implementation of the CAP in its 1963 Furler Report on the competencies and powers of the European Parliament (EP, 1963). The argument presented prefigured the constant refrain over the decades, namely that in order to improve the Community's democratic credentials, the transfer of competencies from national to community level ought to be accompanied by a corresponding reinforcement of the powers of the European Parliament. The Furler Report included several specific demands, one of which was that the EP should have budgetary authority once the Community possessed own resources. By the end of 1963, the Council, the Commission and the European Parliament had all de facto accepted that the introduction of own resources should entail a strengthening of the budgetary position of the EP (Knudsen, 2008: 172).

The advocates of empowering the European Parliament suffered a setback in the mid-1960s, when competing views on the Community's institutional structure led to a seven-month French boycott of the Council of Ministers' meetings (Ludlow, 1999). The triggering factor was the Commission's March 1965 proposal on future CAP financing, which linked funding of the CAP to the introduction of Community own resources and institutional reform, including strengthening the EP. Such reinforcement was essential, the Commission argued, 'in order to ensure adequate parliamentary control at the European Parliament level over large sums of money, the spending of which will no longer be subject to the control of the national parliaments' (European Commission, 1965). While Germany, the Netherlands and Italy supported the Commission's proposal, France and Belgium objected to it. In what would be the last Council meeting with French attendance until the Luxembourg Compromise had been reached, Belgian foreign minister Paul-Henri Spaak gave two principled arguments against the Commission's package proposal. First, linking CAP funding with a discussion of the 'Strasbourg Assembly' was not timely, as the introduction of own resources would only happen in 1970, unless the process was accelerated. Second, it was unreasonable 'to grant powers to a 'parliament' which – *de jure* and *de facto* – is not and cannot be a real Parliament and which cannot in the current state of things, exercise responsibilities' (Ziller, 2017: 5). This was, after all, at a time when the Assembly remained appointed not elected, its members owing their seats to national rather than European elections. The failure to reach agreement moved the French Government to recall France's Permanent Representative to the Communities. At a

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<sup>8</sup> The term 'own resources' had also been used in the 1951 Treaty of Paris (Knudsen, 2008).



press conference in October 1965, French President Charles de Gaulle made it clear that France would only return to Brussels when the inclusion of agriculture into the Common Market had been truly adopted ‘et qu’on voudrait en finir avec les prétentions que des mythes abusifs et chimériques opposent au bon sens et à la réalité’ (De Gaulle, 1965). When negotiations on CAP funding resumed following the January 1966 Luxembourg compromise, the Member States detached the question of empowering the EP from CAP financing. The result was a new temporary agreement on CAP funding that would run until the end of 1969. As part of this agreement, the gradual move towards Community own resources continued (Knudsen, 2008: 176).

The interinstitutional debate on the role of the EP continued throughout the 1960s. This was not least due to the EP itself, which acted as a relentless driver in the matter, passing 16 resolutions on the issue of budgetary authority in 1964 alone. The discussion included a range of topics, most notably the introduction of direct elections and a related delegation of legislative power to the Parliament as it now called itself. It nevertheless focused on budgetary authority because of the logical link to such power that the introduction of own resources presented. In its October 1966 Ilerhaus Report, the EP restated its view that national parliaments’ gradual loss of control over CAP expenditure caused a legitimacy deficit, concluding that all efforts for Community reform ought to centre on the budgetary procedure. Inside the Council, the Netherlands, Germany and Luxembourg repeatedly made it clear that supranational parliamentary legitimacy remained their aim (Knudsen, 2008: 176). From spring 1968, all institutions declared themselves in favour of granting (limited) budgetary authority to the EP (Knudsen, 2008: 177). The Commission’s July 1969 proposal for a new financial model thus appeared in a more receptive political environment than had been the case in 1965. The Commission argued that the introduction of own resources should be conditional on a strengthening of the budgetary powers of the EP. It justified this position with the logic of market integration, the subsequent loss of budgetary control and the increasing total of Community expenditure (Knudsen, 2008: 178). The December 1969 Summit of The Hague confirmed the Member States’ willingness to strengthen the budgetary powers of the European Parliament (Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1970). Following a German proposal, this summit also decided to separate the negotiations on funding from the question of delegation to the EP. On 21 April 1970, the Council adopted a new revenue structure for the Community. The Luxembourg Treaty was signed the following day.

The 1975 Treaty amending Certain Financial Provisions added to the EP’s powers in the budgetary process, strengthening its position *vis-à-vis* both the Council and the Commission. Signed in Brussels in July that year, this treaty gave the EP the right to reject the draft budget, the right to modify the level of expenditure and the right to approve or otherwise the implementation of the EU budget (‘discharge’) (OJEC, 1977). With the entry into force of this treaty, the EP had the authority to reject the draft budget provided that it could muster a majority of the MEPs and two-thirds of the votes cast. In the case of failure to approve the budget at the start of the new year, Council appropriation of additional funding for non-compulsory expenditure required the EP’s approval. The EP’s right to discharge the budget implementation depended on a Council recommendation based on qualified majority vote. The discharge procedure included examination of accounts and the annual report made by the Court of Auditors – a new body that saw the day with the 1975 treaty and which implied a

strengthening of the control aspect of the budgetary process.<sup>9</sup> Finally, the 1975 Brussels Treaty established that when the budget procedure laid out in Article 203 had been completed, it was the President of the Assembly who should declare that the budget had been finally adopted. Clearly, this was only a ceremonial duty, but also one that suggested a change in member states views on the role of the EP in the European integration project.

The delegation of budgetary powers to the EP that started with the 1970 Luxembourg Treaty was the result of a long and complex process in which institutional agency on the part of the EP, treaty obligations and policy development were key. In this process, the advocates of an empowered EP benefited from the Member States' decision to introduce the own resources-system, which enabled them to argue the need for supranational budgetary control. The introduction of own resources, in turn, gained traction from the implementation of the CAP, to which the Member States had committed in the 1957 Treaty of Rome. The 1975 Brussels Treaty continued the process that the Luxembourg Treaty had started. Knudsen (2012: 118) argues that the creation of the Court of Auditors was directly related to the change in Community funding from direct member state contributions to the gradually more significant system of own resources. There was broad agreement, she claims, among experts and politicians on the need to assure good governance of Community funds. Laura Ulrich (2016) traces this argument back to Heinrich Aigner, the then president of the EP's budgetary committee, who in 1973 argued that a more supranational EC budget necessitated an independent audit. This is in keeping with the findings in Knudsen's thorough archival studies into the origins of the budget treaties. In contrast to intergovernmentalist accounts of the budget treaties such as Rittberger (2005), Knudsen highlights the role of the EP as a discursive and normative agenda-setter, arguing that the EP ignited an interinstitutional debate that molded the treaties in decisive ways (Knudsen, 2012: 131). As pointed out by Knudsen (2012: 104), these treaties also impacted interinstitutional relations in significant ways, making the threat of EP challenge to Council and Commission activities omnipresent.

The strengthening of budgetary powers of the EP continued with the 2007 Lisbon Treaty, which removed the distinction between compulsory and noncompulsory expenditure and replaced the second reading of the draft budget with a conciliation process (Crombez and Høyland, 2015: 68). The abolition of the distinction between compulsory and noncompulsory expenditure created the situation that is frequently referred to as 'budgetary codecision' (in a parallel to the EP's powers in the legislative sphere since the 1990s), giving the EP and the Council joint powers over all budget expenditure. The move from two to one readings of the draft budget simplified the budgetary procedure. The Lisbon Treaty also constitutionalized existing practices, namely codifying the multiannual financial frameworks (MFF) which had been introduced via an interinstitutional agreement (IIA) in 1988 to give greater financial stability and reduce the budgetary wrangling. Under Lisbon they are now part of a legally binding act, whereby the Council adopts the MFF by unanimity after having obtained the EP's consent, for which an absolute majority is required.

The period between the first enlargement in 1973 and the MFF was 'characterized by intense conflict about the size and distribution of EU monies, and by institutional battles between the Council and the EP over the adoption of the EU budget' (Laffan & Lindner, 2015: 227). Conflict

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<sup>9</sup> Knudsen (2012) holds that the creation of the Court of Auditors responded to a concrete problem in the institutional design of the audit board, namely its lack of competence and resources to exert control.

over Community revenue and expenditure which had caused tensions in the 1960s worsened after the accession of the UK, which swiftly sought to overcome a perceived unfairness arising from the initial budgetary settlement, which favoured founder Members in general (Germany excepted) and agricultural producers in particular. Alongside the high profile wrangles among the Member States within the European Council, there were institutional battles for budgetary power between the Council and the EP, reflecting both the EP's continuous quest for more powers and its active use of the powers that it had already acquired, notably after direct elections were finally introduced: the EP used its right to reject the budget in both 1979 and 1984 – the years of the first two sets of direct elections. The 1988 MFF IIA for the period 1988-92, often referred to as the Delors I package, was a means to reduce conflict and to enhance budgetary discipline. It was also motivated by the wish to ensure the necessary resources for the ongoing implementation of the 1986 Single European Act (SEA). Two decades on, the Lisbon Treaty amendments to the budgetary procedure linked with the realization of the internal market programme.

Lisbon strengthened the formal powers of the European Parliament in the budgetary arena, yet it represents a rare case in which MEPs have not pressed home their advantage, in contrast to their pro-active interpretations of their legislative and supervisory powers. Analysis of the budgetary arrangements in practice finds that this treaty failed to strengthen the role of the EP vis-à-vis other EU institutions (Crombez & Høyland, 2015; Benedetto, 2017). In a study of the effects of the new annual budgetary procedure on the institutions' powers, Crombez & Høyland (2015: 68) find that the EP's veto right 'has little impact on policy, given the configuration of preferences and the majority requirements in the EP and Council'. While they did find that amendment and proposal rights constitute a source of power for the EP, they concluded that the current budgetary procedure is poorly designed and able to lead the negotiations to a breakdown. On a similar note, Benedetto (2017: 649) argues on the basis of a study into the spending outcomes for 2011 and immediate payments for the subsequent years, that 'the power of the purse resides with the Council'. The EP now formally has the right of co-decision with the Council in the field where its first saw its powers extended in the 1980s, yet it does not seem to have managed to use them to great effect, though the negotiations for the 2021-27 MFF could alter this. By contrast, MEPs have consistently maximized their (initially minimal) role in the legislative sphere to which we now turn.

### 2.3 Legislative powers

Under the Lisbon Treaty, the EP's role in the legislative sphere is significant, with the right to co-legislate with the Council. This is in marked contrast to its first thirty years, when its role in the Community's legislative process was purely consultative at most. The Treaty of Rome required the Council to consult the EP on proposed legislation prior to adoption, but the Council remained free to disregard amendments on the part of the EP, leading to the dictum: 'The Commission proposes; the Council disposes', reflecting the EP's effective absence from the legislative arena. The 1986 SEA marked the beginning of a consistent transformation of the EP's role in the EC/EU legislative process.<sup>10</sup> The SEA introduced the cooperation procedure, which

<sup>10</sup> The literature on delegation of legislative power to the EP is extensive. For an intergovernmental approach see Rittberger (2005) and Moravcsik & Nikolaïdis (1999). Smith (1995) links the empowerment of the EP to policy development on European level, while Héritier *et al.* (2019), Howarth and Roos (2017), Shackleton (2017) and Kreppel (2002) all highlight the agency of the EP.

granted the EP the right to a second reading of proposed legislation and restricted the Council's power to overturn the EP's proposed amendments.<sup>11</sup> If the Commission supported amendments that the EP had adopted by an absolute majority, Council rejection required unanimity. Council acceptance of such amendments, however, only required a qualified majority. As in the EP's budgetary powers in the 1970s, the logic for such a change arose from Member States' decision to cede more sovereignty to the Community: legislation for the internal market would be made by qualified majority in the Council, meaning that national parliaments would no longer be able to hold their governments effectively to account in these areas. The solution to this emerging democratic deficit was to confer new legislative powers on Europe's elected parliament. Over the years, a similar logic would prevail as the Community became the Union and underwent a prolonged period characterized by repeated treaty reform.

The Treaties of Maastricht (1991), Amsterdam (1997), Nice (2000) and Lisbon (2007) each extended the legislative powers of the EP. With the Treaty of Maastricht, the number of policy areas falling under the cooperation procedure increased, at the expense of the consultation procedure. This treaty also introduced the co-decision procedure, which gave the EP power to veto legislation (Smith, 1995: 43). Introducing the possibility of a third reading and the establishment of a Conciliation Committee, the co-decision procedure added another layer of complexity to the EU legislative process. The Conciliation Committee would come together after the second reading if the Council and the EP had failed to agree on a common position. Consisting of an equal number of members from the Council and the EP, its task was to agree on a joint text, the adoption of which required a qualified majority in the Council and a simple majority in the Parliament. If the Conciliation Committee failed to agree on a joint text, the legislation in question could still be adopted, on condition that the Council confirmed its position and the EP accepted. If the EP rejected it, the status quo would prevail (Crombez, 1997: 99).

The Treaty of Amsterdam extended the number of articles to which co-decision applied.<sup>12</sup> This treaty also simplified the co-decision procedure in significant ways. First, it provided for the possibility to adopt a text at the first reading.<sup>13</sup> Second, the treaty removed the phase of intent to reject, enabling the EP to go straight to a vote of rejection. Third, the Treaty of Amsterdam removed the third reading, whereby the Council was able to re-propose its position following a failure to agree in the Conciliation Committee. Under the provisions of the Amsterdam Treaty, a proposal would fail in the absence of agreement in conciliation (EP, 2020b). The elimination of the third reading put the EP on an equal footing with the Council at every stage of the co-decision procedure (Maurer, 2003: 230). The Treaty of Nice further extended the scope of co-decision, while the Lisbon Treaty raised the number of policy areas to which co-decision applied to 73 and recognized the procedure's centrality in renaming it the ordinary legislative procedure (OLP) (EP, 2020a). While approximately 90 per cent of EU legislation is currently adopted under the OLP, important policy areas, such as the CFSP, remain outside its scope, and thus outside the EP's influence.

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<sup>11</sup> The cooperation procedure had a limited scope, applying to just ten SEA articles. These articles were, however, central to the success delivery of the EC's number one priority at the time – the realization of the single market and cooperation in flanking areas.

<sup>12</sup> For an overview of the changes that came with this treaty, see: Maurer, 2003: 229.

<sup>13</sup> Such adoption was conditional on the EP not proposing any amendments at first reading or, if it did, that the Council agreed with all the EP's first reading amendments.

As in the case of the EP's acquisition of budgetary powers, the empowerment of the EP in the legislative area in the period 1986-2007 arose from multiple and interlinked causes. In part, the empowerment of the EP was 'a pragmatic response to the problems created by other ends' (Smith, 1995: 42). Agreement on the realization of the single market programme generated a need for more efficient decision-making. Repeated Community/Union enlargements worked in the same direction, increasing the sum of competing interests to which it was expected to attend. Moreover, the Member States accepted that increased use of QMV in the Council intended to facilitate decision-making in these new circumstances should be matched by a greater legislative role for the EP in the form of the cooperation and then the co-decision procedures.<sup>14</sup>

The EP acted as a relentless and ingenious advocate for its own empowerment within this expanding arena. Its transformation from consultative assembly to legislative body would not have occurred, Kreppel (2002: 89) argues, 'without the continuous effort on the part of the EP itself'. The first way in which the EP's agency manifested itself, was in the adoption of parliamentary reports. The 1960 Dehousse Report was a follow-up of the Treaty of Rome's Article 138.3, which tasked the EP with the drawing up of proposals for a uniform procedure for the election of its members by direct universal suffrage. The number of parliamentary reports in the period leading up to the SEA is testament to the EP's activism, though MEPs would not secure all their demands, certainly not quickly.<sup>15</sup>

Its quest for empowerment was enhanced by the introduction of direct elections, which placed the EP in a unique position *vis-à-vis* the other Community institutions, since it could now claim democratic legitimacy at the supranational level. This enabled the Parliament further to build on its existing powers.

Shackleton (2017: 142) argues that with the advisory and supervisory powers that the Treaty of Rome conferred upon the EP, 'a trajectory for further development in the Parliament's powers was laid down, creating a form of 'path dependency''. The 1980 Isoglucose case is illustrative of such path dependent development, as well as of the EP's above-mentioned ingenuity. In this matter, the EP took the Council to the European Court of Justice (ECJ) for failure to respect the consultation procedure, and thereby the Treaty of Rome.<sup>16</sup> In its judgment, the ECJ annulled the piece of legislation in question because the Council had failed to respect Parliament's right to give its opinion, and thereby 'play an actual part in the legislative process of the Community' (Shackleton, 2017: 143). Significantly, in its Isoglucose ruling, the ECJ further described the consultation procedure as a reflection of 'the fundamental principle that the people should take part in the exercise of power through the intermediary of a representative assembly' (CJEC, 1980). Thus, this ruling not only confirmed the EP's role in the legislative sphere. It was also indicative of a growing concern with the democratic legitimacy

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<sup>14</sup> Member States' reasons for empowering the EP are contested. Most conventional explanations relate to 'increas[ing] the legitimacy of the EU' (König, 2008: 168), which is in line with the EP's own rhetoric. See also Costa *et al.* 2003: 671. However, König (2008: 170) argues that other factors may also play a part, stating that, in addition, 'sophisticated member states can benefit from the introduction of the co-decision procedure when comparing the solutions with those under other procedures'.

<sup>15</sup> The 1972 Vedel Report argued, for instance, for the power of assent and against the right to amend, which was what the EP achieved with the SEA.

<sup>16</sup> Before this, the EP had amended its rules of procedure, allowing itself to delay giving their opinion via a process of referrals back to committees. On the EP's active use of the power to delay, see: Servent, 2018: 58.

of the ongoing integration. This concern also came to the fore in the Council and the Commission. The 1981 Genscher-Colombo plan advocated an increased role for the EP in both Community and EPC affairs, while the 1985 Dooge Committee's report ('Spaak II') called for the EP to share joint decision-making powers with the Council; this would take another quarter of a century but the EP was on the verge of a sustained period of empowerment, in part arising from formal treaty reform, in part from its creativity in deploying the powers it already had, creating an array of precedents that would become convention and then be formally codified in subsequent treaty reforms.

Generally speaking, and from the perspective of legal procedures, the delegation of legislative authority to the EP in the period 1986-2007 strengthened the EP's position *vis-à-vis* the Council and the European Commission. On the face of it, this enhanced the democratic dimension of the EU. However, changes in the legislative procedures also enabled the introduction of practices that worked counter to the principles of democratic government, adding to the already existing gap between form and substance.

The cooperation procedure shifted power in the EP's favour as it provided the EP with what Tsebelis (1994) has termed 'conditional agenda-setting power'. It created a room for manoeuvre in which a strategic EP could propose amendments that the Commission and Council members would prefer (Rittberger, 2005: 143) and enabled the EP to influence the substance of key pieces of Community legislation (Rittberger, 2005: 143; Smith, 1995: 44).

The subsequent introduction and revision of co-decision was an even more significant event from the EP's perspective, putting it on an equal footing with the Council in the areas where this procedure applied. In the words of Tsebelis and Garrett (2000: 32), the Treaty of Amsterdam, which amended the co-decision procedure after its introduction via the Maastricht Treaty, made the EP 'a coequal legislator with the Council' and relegated the Commission 'to a more traditional bureaucratic role in policy making'. Under Maastricht co-decision was skewed in favour of the Council, which was allowed to act unilaterally in the absence of agreement after the second reading (Curtin, 1993; Crombez, 1997: 115; Hix, 2002). Amsterdam eliminated this opportunity, leading Simon Hix (2002: abstract) to claim: 'It is widely accepted that the 1999 Treaty of Amsterdam significantly increased the powers of the European Parliament'.

Yet, if treaty reform empowered the EP, co-decision was not without its critics. Stie (2010) argues that, from the perspective of deliberative democracy, there is a tension between the formal provisions and the established practices of the co-decision procedure. The procedure suffers, she finds, from the fact that laws passed under the co-decision procedure are to a large extent 'made by experts and bureaucrats' (Stie, 2010: Abstract). Moreover, following the introduction of trilogues the practice of co-decision moves the policy-process behind closed doors (Stie, 2010; see also: Stie, 2013). This is in keeping with the findings of Rasmussen (2010: 42), who describes the first reading deals as deals where responsibility 'is delegated to a restricted set of institutional representatives, who often operate in secret, without a mandate and under less control from their 'parent bodies' than if deals move on to the second and third reading'. Thus, while the move to co-decision can be seen as a victory for the EP in its quest for a role, the practice does little to engage the citizens, with complexity and lack of transparency issues that need to be addressed if the EP, and by extension the Union, is to be able to burnish its democratic credentials. Yet, it was that purported democratic dimension that saw the European Parliament initially empowered.

## 2.4 Supervisory Powers

If the EP started off with very limited legislative powers, it was granted supervisory powers from the outset. In its initial incarnation, the Common Assembly had its singular purpose in holding the High Authority to account. The Common Authority's 'only significant power was supervisory' (Smith, 1995: 26-28). In this regard, whilst the EP has seen a steady expansion of its legislative and budgetary powers, its supervisory role has been reasonably constant within a simple formula: as the remit of the other, decision-making institutions widens and deepens, those institutions' accountability to the Parliament has been increased, at least as far as the European Commission and some other executive institutions are concerned. The EP does not have the same powers vis-à-vis the European Council or Council of Ministers, since they represent the Member States, and hence are not formally accountable to the EP. Nonetheless, the EP has acquired the right to ask questions of the Council and the President of European Council. As further powers were transferred to European authorities/institutions, the issue of accountability and the 'democratic deficit' became more apparent; 'the Parliament seemed to be the natural recipient of further powers to overcome this problem' (Smith, 1995: 8-9), in line with the logic for empowering the EP in the budgetary and legislative fields.

The formal treaty provisions do not tell the whole story, however. Over the years, the EP has deployed its own bargaining power as the gatekeeper of democratic legitimacy (Moury, 2007: 389) to turn weak concessions and informal precedents into strong powers of scrutiny and supervision. This subsection aims to examine the changing power and role of the EP in the scrutiny and supervision of the other institutions of the EU, looking especially at developments in the accountability of the Commission and the ECB as well as the role of parliamentary questions and the Committees of Inquiry.

### 2.4.1 *The Commission*

From its inception, the EP has been intrinsically linked to the accountability and legitimacy of the Commission (High Authority) through the power of Censure.<sup>17</sup> Established by the Treaty of Rome, the Commission as a collective body was made accountable or 'responsible' to the Parliament in that, by a vote of a two-thirds majority, the latter could force the entire Commission college to step down (Moury, 2007: 389). Yet, while the EP had the right to kick-out the Commission, it originally had no say in its composition, which effectively neutralized their power of censure. This situation would change incrementally, as the EP sought to influence the appointment of the Commission using all its ingenuity in terms of establishing practices and amending its rules of procedure, before being rewarded with an increased role enshrined in the treaties.

What in 2020 appears a strong power of investiture over the Commission had very humble beginnings. As Westlake (2002) writes, this power actually originated not from the treaties but from precedent, as in 1981 the incoming President's speech was termed a 'confirmation hearing' by the EP. This informal precedent was formalised in the 1983 'Stuttgart Solemn Declaration' through which the EP was 'granted a consultative role' in the incoming commission and its president's appointment (Westlake, 2002: 438) and further strengthened by the

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<sup>17</sup> Parliamentary questions are another mechanism through which the EP exercises its scrutiny and supervisory function: they are analysed in Section 4 of this working paper.

Maastricht Treaty (Article 214:2), allowing the EP to approve the Member States' nominee for Commission President.

The EP's right to be consulted over the appointment of the Commission President was formalised by the Maastricht Treaty. However, it was Jacques Santer's declaration of his intention to withdraw 'if the vote in parliament went against him' that dramatically increased Parliament's power over the process (Westlake, 2002: 439). Regarding the College, the EP created an internal procedure to hold hearings of the incoming commissioners. Whilst there were no formal obligations for commissioners-designate to appear, the invitation held significant political weight coming from the gatekeeper of democratic legitimacy (Westlake, 2002: 440). In recent years, MEPs have made clear their disapproval of certain nominees and seen those nominees replaced by the relevant Member State.

In these powers of accountability over the appointment of the Commission, there has been an evolutionary development from informal precedent into formal power, the stretching of weak concessions into powerful processes, 'transforming the conventions it so imaginatively creates into formal treaty provisions' (Westlake, 2002: 444).

The EP's attempts to influence appointments have not always be so successful. Its first involvement with an 'appointment mechanisms' came in 1975 after the Treaty of Luxembourg created the Court of Auditors. The European Council appointed the body unanimously after consulting the Parliament. In a similar manner to that of the investiture of the Commission, the Parliament utilised this small formal concession to develop a strong informal tradition to 'vet' the nominees put forward (Westlake, 2002: 432-433). This precedent was applied and used to vet the nominees successfully in 1989, but in 1993 the Council ignored the Parliament's 'reservations' about two nominees and appointed them anyway (Westlake, 2002: 432-33). This episode showed that the EP's scope for advancing powers through the development of informal procedures can easily be thwarted by an unwillingness on the part of other institutions to cooperate. This raises some fundamental questions of the effectiveness of a process that relies on the willing cooperation of those to be scrutinized. Similar issues can also be observed vis-à-vis the EP's supervisory powers regarding two newer institutions: the European Central Bank (ECB) and the Eurogroup.

#### **2.4.2 ECB and Eurogroup**

A unified central banking authority presents a political conundrum: 'while central bank independence is a necessary condition for coherence in monetary policy', Collignon and Diessner (2016: 1296-1297) argue, 'policy effectiveness also rests on the democratic legitimacy of the central bank as an institution that serves collective welfare'. Since its conception, the ECB has straddled this divide. As Collignon and Diessner (2016: 1299-1301) put it, the ECB offers 'transparency' through public press conferences/releases, and 'accountability' *via ex-post* explanations of its decisions. The ECB thus often operates beyond the direct supervision of the European Parliament and instead has more legal and obligation-based ties to the Council and Commission.

This interinstitutional relationship in regard to the ECB can be seen in the appointment process of the ECB's executive board, where the EP is, again, simply consulted. Whilst the Parliament's expansive influence over the similar process within the Commission has not been achieved in



relation to the ECB, it has nonetheless been able to utilise this process to obtain significant concessions over time: the most substantial of these being the quarterly Monetary Dialogues with the institution and an annual debate over its actions (Westlake, 2002: 435-6). Initiated by these appointment-based discussions and a series of parliamentary resolutions in 1996-1998, and confirmed in the Treaty of Amsterdam, ‘the two institutions established a ‘monetary dialogue’’ in which the ECB president meets the EP’s ECON Committee four times a year (Maricut-Akbik, 2020: 1-2; EP, 2020c; EP, 2020d; Collignon & Diessner, 2016: 1301-1302). Through these meetings, where direct questioning of the ECB’s affairs can be undertaken, as well as an annual debate over the ECB’s activities, the Parliament has developed a successful ongoing supervisory dialogue with the institution.

As the ECB’s remit has expanded, this level of accountability and supervisory power has also increased. In the wake of the increase in the ECB’s responsibilities in response to the Euro-zone crisis in the form of the Single Supervisory Mechanism (SSM), the ECB’s accountability to the Parliament has been developed through an Interinstitutional Agreement (Maricut-Akbik, 2020: 1-3). Despite conflict with the Council and the Eurogroup, Parliament succeeded in ‘strengthening its scrutiny powers’ in regard to the ECB-linked SSM supervisory board, as well as obtaining ‘the right to formally approve (and dismiss) (its) chair and vice-chair’ (Rittberger, 2014: 1180-81). However, more than develop the Parliament’s powers of supervision and scrutiny over the ECB, the SSM regulations have more accurately changed the powers of supervision. Under these provisions, accountability is in practice ‘limited’, MEP questions to the ECB remain generally broad as specific contestation (reference to decision-making/action on the member-state level) can be silenced by the ECB under the SSM confidentiality rule in the IIA. Yet again, more complete accountability rests on the continued willing cooperation of the ECB (Maricut-Akbik, 2020: 13-14; Collignon & Diessner, 2016: 1310).

Beyond its role in appointments, the EP’s scrutiny powers include parliamentary questions. After the introduction of the Lisbon Treaty, the EP’s role in the supervision and scrutiny of monetary policy in the Union remained ‘marginal’, decision-making, recommendations, and expertise lay with the Council, Commission, and ECB; this balance fundamentally shifted after the expansion of these institutions’ monetary remit in the wake of the euro-zone crisis (De la Parra, 2016: 2-4). An increase in accountability to the EP, De la Parra (2016: 2-3) argues, was directly in response to this increase in executive power for these institutions.

In 2011, as part of the ‘Six-Pack legislation’ as well as the ‘two-pack’ legislation in the wake of the euro-crisis, Parliament gained the right to ‘invite council and Commission members to report to the EP’. This legislation also expanded this right to an ‘Economic Dialogue’ (ED) pertaining to specific euro-related matters to the Presidents of the Council, Commission, Eurogroup, and the ECB (Rittberger, 2014: 1175; 1180-1181). Since these provisions were not treaty-based, they were dependent on the existing accountability measures already in place. The provisions’ legal effect thus differed from institution to institution. Whilst the ED between the Parliament and the Commission built on the existing principle and treaty-based accountability of the Commission to the Parliament, cooperation in the ED from the European Council or Council of the EU enjoy6: 8).<sup>18</sup> In this manner, beyond having to carefully and strategically utilize precedent to obtain new supervisory and scrutiny-based remits, the expansion of the powers of other institutions has demanded a counter-balance to the

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<sup>18</sup> For such Economic Dialogues during the 9<sup>th</sup> legislative term and their legal basis, see EP, 2020.

democratic deficit, parliament has been able to simply step into this role in this arena as in the budgetary and legislative arenas.

The luxury of willing cooperation has not always extended to the other area where the EP seeks to exercise scrutiny: Committees of Inquiry. Whilst informal committees of inquiry were set up as early as 1979, these committees took their legal basis from the EP's own rules of procedure and hence had no '*locus standi*' to enable them to obtain cooperation' from other institutions; the success of such committees thus rested on the 'voluntary co-operation' of other institutions (Shackleton, 2002: 116). Maastricht gave the Parliament the formal right to set up Committees of Inquiry to 'investigate alleged contraventions or maladministration in the implementation of (EU) law' (Shackleton, 2002: 115), but stated that the specific provisions dictating this process would have to be negotiated by an interinstitutional agreement in accord with the Council and the Commission (Shackleton, 2002: 116-117). The interinstitutional agreements eventually negotiated did not grant a formal 'right of summons' to EP inquiries (Shackleton, 2002: 119-121), thus, again, the proper exercise of the EP's supervisory powers rested on the voluntary cooperation of the institutions involved; cooperation held a political/legitimacy-based weight rather than a legal one. As a result, the EP lacks the sort of scrutiny powers that national parliaments usually enjoy, calling into question how successful supervisory powers can be if they can be so easily impeded. Whilst this can be said of the committees of inquiry's processes, this cannot be said of their potential results. As the development of the precedent of 'conditional censure' of the Commission, referring to the threat of censure in the wake of the BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) crisis committee of inquiry unless specific conditions were met in six months (Westlake, 2002: 442-443), shows, whilst there are significant gaps in the individual incrementally-developed supervisory powers of parliament, they can be utilised together to great effect.

## 2.5 Concluding remarks

To sum up, the EP owes its evolving role in European integration to a combination of: institutional creativity; a perceived need to tackle the democratic deficit as the Union has widened and deepened; frequently informal practices being institutionalized through treaty reforms. While it has seen its formal powers increased at successive treaties, its informal influence and relative position in the key interinstitutional triangle – Commission-Council-EP – has not always advanced so significantly (*c.f.* the sense it is slipping backwards in budgetary politics post-Lisbon, which was supposed to have provided budgetary co-decision). Thus, it seems that the EP's role depends on its understanding of its powers and ability/willingness to use those powers creatively and on the willingness of other institutions to cooperate. This situation raises questions about the EP's ability effectively to scrutinize other institutions, such as the Eurogroup.

### 3. The legislative process: a view from the European Parliament

Camille Kelbel (Lille Catholic University), Julien Navarro (Lille Catholic University), and Marie Neihouser (Lille Catholic University)

In many respects, legislative work is the backbone of any parliament. In parliamentary democracy, it is further arguably the heart of the polity. Despite parliaments exerting different types of tasks and intervening in various kinds of interinstitutional relations (see *supra*: Section 1), in the literature, it is most often and first their work on legislation that is granted scientific as well as public attention. The EP is certainly no exception to that claim. Although the EP is conferred several distinct roles in the treaties, the appraisal of its growing powers is most often gauged against its gain in terms of legislative powers and the successive developments of codecision. In addition, at the EU level, changes in the balance of power between the three main institutions are generally used as an indicator of the type of system the EU is tilting towards and it is precisely the growing powers of the EP in the legislative domain which are generally interpreted as a move toward a federal-like union (see for instance: Lodge, 1994).

New legislative practices are often introduced with the aim of closing the gap, or, as it has become famous in EU vocabulary, resolving the EU democratic deficit. This deficit exists in legislative practices (addressed here) and in the horizontal interinstitutional relations as much as in a more vertical way between the union, the member states (see *infra*: Section 5 of this working paper) and the citizens. In that regard, granting more power to the Parliament in the making of legislation is generally seen as a step in the direction of more legitimacy in decision-making, and ultimately, more democracy. Not all legislative practices, however, can immediately appear as democratic. One reason is that the EP's search for democratic outcomes is after all just one aim among several that MEPs pursue in their day-to-day work, while others include their own policy preferences (see: Ripoll Servent, 2013) or that of their party or party group, their image, and even the preservation or pursuit of their relations with other institutions. In other words, while input and throughput legitimacy can be guaranteed or at least safeguarded by the institutional setting, output legitimacy (*i.e.* whether the decisions reached are consistent with citizens' preferences and address their needs – Scharpf, 2003) relies much more on individual actions by political actors. One central assumption of this piece is thus that to a great extent, the legitimacy of legislative procedures is key in allowing political systems to be democratic (Lord, 2013).

The evolution of the legislative procedure is closely linked to the development of interinstitutional relations (see: Section 2 – *supra*). If for long, the EP was the weakest institution and the three institutions lived 'apart' from each other, after Maastricht, the Council has been forced into cooperation. Costa (2009) explains how the EP activism and the rejection of the first directive by the EP following the Council's refusal to dialogue directly with the EP, either informally or within the 'conciliation committee', forced the Council into engaging in interinstitutional dialogue.

For sure, the EP's work, above all on legislations, is under considerable scrutiny, and has been so since its inception. The central argument to delve once more into its role and practices in the legislative domain is two-fold. First, the EP is an evolving or, as Roederer-Rynning and Greenwood (2017) put it, a 'developing' legislature. Indeed, the 'parliamentarization' of the EU

thesis bestows the changing nature of the Parliament in general and of its role in law-making in particular. Thus, there is a need to study in parallel the engine behind these alleged changes: the attitudes and behaviours of those who impulse them, legislature after legislature. Previous studies of MEPs legislative work tell us little about current practices by other squads of MEPs in an institutional context which is inherently different as pre-existing ones. Quite clearly, interest in the legislative procedure has been considerably advanced in the framework of the introduction and development of the codecision procedure, and actors within the newer setting therefore deserve specific consideration.

Second, the current research agenda on the EU decision-making points at the importance of informality in these processes (Christiansen & Piattoni, 2003; Christiansen & Neuhold, 2013; Webb & Kreppel, 2020), while research in the legislative arena originally often rested on crude counts and official records. Recently, the negotiation processes and institutional developments such as the trilogues and early agreements pushed researchers to explore the ‘behind the scene’ negotiations from within the EP (see: *infra*).

This section of the working paper aims at presenting new research evidence of MEPs’ legislative behaviours. It rests on a new and unique dataset recording the opinions, attitudes and declared actions of MEPs from the current 2019-2024 EP legislature. In doing so, it follows in the footsteps of previous similar endeavours conducted by the European Parliament Research Group (EPRG – LSE/ University of Leicester) in 2000, 2006, 2010 and 2015 (Hix *et al.*, 2016).<sup>19</sup> The section starts by presenting the main developments in the literature that has focused on the EP legislative behaviour, underlining existing blind spots, before the analysis is conducted.

### 3.1 State of the art: legislative practices in a changing interinstitutional environment

What do we know about the way MEPs conceive of their role as legislators? This section rests on the assumption that current developments may influence representatives’ perceptions and ultimately their work, which in turn bear consequences for the EP and EU democracy beyond it. This research, however, does not befall in a vacuum. Studies on the EP, which focus on its legislative aspects, are now legion.

Early research in the 1980s and early 1990s did all but noted the lack of political competition in the EP (see: Mair, 2007), and the consensuality of decision-making in the assembly (Kreppel & Tsebelis, 1999) at a time when the Parliament enjoyed only limited influence on the drafting and approval of legislation. In the wake of the Maastricht Treaty, where the legislative powers of the Parliament were genuinely enacted by the establishment of the codecision procedure, most authors rallied the interpretation of a greater influence of the EP in the interinstitutional game. Some exceptions spotted by Costa (2009) concern Kreppel (2000) and Tsebelis (Tsebelis, 1999; Tsebelis & Garrett, 2001). For Ripoll Servent (2013) for instance, the EP entering equal-footing negotiations for which it wants to be seen as ‘responsible’ in codecision produces less of a democratic and transparent output.

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<sup>19</sup> Please note that although our MEP survey was expressly designed to allow for cross-time series, we do not develop a longitudinal perspective in this deliverable yet, focusing on the cross-sectional data we collected in 2020.

Due to the expansion of the codecision in successive treaties starting with the Treaty of Amsterdam, and being pursued in Nice and Lisbon, as well as the simplification introduced by the EP change of its internal rules (Delwit, De Waele & Maignette 1999; see also: Brack & Costa, 2018), the focus somewhat switched toward actual decision-making mechanisms and their expected politicisation. As the research agenda moved forward, it started to take issue with parliamentary law-making, underlining its dominant political dimensions as well as individual and collective preferences of MEPs. Studies on legislative behaviours in the EP flourished, focusing on the various – and sometimes contradictory – incentives undergone by MEPs when legislating. Somewhat unsurprisingly, a major point under attention that has served as an indicator of these behaviours are votes in the plenary. Oftentimes, in rational-choice approaches, the bottom-line is the trade-off MEPs face between their national party (of which they are incentivised to toe the line as it will re- or deselect them as candidates for elections in the future) and their European parliamentary group (which oversees internal resources useful to MEPs such as group positions and staff, committee memberships and chairmanships, or reports) (Hix, 2002a; 2004; Faas, 2003; Hix *et al.* 2007; Klüver & Spoon, 2015; Finke, 2016; Koop *et al.*, 2018). Obvious limitations, however, are entailed: it is not necessarily the party executive and even less so the PPGs in the EP that select candidates (Kelbel, 2018), the timing also matters (Lindstädt *et al.*, 2011) as well as other factors at the national level (*e.g.* concerns related to the electorate – Meserve *et al.*, 2017). And above all, there is not necessarily a conflict between the various principals, as MEPs themselves do not necessarily form clear policy preferences (Ringe, 2010) and national parties do not necessarily exert close scrutiny nor issue clear instructions (Raunio, 2000; Blomgren, 2003).

Another, related, strand of the literature that developed with the expansion of codecision concerns specific attitudes and behaviours on new policy areas or even isolated texts that came under magnifying glass of researchers (*inter alia*: Shackleton, 2000; Earnshaw & Judge, 2003; Burns, 2005).

Yet, other aspects of the legislative work have also gained increased attention in recent years, dealing with MEPs' roles, attitudes and behaviours beyond that of casting their vote in the plenary (Navarro, 2009; 2012). Most notably, committee work has been the object of a growing amount of literature over the past two decades (Roger & Winzen, 2015) – a development that can hardly be detached from the growing importance of committees in the wake of the codecision procedure (Costa, 2009: 153). In the same vein, other specific aspects of the procedure allowing to detect legislative behaviours came to the forefront such as the amendments (Kreppel, 1999; Tsebelis *et al.*, 2001) or the role and actions of rapporteurs have been under considerable scrutiny. Yordonova (2011) shows for instance that rapporteurships under codecision are a means for group leaders to ensure cohesion and promote their own coalition, arguably contributing to politicisation.

But there is more to the story. The interinstitutional context is not neutral for the EP's organisation in that gaining legislative powers has affected how the legislative work is handled within the assembly.

Another far-reaching evolution of the EP legislative process that has gained considerable attention from the literature is the rise of informality. This is in line with the 'EU governance' turn in EU studies which has drawn attention to the thriving informal practices therein – *e.g.* fast-track agreements and trilogues, Eurogroup meetings, etc. (see: Christiansen & Neuhold,

2013). Public confrontation has, in many ways, vanished (Bowler & Farrell, 1995), at least until the surge of Eurosceptic parties (and perhaps favouring it). In the framework of the increased power of the EP in legislation, at the beginning of the 2000s, informal negotiations between groups and between institutions started off as a facilitator in negotiations on specific texts, before escalating into common practice (Shackleton & Raunio 2003; Farrell & Héritier 2004; De Ruiter & Neuhold 2012; Roederer-Rynning & Greenwood 2015; Brandsma 2015; 2019). In the legislative process, this essentially means – in terms of process – the trilogues and – in terms of output – early agreements; to the extent that Roederer-Rynning and Greenwood (2015: 1148) argue that ‘codecision has de facto become a single-reading legislative procedure’. Hence, the general picture that emerges of legislative-making today is that of interinstitutional relations being increasingly based on informal meetings between the representatives of the three institutions. On the side of the EP, such a trend forces the plenary assembly to rely on a few of its members (especially chairpersons of commissions and rapporteurs) (Costa, 2009: 153).

Consequently, much ink has been spilled, both by political observers and researchers on the vices and virtues of such legislative practices. Typical research questions have looked at the rationale for resorting to early agreements, including the type and number of actors involved, the EP’s workload, the technicality and saliency of the issue at stake, its flagging by the Council presidency, or the type of policy involved (Farrell & Héritier 2003; 2004; Shackleton & Raunio 2003; Reh *et al.*, 2013).

Another strand of that same literature has envisaged the consequences of adopting legislation ‘fast-track’. The normative argument underpinning this type of investigation is undoubtedly that while codecision has been established and spread with the explicit aim to make the EU more democratic by increasingly involving the parliamentary branch, input legitimacy might suffer should decisions be taken and deals agreed upon outside this transparent and balanced EP-Council set up, or by smaller groups within them. Unsurprisingly, one repercussion that has been granted specific interest concerns bargaining success (Farrell & Héritier, 2004; Rasmussen & Reh, 2013), one of the main justifications of the use of informality being its alleged efficiency. In mirror, most authors have evidenced and deplored the lack of transparency surrounding trilogues (*inter alia*: Lord, 2013; Reh, 2014; Stie 2015; Curtin & Leino, 2017).

These different perspectives make up the bulk of this section of the working paper which seeks to address current developments in EU legislative practices. Accordingly, this study takes a fresh look at where MEPs stand in terms of their legislative duties by informing current developments in the interinstitutional arena. To do so, it rests on data collected as part of an MEP survey conducted between January and August 2020.

### 3.2 The MEP survey: data and methods

To establish findings and map the view of MEPs, the RECONNECT team at the Lille Catholic University conducted an MEP survey which data is used in part in this working paper.<sup>20</sup> This section of the working paper thus presents, mostly in a descriptive way, part of the data hence collected that relates to legislative activities as part of MEPs’ day-to-day work. With this, we

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<sup>20</sup> The team of researchers responsible for the MEP survey at the Lille Catholic University (ESPOL) was composed of Camille Kelbel, Julien Navarro, Giulia Sandri and Felix von Nostitz.

thus only tap into a small number of questions of the survey, focusing on those related to the legislative arena – reproduced in Appendix 3.

This snapshot of the data, however, was made possible only thanks to the overall ambition of the data collection. To enable comparison in subsequent stages of the analysis, the questionnaire was elaborated on the basis of the EPRG questionnaire<sup>21</sup> (Whitaker *et al.*, 2017) as well as the RECONNECT 2019 citizens' survey. In particular, questions from the EPRG survey that have been most often used in previous research were reproduced (and sometimes slightly adapted), while questions from the RECONNECT 2019 citizens' survey were selected based in view of our next deliverable, where we will need to measure congruence between people and elites. The final questionnaire is made of 58 questions, split into five sections: 1) the MEP's background and career; 2) elections, electoral system and campaign; 3) his/her work as an MEP; 4) interinstitutional relations; and 5) political and EU attitudes. In view of increasing the response rate and the quality of the collected data, the questionnaire was translated in several different EU languages, some of which made directly by team members. In total, the survey is thus available in eleven languages: English, French, Italian, German, Spanish, Polish, Romanian, Dutch, Greek, Hungarian and Czech. As of January 2020, the data collection started using an online platform called Qualtrics, we started to distribute the questionnaire via email. In some cases, party delegations or party groups were contacted as well. While most data was collected directly online through the links we sent, some MEPs were interviewed on the phone or *via* a videocall. As of July 31st, we had received answers from 122 MEPs (out of 751). This sample covers all countries but one, and all party groups. We subsequently evaluated the representativeness of the sample by calculating the Duncan index of dissimilarity as well as the correlations (see: Table 3.1). Both indicators produced satisfactory results, very close to previous rounds (Whitaker *et al.*, 2017). Quite clearly, such large-scale project is an extremely resource-consuming endeavour for researchers and the scope of the survey therefore purposely largely outreached that of this part of the research. In fact, another section, that on inter-parliamentary relations (Section 5), also makes use of the survey.

Table 3.1: Survey sample in the 2020 ESPOL-EPRG MEP survey

Member states	Number		%	
	MEPs	Survey	MEPs	Survey
Austria	19	5	2.70	4.10
Belgium	21	9	2.98	7.38
Bulgaria	17	4	2.41	3.28
Croatia	12	2	1.70	1.64
Cyprus	6	1	0.85	0.82
Czech Rep.	21	4	2.98	3.28
Denmark	14	4	1.99	3.28
Estonia	7	2	0.99	1.64
Finland	14	3	1.99	2.46
France	79	15	11.22	12.30
Germany	96	16	13.64	13.11
Greece	21	1	2.98	0.82
Hungary	21	6	2.98	4.92
Ireland	13	3	1.85	2.46
Italy	76	5	10.80	4.10
Latvia	8	1	1.14	0.82

<sup>21</sup> EPRG questionnaires: 2000, 2006, 2010, 2015.

Lithuania	11	3	1.56	2.46
Luxembourg	6	1	0.85	0.82
Malta	6	1	0.85	0.82
The Netherlands	29	5	4.11	4.10
Poland	52	4	7.39	3.28
Portugal	21	4	2.98	3.28
Romania	33	5	4.69	4.10
Slovakia	14	0	1.99	0.00
Slovenia	8	3	1.14	2.46
Spain	59	13	8.38	10.66
Sweden	21	2	2.98	1.64
<i>Correlation</i>				0.82
<i>Duncan Index of Similarity</i>				0.18
<b>Political Groups</b>				
EPP	187	35	26.52	28.69
S&D	148	27	20.99	22.13
Renew	97	19	13.76	15.57
Greens/EFA	68	11	9.65	9.02
I&D	76	9	10.78	7.38
ECR	62	7	8.79	5.74
GUE/NGL	40	10	5.67	8.20
NI	27	4	3.83	3.28
<i>Correlation</i>				0.97
<i>Duncan Index of Similarity</i>				0.08
<b>Totals</b>	705	122		

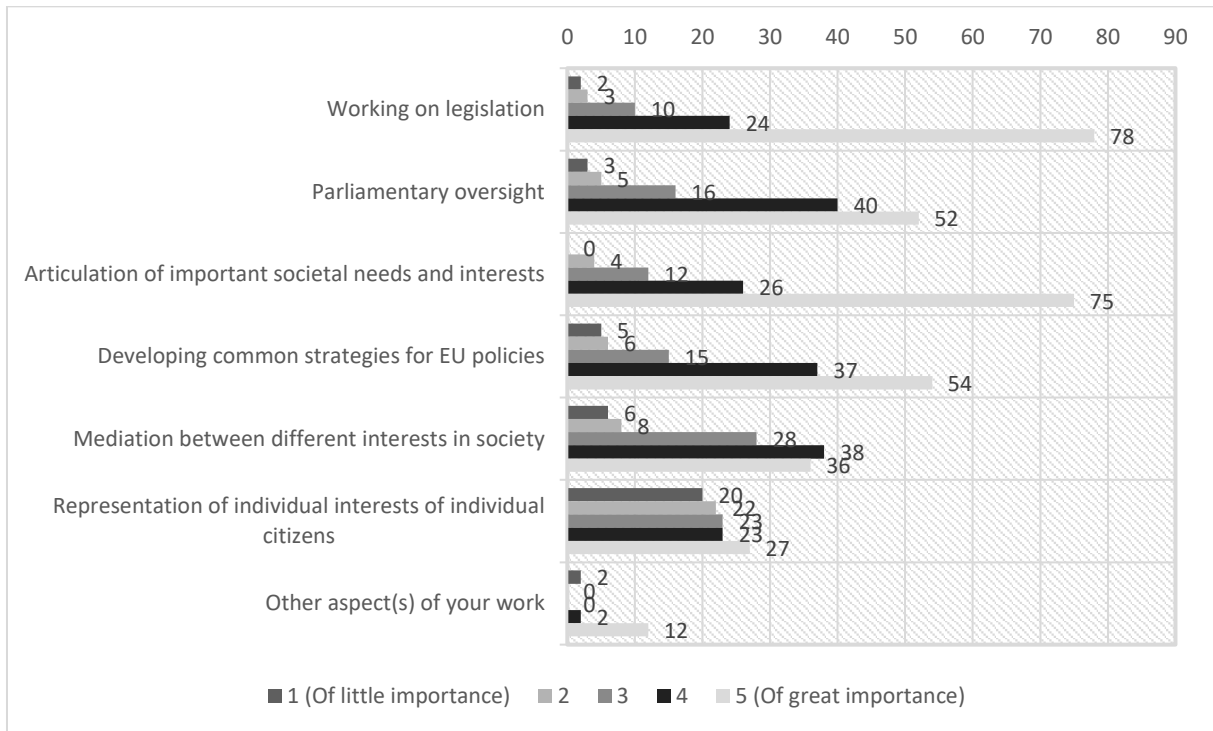
### 3.3 Results: how MEPs view and work on legislations

In line with the above-detailed literature, current practices are assessed through the reported importance of legislation among the various activities undertaken by the representatives on a daily basis, their act of voting (in particular the presence or absence of recommendations they receive when voting), their views on a series of institutional practices and instruments, as well as the role they foresee for the European Parliament in the interinstitutional arena.

From a political sociology perspective, the analysis of actors' attitudes and individual practices is just as important as that of institutions and formal rules for the understanding of EU decision-making (Saurugger, 2008; Guiraudon & Favell, 2011). As regards the legislative process, and in particular the codecision procedure, its outcome largely depends on the ways in which MEPs behave – that is, primarily on their view, position and involvement into the legislative work. A first set of questions allows us to situate legislative activities within the broader realm of all activities carried out by MEPs. As depicted in Figure 3.1, when questioned on the importance of different tasks, work on legislation is most often cited as being of great importance (by 78 out of 117 MEPs), closely followed by the articulation of important societal needs and interests – a task that arguably can also be in part pursued through this means. Only a marginal number of representatives in our sample (two of them) consider working on legislation as being of little importance. While most of the various aspects chosen for this question were considered as part and parcel of the work of MEPs when drafting the questionnaire and hence receive high appraisal, working on legislation clearly stands out.



Figure 3.1: Importance of legislative work and other activities for MEPs.



Source: ESPOL-EPRG MEP survey (2020)

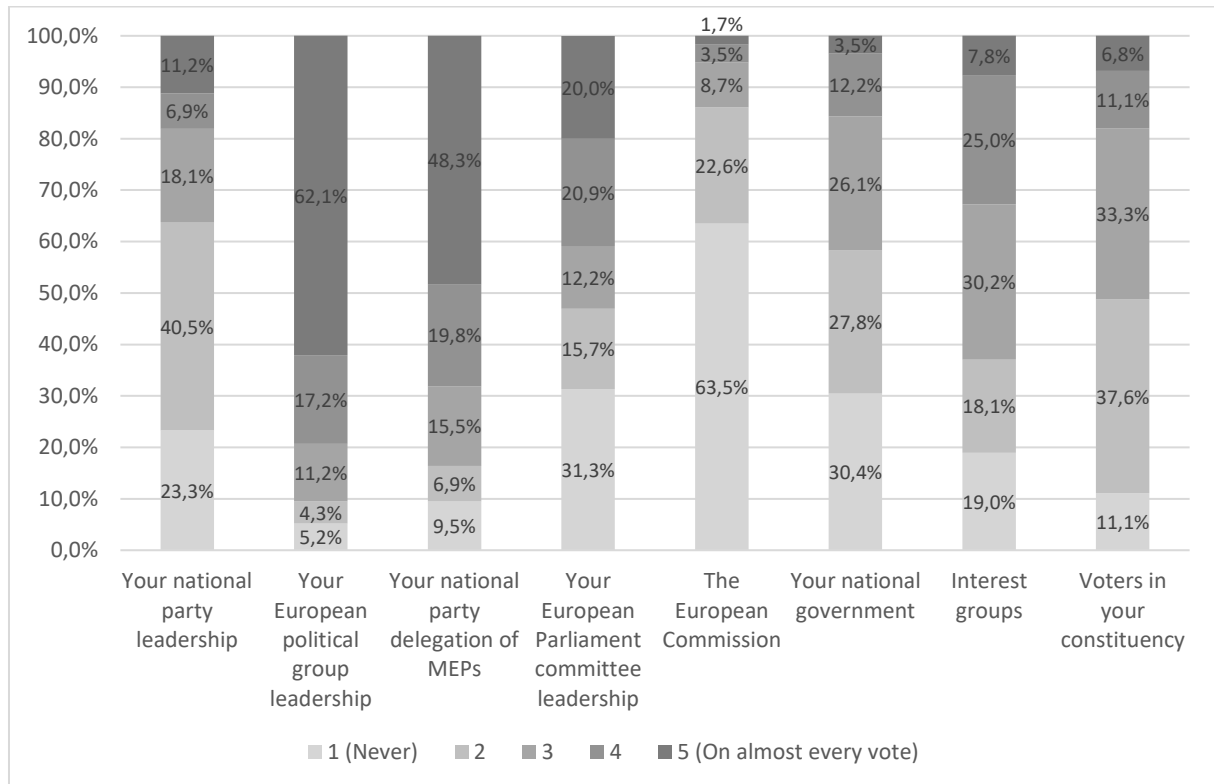
One of the main ways to gauge legislative activities is through voting decisions. In the survey, MEPs were asked to indicate the frequency of voting recommendations they receive from different groups or institutions – whether they follow them or not. Results are displayed in Figure 3.2. Voting recommendations provide a good insight as to the contacts and attempted influence that other institutions seek in the EP and also signal the importance of the parliament in decision-making (if not, no one would bother making recommendations). While the literature has most often looked at the voting instructions issued by national parties or EP party groups (e.g. Hix, 2004), we offer a broader view that also allows comparing the behaviours of other institutions (as perceived by the MEPs).

As it turns out, and coherent with previous studies, it is indeed the political group leadership and the national party delegation that issue most often recommendations (62.1 % and 48.3 % of the MEPs indicate to receive recommendations of these bodies, respectively, on every single vote). The difference might be in part explained by the fact that not all MEPs are part of a national delegation per se (as many are elected as only representatives of their party), while we have very few non-attached MEPs (with no EP party group affiliation) in our sample. And indeed, less than 10 % of MEPs indicate the absence or quasi-absence of recommendation from their parliamentary grouping (5.2 % and 4.3 %). Strikingly, the national party seems to instill its recommendations through the national party delegation much more than directly from the party leadership (with almost one quarter of MEPs never receiving any recommendation from their party’s headquarter), a nuance that would deserve further exploration.

This data further provides a preliminary answer to the question as to how much other institutions encroach (or try to encroach) upon the prerogative of MEPs. The European Commission is found to be largely remote of voting decisions in the EP with almost two thirds of the representatives acknowledging to never receive recommendations from the institution

and close to an additional quarter seldom receiving any. The situation is less clear for national governments: respondents are equally split between those never receiving recommendations and those seldom or sometimes receiving some. This situation might in part be explained by the fact that MEPs from ruling parties at the national level are more scrutinised (Raunio, 2000), and that there is then a confusion between the party in public office (the government) and in central office ('your national party leadership').

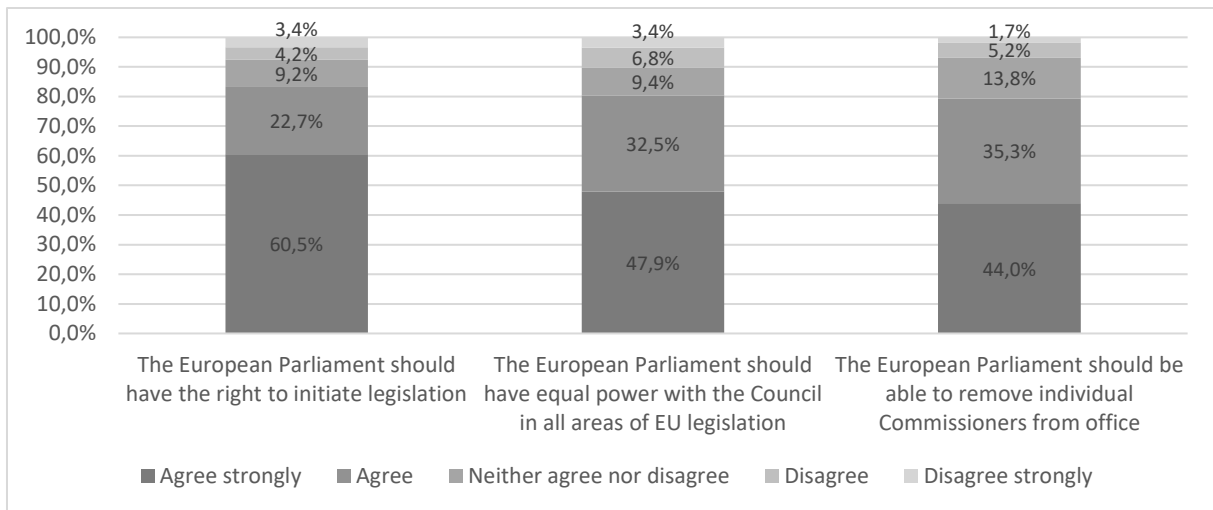
Figure 3.2: Frequency of voting recommendations to MEPs



Source: ESPOL-EPRG MEP survey (2020)

A more general outlook of how MEPs view their role as legislators within the interinstitutional setting is given through the power they set for themselves in the EU decision-making (see: Figure 3.3). Somewhat unsurprisingly, MEPs are overall favourable to granting more power to the EP, be it at the expense of the other two main institutions. The main power they claim is that of initiative, with over 60 per cent of the respondents strongly agreeing, possibly influenced by the institutional setting prevailing in most member states where parliaments can – at least *de jure* – draft legislation. A vast majority of MEPs (around 80 per cent) further agrees at least to a certain extent that the Ordinary Legislative Procedure should be further extended so as nomination prerogatives (although the latter falls somewhat out of the scope of this section). Considering solely the legislative domain, MEPs seem thus somewhat more inclined to encroach upon the powers of the Commission (legislative initiative) than upon that of the Council (codecision), also perhaps as they see less of a leeway in the latter (codecision being already the 'ordinary' way of taking decisions).

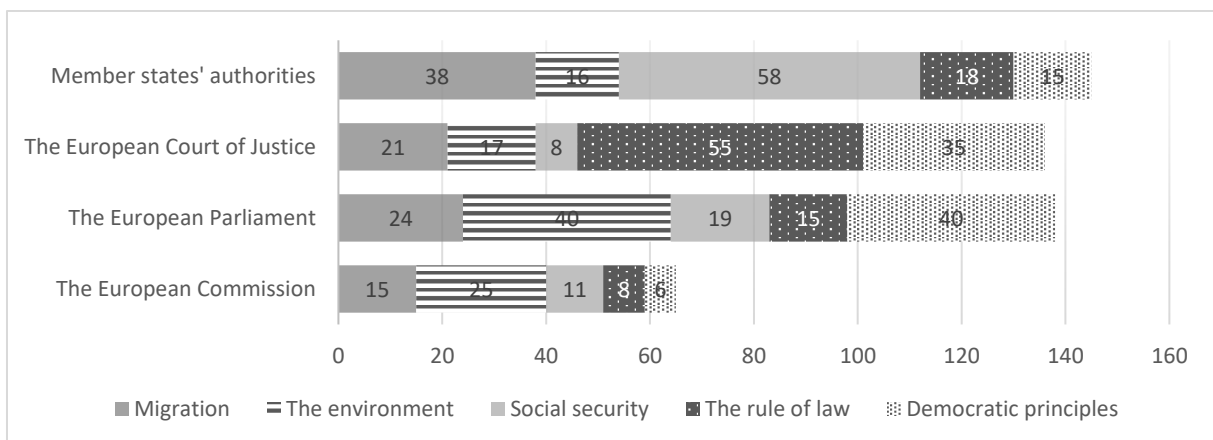
Figure 3.3: Preferred powers of the EP in the interinstitutional arena



Source: ESPOL-EPRG MEP survey (2020)

Relatedly, the issue of disputes between the EU and member states’ authorities allows assessing how MEPs view the overall interinstitutional hierarchy. In the MEPs’ views, the final say in disputes seems to be highly dependent upon the issue itself (Figure 3.4). Hence, the highest share of MEPs grants to themselves that final say only for matters regarding the environment and democratic principles. Interestingly, while the question of a ‘social Europe’ has been agitating the EU agenda for years, not least in the aftermath of the financial and economic crisis (and while MEPs answered in the midst of a major health crisis), a majority of them (60.4 %) grant the member states the final word in disputes over social security. A similar although less straight-forward observation can be made for migration, with 38.8 % of our respondents ready to leave it to national authorities, the others being split between the EP (24.5 %), the Court of Justice (21.4 %) and the European Commission (15.3 %). The Court appears as main authority in the area of the rule of law only, and interestingly the Commission never does – possibly a hint that MEPs have interiorized the role of the Commission as a broker of interests and initiator rather than a settler.

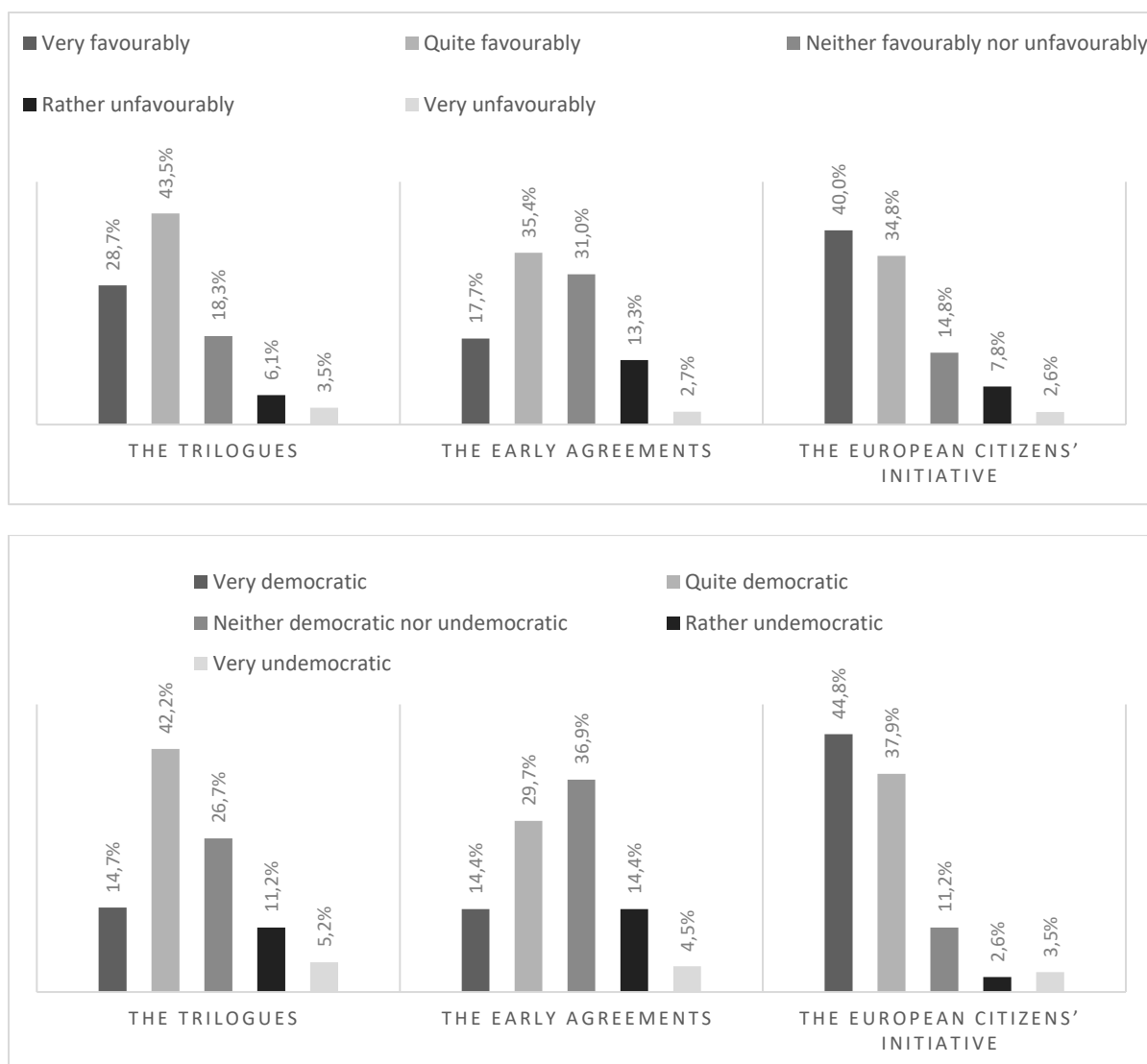
Figure 3.4: MEPs’ views on whom should have the last word in disputes per policy area

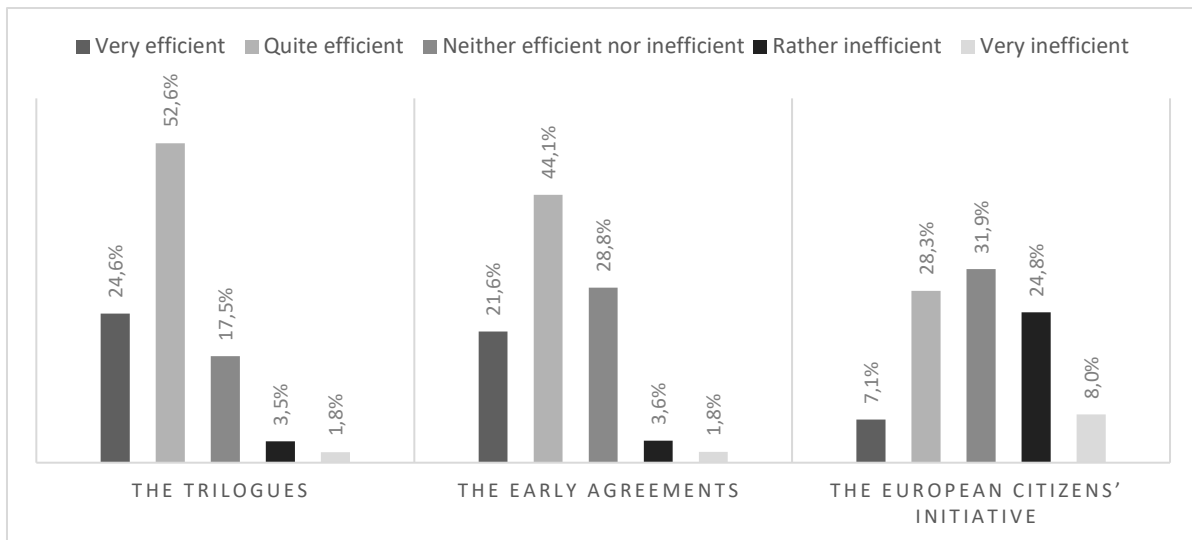


Source: ESPOL-EPRG MEP survey (2020)

Our survey further contained a battery of questions dealing with new instruments and innovations within the Parliament and having to do with its legislative tasks. Those are the trilogues, the early agreements, and the European Citizens’ Initiative (ECI). MEPs were asked for their general appraisal of these instruments as well as their democratic character and efficiency. First of all, concerning their general view, while all three instruments are assessed favourably by a majority of the respondents, only the ECI is viewed very favourably by the largest share of MEPs of our sample, the other two (trilogues and early agreements) scoring higher on the ‘quite favourable’ dimension. In fact, early agreements are even viewed as neither favourable nor unfavourable by almost a third of our respondents (31.0 %). This is interesting: MEPs are ready to initiate legislation by themselves as indicated above, but they seem also ready to confer (part of) that power to citizens. It could also be interpreted as a willingness to supplement the Commission (current main initiator) by the citizens.

Figure 3.5a, 3.5b, 3.5c: MEPs’ views on new instruments and innovations at the interinstitutional level





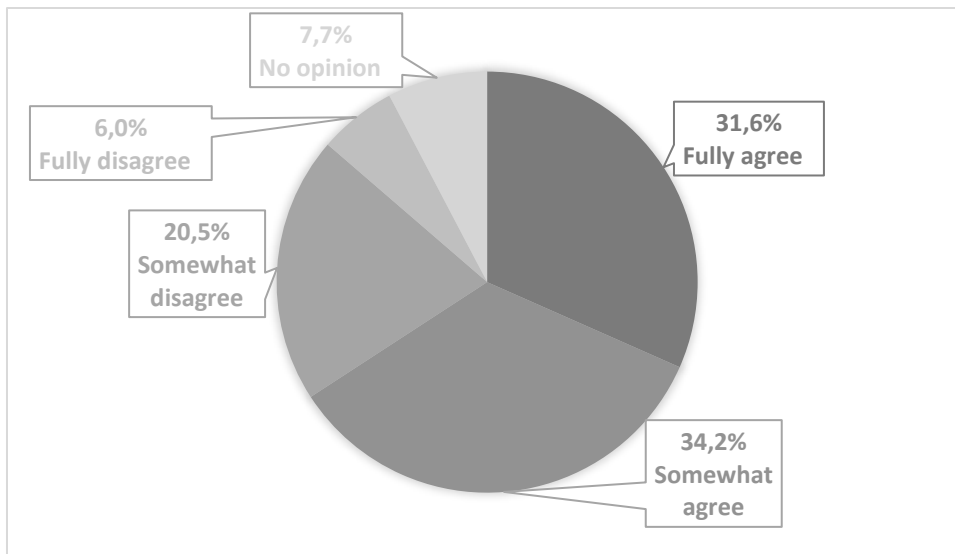
Source: ESPOL-EPRG MEP survey (2020)

This distribution is, all in all, quite consistent with that on the democratic nature of the instruments. Less than fifteen per cent of the MEPs dare to qualify trilogues and early agreements as very democratic. In fact, when grouping the ‘very democratic’ and ‘quite democratic’ answers, the MEPs appear to be enthusiastic about the ECI (82.7 % see it as democratic), whereas they are milder about the trilogues (56.9 %) and early agreements – which only a minority (44.1 %) view as a democratic instrument. In turn, trilogues and early agreements score much better than the ECI in terms of perceived efficiency. Indeed, in contrast to ECI that only about one third of MEPs (35.4 %) consider as efficient, trilogues and to a somewhat lesser extent early agreements rate high in terms of efficiency, with 77.2 % and 65.8 % considering them either very efficient or quite efficient, respectively.

By and large, while a majority of respondents is generally positive about trilogues both in terms of their democratic credentials and efficiency, MEPs seem to perceive a trade-off between democracy and efficiency for the other two instruments. On the one hand, early agreements are seen as contributing to the efficiency of the legislative process but at the detriment of democracy according to a majority of respondents. On the other hand, citizens’ initiatives are beneficial to democracy in the EU, but only a minority of respondents view them as efficient.

Finally, we consider a possible improvement to the transparency critiques often addressed to the trilogues in the literature (but much less so by the MEPs themselves as our analysis revealed). Less than a third of the MEPs from our sample appear to be fully favourable to the release of the minutes or reports of the trilogues. This finding is consistent with the largely favourable views to the instrument as it stands (reported in Figures 3.5a to 3.5c) and potential fears of a loss of efficiency in case of changes, but somewhat at odds with existing rules that prescribe reporting of the meeting to the relevant committee (Brandsma, 2019).

Figure 3.6: Views of MEPs on the release of trilogues' minutes



Source: ESPOL-EPRG MEP survey (2020)

### 3.4 Discussion

Over the years, the EP has acquired a pivotal position at the heart of the EU interinstitutional architecture when it comes to legislation. Its increased legislative powers are well reflected in the way MEPs conceive of their own role. As a matter of fact, according to our new ESPOL-EPRG MEP survey, MEPs place working on legislation at the top of their priorities, closely followed though by the articulation of important societal needs and interests.

While mostly supportive of an enhanced parliamentary influence, MEPs recognize the prominent role of other institutions in the EU decision-making process. Hence, if according to a vast majority of MEPs the EP and the Council should be on an equal footing in all areas of EU legislation, MEPs also admit that not all policy areas – starting with migrations – should be dealt with at the EU level. Strikingly as well, MEPs show their attachment to the superiority of law over political power by granting the last word to the European Court of Justice in matters related to the rule of law. Such a finding undermines the thesis that dialogue with the Commission is the key tool to solve rule of law crisis in Member States.

Finally, our investigation has shown that MEPs critically assess specific aspects of the legislative process and tend to support proposals for reforming it. In particular, many MEPs question the European Commission’s so-called monopoly on legislative initiative. Indeed, not only do they view favourably the recently-established European citizens’ initiative, but they also hope for a similar right for the EP itself. Likewise, even though the overall evaluation of trilogues and early agreements is clearly positive, only a minority of MEPs sees the latter as (either very or quite) democratic and most of them wishes for more transparency by releasing the trilogues’ minutes. In fact, when it comes to the legislative process, there is a perceived trade-off between democracy and efficiency – the MEPs seemingly trying to strike a balance between these two – sometimes conflicting – goals.

## 4. Parliamentary scrutiny of the ‘executive’ through parliamentary questions

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Just like legislation and representation, oversight is regarded as one of the key functions of parliaments in contemporary democracies (Saalfeld, 2000; Strøm, 2000). It has gained in importance in the recent period as parliaments have sought to compensate for their diminished policy-making role by a heightened activity in the area of *ex post* control (Costa *et al.*, 2004). Based on a comparison of representative chains of delegation and accountability across 17 West European countries, Strøm *et al.* (2006) have demonstrated that West European democracies have experienced a strengthening of executive institutions’ accountability to their respective principals. Parliaments have in particular gained more levers with which to control their governments and executive agencies, and their monitoring has increased. This is evidenced, for example, by the fact that parliamentarians ask more questions and scrutinise cabinet members harder.

At the EU-level, similar trends can be observed. Scrutiny and control were among the first formal rights granted to the EP (see Section 2 *supra*). In fact, the EP holds several means to examine and challenge the work of other EU institutions.<sup>22</sup> Notably, it discusses the annual general report submitted to it by the Commission (Article 233 TFEU) and oversees, together with the Council, the Commission’s implementing and delegated acts (Articles 290 and 291 TFEU). The Parliament also has to grant an annual discharge to the Commission (and other institutions) for their execution of the budget (Chapter 4 of Part six of Title II TFEU). To carry out its scrutiny prerogatives, the EP can additionally establish committees of inquiry as well as special parliamentary committees, which have the mission to investigate ‘alleged contraventions or maladministration in the implementation of Union law’ (Article 226 TFEU).

With the extension of the powers exercised at the supranational level since the founding of the ECSC in 1952, the task to hold EU executive institutions accountable has become even more demanding and challenging for the EP. Compared to other parliamentary institutions, the EP faces the peculiar difficulty of confronting a ‘dual executive’ – the Commission and the Council – as well as a series of executive agencies that have limited formal requirements to give accounts. Over time, the EP has therefore sought to strengthen its capacity to check and challenge the activities of other EU institutions. Parliamentary questions – one of the classic instruments of parliamentary control and scrutiny – are a case in point. They allow the EP to request information from and to signal problems to a growing number of EU institutions and agencies. They are therefore widely used by MEPs – collectively and individually – to hold these bodies accountable.

In what follows, we focus on the parliamentary oversight of EU supranational institutions through parliamentary questions and, more particularly, parliamentary questions to the ECB. In contrast to the Commission and the Council, the ECB has been established as a fully independent body, thus generating – since its inception – concerns about its accountability.

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<sup>22</sup> For an overview, see: Remáč (2018) as well as Section 2 of this working paper.

These concerns have only grown in importance after the ECB has been endowed with new powers in the aftermath of the recent economic and financial crisis (Fromage *et al.*, 2019). How the EP scrutinizes the ECB and how MEPs adjust to its altered role, standing, and function will be the object of this section which analyses the driving forces behind parliamentary questions.

Compared to other parliamentary instruments of accountability such as the motion of censure or inquiry committees which are by nature exceptional, questions provide the EP – and its members – with the possibility to scrutinise and hold accountable other EU institutions and bodies in a routine fashion. From a theoretical and methodological standpoint, parliamentary questions have the advantage of offering a basis for measuring both legislators’ individual behaviour and legislatures’ role within the political system (Rozenberg & Martin, 2011). With this in mind, the objective of this section is two-fold. On the one hand, we seek to establish to what extent and how the EP exercises its scrutiny role – in particular, in the field of monetary policy. On the other hand, we aim at analysing the purpose of parliamentary questions from the MEPs’ perspective.

#### 4.1 Parliamentary questions: what for?

Parliamentary questions have recently been the object of much scholarly attention (for an overview, see: Martin, 2011). This section of the working paper takes stock of existing research to draw hypotheses regarding how the EP exercises its scrutiny function of EU executive institutions and agencies.

Addressed by MPs to governments, parliamentary questions contribute to the articulation between the executive and the legislative in democratic regimes (Martin & Rozenberg, 2014). Parliamentary questions are a two-direction communication instrument: they serve to communicate an issue to the executive; they allow MPs to receive information in return. What drives the ‘questioning activity’ in the first place is, however, an intriguing question. Indeed, parliamentary questions are not deemed a very efficient policy instrument, and public interest in them seems quite limited. At the EU level, MEPs devote a lot of time and energy to parliamentary questions, although these questions rarely have immediate policy consequences, nor are they particularly visible to voters (Navarro, 2019). In fact, legislative work is arguably the true *raison d’être* of any parliamentary institutions (on legislative work, see Section 3 of the working paper). In the EU, MEPs seeking to maximise their influence on the policy process should be advised to focus on legislative reports, not parliamentary questions (Yordanova, 2013). Nevertheless, tabling a question is ‘one of the last formal rights of the backbencher’ (Raunio, 1996). From the MEPs’ perspective, questions – at least in their written form – have the merit to require only limited expertise and resources and to be easily accessible. In a nutshell, parliamentary questions – be it as the national or at the EU level – have a low cost and a low benefit. Considering how many questions MEPs table each year, one can assume the benefits to outweigh the costs.

In fact, the literature on parliamentary questions has established that they serve a variety of purposes. According to Raunio (1996), they have three main functions: representation, information and control.

Regarding first the function of representation, parliamentary questions have a ‘performative’ nature. As they enjoy great freedom in their drafting, MPs can use them to bring concerns of



citizens or organized interests to the attention of executive officials (Russo, 2011; Saalfeld, 2011). In this case, questions have a goal of their own, while the actual content of the answers does not matter that much. Everything that the questioner wants to achieve is reached as soon as the question has been asked. In other words, questions serve to convey a political message from the elected representatives to the executive agents. In turn, they allow MPs to show concern for the interests of their constituents or to build up a reputation as hard-working politicians. They can thus participate of the MPs' strategy to increase their personal profile and ultimately their re-election chances (Bouteca *et al.*, 2019; François & Navarro, 2019; Kellermann, 2016). To some extent, such a strategy seems to be effective at the EU level as demonstrated by the fact that MEPs asking a high number of questions (and writing many reports) have a larger chance to get re-elected (Navarro, 2010).

Next to their 'signalling' function, parliamentary questions enable individual MPs to solicit and receive expert information from the executive. This second – informational – function is particularly crucial because, compared to the executive branch, parliamentary institutions generally suffer from an information deficit and a lack of administrative resources (Papadopoulos, 2013). MPs are thus dependent upon the expertise and administrative capacity of the executive. Given they have a genuine interest in a specific policy field, MPs can use parliamentary questions to gather technical or practical information on public policy and on the functioning of administrative services (Lazardeux, 2005). By answering questions, the executive shares strategic information about a given issue and reveals its policy preferences and intentions. Since the executive is required to answer questions, the latter contribute to compensate for the parliamentary information deficit.<sup>23</sup> It has been shown that asking questions in the EP does indeed follow a specialization pattern: MEPs tend to ask more questions related to the policy field of the committee they belong to than to other policy fields (Bowler & Farrell, 1995). Besides, MEPs characterised as 'policy specialists' have recourse to questions more frequently than their colleagues do (Navarro, 2012).

Thirdly, MPs employ questions to supervise and monitor the decisions and actions of executive agents. Parliamentary questions basically constitute a 'fire alarm' oversight mechanism (Wiberg, 1994). As there are few procedural restraints placed on questions – especially written ones –, they allow MPs to raise issues that the executive wants to avoid and force the latter to take a stance. The most critical MPs can use questions to contest decisions by the government or denounce executive failures. Besides, oral questions provide an ideal space to display and dramatize the antagonism between the government and the opposition (Rozenberg & Martin, 2011). *Mutatis mutandis*, the same holds true at the EU-level where parliamentary questions give MEPs the most direct access to oversight of the European Commission (Proksch & Slapin, 2011), but also to independent agencies, even though they seem to be less effective in the latter case (Maricut-Akbik, 2020). Interestingly, given the multi-level structure of the EU, parliamentary questions can also serve to alert the Commission about the improper implementation of EU legislation in the member states (Jensen *et al.*, 2013). In what follows, we will nevertheless concentrate on inter-institutional interactions at the supranational level.

It should be noted at this point that the different functions and reasons for asking parliamentary questions are not mutually exclusive. MPs can for instance inform the government about issues

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<sup>23</sup> Obviously, the information function of parliamentary questions is subject to the quality of the answers provided by the executive.

which they feel should receive greater attention (representation function) while developing an expertise in a specific policy field thanks to the government's response (information function); parliamentary questions may equally enable MPs to both check on the executive and *show* responsiveness to their voters' concerns. Besides, macro-functions of parliamentary questions are theoretically distinct from the MPs' motivation in asking them. We thus now turn to potential macro- and micro-explanations of parliamentary questioning with the general aim of understanding – in the specific context of the EU – who is asking questions, to whom and on what topic.

Parliamentary questioning is first constrained by the institutional rules and the resources available to parliaments and parliamentarians. While all democratic parliaments have some instruments that enable MPs to put questions to ministers, formal and informal procedures for presenting questions to governments vary greatly (Russo & Wiberg, 2010). Based on procedural characteristics, Russo & Wiberg (2010) distinguish no less than seven types of procedures combining four aspects that appear to have an important role in influencing their empirical usage. Their typology notably considers the form of the answer (written or oral), the timing of the questioning (question submitted in advance or spontaneous), the possibility to join the debate (whether other members can speak), and the possibility to vote a motion. The important point for us here is that the institutional context of parliamentary questions at the EU level has been deeply impacted by procedural changes affecting both the role of the EP in interinstitutional relations (see Section 2 *supra*) and the inner functioning of the EP. Such changes are likely to affect the individual questioning activity of MEPs as well as the EP's collective capacity to supervise and monitor other EU institutions. Hence, they will deserve a particular attention.

Beyond institutional rules, political salience can be expected to affect patterns of parliamentary questioning, as it has been shown to affect in general patterns of delegation and accountability (Koop, 2011). Regarding delegation to bureaucratic agents in the American federal government, it has notably been argued that politicians seek to retain greater control and therefore to grant less agency discretion to bureaucratic agents in those policy areas that are more important to them (Calvert *et al.*, 1989). The explanation is that in those areas for which they care the most (or that attract more public attention), politicians will expend greater effort and resources in reducing the uncertainty that gives bureaucrats the opportunity for discretion. Turning to *ex post* control, the general expectation is similarly that issues that are higher on the public agenda should receive more attention from politicians (Hanretty & Koop, 2012). Applying this reasoning to the EP, one would expect MEPs to put more efforts in questioning commissioners or agencies dealing with highly salient issues. Empirical research has confirmed this hypothesis, at least in the case of EU agencies (Font & Pérez Durán, 2016). The political salience logic, which explains the interplay between parliamentary and executive institutions at the macro-level, can be applied to individual politicians as well. Indeed, all issues are not equally important and salient to politicians. Consequently, MPs' constituency interest(s) as well as party priorities contribute to determine both the content of parliamentary questions and their addressee (Green-Pedersen, 2010; Otjes & Louwse, 2018). This points to the role of partisanship.

Party competition and, more generally, partisanship are indeed other key factors to understand the questioning activity of parliamentarians. First, as just mentioned, according to issue-ownership and salience theories, political parties have strong incentives to set their preferred

topics on the agenda (Budge, 2015). It follows that MPs strategically ask more questions about issues their party cares about and identifies with (Vliegthart & Walgrave, 2011). In the EP, in particular, party groups and their members use oral questions to set the political agenda and initiate debates on issues that they are particularly interested in (Costa & Guinaudeau, 2019). Party competition has clear implications not only for the content of questions but in general for the whole questioning activity. In fact, compared to government supporting parties, opposition parties tend to ask more questions. This is because they have less direct access to key information sources and because they have a stronger incentive to challenge the government. At the national level, parliamentary questions are sometimes used by junior coalition partners seeking to scrutinise ministers from dominant government parties (Navarro & Brouard, 2014). At the EU level, MEPs representing parties in opposition at the national level and MEPs from anti-European parties were similarly found to have distinct questioning patterns (Jensen *et al.*, 2013; Proksch & Slapin, 2011).

The questioning activity of individual MEPs and the broader patterns of parliamentary oversight at the EU level certainly depend on a combination of these different factors. Before we proceed to the empirical analysis of a fresh dataset on questions emanating from the EP, we need to set the stage by presenting the various types of questions that are legally available to MEPs.

## 4.2 The various types of parliamentary questions in the EU

The legal bases for parliamentary questions at the EU level are found in the Treaties, while detailed provisions are provided in inter-institutional agreements and the EP's Rules of Procedure. Parliamentary questions have existed since the foundation of European supranational institutions. The right of the Assembly to question the Commission (then the High Authority) was indeed already present in the Treaty of Paris (Article 23), which provided for written and oral questions to the Commission; the Treaty of Rome included a similar provision (Article 140).

MEPs' capacity to ask questions to other EU institutions has been progressively broadened and strengthened. In particular, even though there was no similar legal basis in the Treaties as the one existing for the Commission, the Council accepted to answer questions as well in an arrangement formalised in 1973. This possibility was also extended to the Foreign ministers regarding political cooperation in 1976, to the ECB in 2002 and to the president of the European Council in 2011.

Besides, the EP has been able to draw on various historical traditions to change procedures. Thus the 'question time' procedure, which did not previously exist at Community level, was introduced into the Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament in 1973, following the British example when the United Kingdom had just joined (Costa, 2001).

The Rules of Procedure of the current parliamentary term include, in one dedicated chapter, six different types of questions:

- Questions for oral answer with debate (Article 136)
- Question Time (Article 137)
- Questions for written answer (Article 138)
- Major interpellations for written answer (Article 139)

- Questions for written answer to the European Central Bank (Article 140)
- Questions for written answer concerning the Single Supervisory Mechanism and the Single Resolution Mechanism (Article 141)

Questions for oral answer with debate (also called ‘oral questions’) may be put by a committee, a political group or one-twentieth of Members. They are dealt with during plenary sittings, and included in the day's debates; they may be followed by a resolution.

Question Time with the Commission are asked during the period set aside for questions during plenary sittings. Even though the Rules of Procedure still foresee the possibility for ‘question time’ sessions to be held, the practice has ceased to exist since 2011.

Any MEP, a political group or a committee may ask a question for a written answer (simply called ‘written questions’) to the President of the European Council, to the Council, to the Commission or to the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. This type of questions thus offers the maximum flexibility at the individual level, although their number is now limited (see: *infra*).

Major interpellations consist of questions for written answer put to the Council, the Commission or the Vice-President of the Commission/High-Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy by a political group. Just like ‘minor interpellations’ (which have ceased to exist following the revision of the Rules of Procedure of Parliament adopted on 31 January 2019), they have been established recently but are not very much used. As a matter of fact, there have been only 21 major interpellations during the 8<sup>th</sup> parliamentary term and one since the 2019 election.

Questions for written answer to the ECB as well as questions for written answer concerning the Single Supervisory Mechanism and the Single Resolution Mechanism have been introduced recently and will be discussed in greater detail later.

## 4.3 Quantitative trends

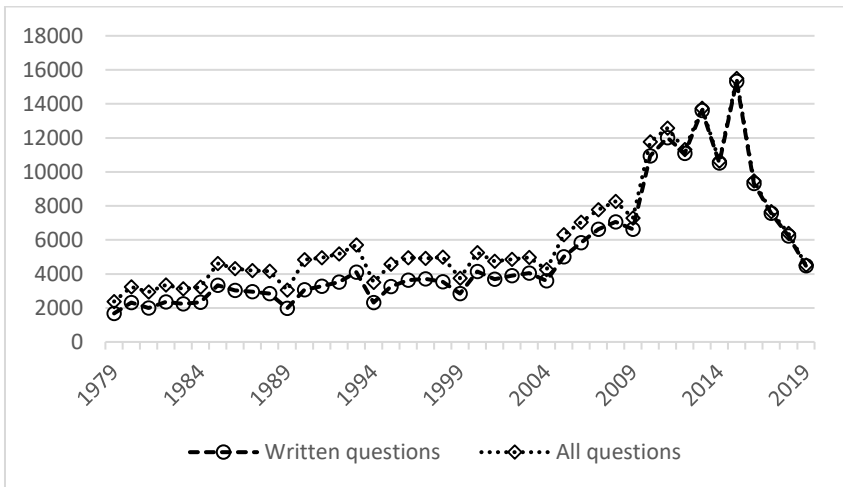
The sheer volume of parliamentary questions is impressive.<sup>24</sup> Since the first direct elections to the EP, its members have asked more than 250,000 questions, oral or written, to the Commission or to the Council. The volume has considerably increased over the period. From a total of 3,229 questions in 1980 (the first full year in the statistical series), the number of questions reached a record high in 2015 (15,486 questions). Since then, the number of questions has declined, even though MEPs still asked as many as 4,522 questions in 2019. In fact, Figure 4.1 confirms that there are three distinct periods in the quantitative evolution of parliamentary questioning in the EP. The dominant trend during the first five parliamentary terms (*i.e.* until 2004) was a slow and moderate increase in the questioning activity of MEPs over the years. In a second stage, between the 2004 and 2015 the growth was much steadier: the number of questions was in fact multiplied by four over a decade. In the last four years,

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<sup>24</sup> For the quantitative analysis of parliamentary questions, we constituted an *ad hoc* dataset using data provided by the Secretariat of the EP for the first four legislative terms and available on the EP webpage for the most recent terms.

finally, the trend has been dramatically reversed, the volume of questions declining very quickly.

Figure 4.1 Yearly number of parliamentary questions since 1979.

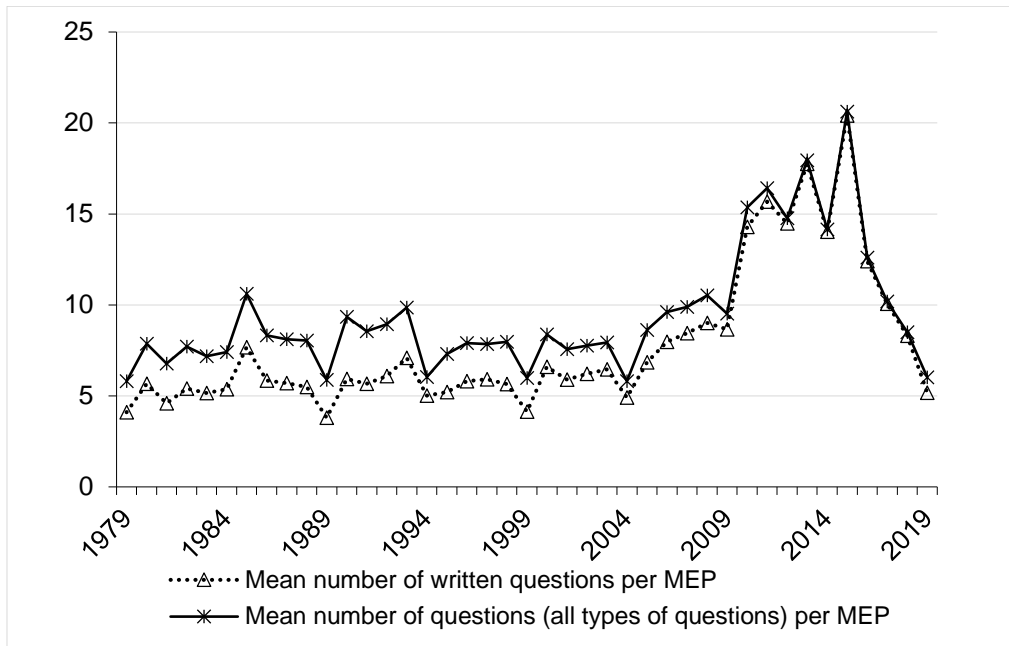


Source: authors’ calculations based on data available on the official webpage of the EP as well as on data provided by the EP’s secretariat (private correspondence)

How do we interpret these quantitative evolutions? Do they reveal some significant inflections in the individual activity of MEPs? Are they on the contrary related to variations in the composition of the EP? The individual-level analysis tends to qualify the finding somewhat and to attenuate – at least until 2009 – the idea of a major growth in the individual activity of MEPs (Figure 4.2). Indeed, the mean number of questions per MEP amounted to 8.5 in 2018 compared to 7.9 in 1980. In other words, the increased number of questions was to a large extent the direct consequence of the growing number of MEPs (from 410 in 1979 to 751 in 2019). The picture is somewhat different for the two next terms, when the mean number of questions amounted to 16.1 and 13 respectively.<sup>25</sup> This stark increase is observed regardless of the type of questions. It is followed by an equally sharp decline in the number of questions after 2015 as pointed out above.

<sup>25</sup> These are the figures for the four full years of the 7<sup>th</sup> term (*i.e.* 2010 to 2013 inclusive) and the 8<sup>th</sup> term (*i.e.* 2015 to 2018 inclusive).

Figure 4.2 Mean number of questions per MEP.



Source: authors' calculations based on data available on the official webpage of the EP as well as data provided by the EP's secretariat (private correspondence)

As hypothesised above, the observed upward and downward trends in the practice of parliamentary questioning in the EU are likely to result from institutional changes, both in the functioning of the EU as a whole and in the internal parliamentary rules. On the one hand, the overall increase in the number of questions from the EP can be linked to the continued process of EU integration itself. The EU has assumed growing competencies in an increased number of policy fields while the powers of the EP have been constantly strengthened. Hence, for example, the sharp and sudden increase in the number of questions in 2010 can be seen as the consequence of the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty at the end of 2009. As the EP's prerogatives were increased, MEPs were involved in more subject areas and exercised their scrutiny prerogatives more thoroughly. This ultimately resulted in an exponential growth in the number of questions.

On the other hand, while there existed originally no limit to the number of written questions MEPs could ask, the Rules of Procedure adopted in 2014 have set a maximum of five questions per month, and since 2017, each Member, political group or committee is entitled to submit a maximum of twenty questions over a rolling period of three months. The total number of written questions has been reduced mechanically. What is true of written questions also applies *mutatis mutandis* to other types of questions. In fact, it has generally become more difficult for MEPs to ask questions individually. For instance, the threshold to table a question with an oral answer, which was of 1.95 per cent of MEPs in 1991, is now of 5 per cent (Brack & Costa, 2018).

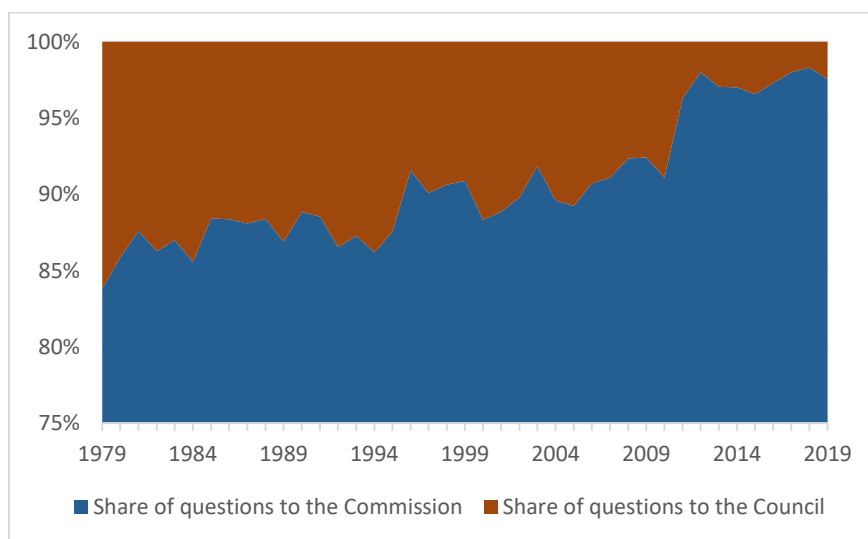
Another observation is that the volume of questions is lower in the election years. This electoral cycle is probably primarily the mechanical consequence of the interruption of parliamentary work during the weeks preceding and following the election. It can also be explained by the time dedicated to the electoral campaign by MEPs seeking re-election. Thirdly, new MEPs need

to learn the rules and make their marks before being fully efficient (Beauvallet & Michon, 2010): this may explain why there are less questions asked in the immediate aftermath of the election.

Beyond these general trends, other trends are visible regarding the types of questions MEPs ask and to whom they are addressed. In fact, the overall trends in the number of questions do not necessarily equate to a uniform increase in all types of questions. First, it should be noted that written questions have always accounted for the vast majority of questions in the EP (**Error! Reference source not found.**). Here again, the explanation is to be found in the procedural constraints that differentiate written questions from other types of questions: restraints on written questions are much more limited than those existing for other types of questions. Interestingly, the share of written questions has become overwhelming in the last two terms, as written questions accounted for 98.7 per cent of questions to the Commission and the Council during the 8<sup>th</sup> legislative term (2014-2019). Comparatively, the number of questions for oral answers increased less steadily than written questions during the first six terms and has become very low recently (only 622 oral questions during the 8<sup>th</sup> term). Besides, ‘question time’ sessions are not organized anymore since 2012, although they still theoretically exist in the Rules of Procedure.

Distinct patterns in the practice of parliamentary questioning are also visible as far as their addressees are concerned. To this regard, it should first be noted that the number of questions to other institutions than the Commission and the Council (leaving the ECB aside) is extremely limited. There was actually no question to the President of the European Council and to the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy during the 8<sup>th</sup> legislative term. In the ongoing term, the President of the European Council has received so far (as of 1 September 2020) two written questions, and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 302 written questions and only one oral question. Focusing on written questions to the European Commission and the Council of the EU, the most visible pattern is a reduction in the absolute number and the share of questions to the latter (Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3 Share of written questions to the European Commission and to Council of the EU.



Source: authors' calculations based on data available on the official webpage of the EP as well as data provided by the EP's secretariat (private correspondence)

All in all, if the number of parliamentary questions is an indicator of how much the EP exercises its oversight function, it can be stated with confidence that MEPs invest a lot of energy in scrutinizing and controlling other EU institutions. Beyond, the fluctuations in the number of questions across time, we have observed a narrowing in the types of questions, which are increasingly geared toward the European Commission and that take more and more a written (rather than an oral). One can only speculate as to the reasons why the proportion of questions to the Council has declined so much relatively to the questions to the European Commission. One possibility is that MEPs have come to be frustrated with answers provided by the Council: the latter, which are drafted by the Council's Secretariat and need to have the consent of the COREPER, tend to represent the smallest common denominator among the member states (Corbett *et al.*, 2003: 244). Be it as it may, these questions are addressed to institutions that are more or less directly linked to an electoral process and accountable to voters. We now turn to parliamentary scrutiny of an independent agency: the ECB.

#### 4.4 A focus on parliamentary questions to the ECB

Parliamentary oversight of the ECB presents specific challenges compared to that of the European Commission or the Council. The latter two institutions – and to some extent the President of the European Council and to the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy – are institutionally more or less directly linked by a 'chain of delegation' to national and supranational parliamentary institutions. On the contrary, the ECB was established as a fully independent agency with limited accountability mechanisms (Magnetite, 2000).

##### 4.4.1 *The context: the monetary dialogue between the ECB and the EP*

The relationship between the EP and the ECB was originally – and remains to some extent – based on two instruments. On the one hand, the ECB submits an annual report on its activities, the activities of the ESCB and the Eurosystem's monetary policy to the EP.<sup>26</sup> The report is presented each year to the EP by the Vice-President of the ECB in a dedicated session of the Committee on economic and monetary affairs and by the President on the occasion of a plenary debate. On the other hand, the ECB's President participates in quarterly hearings of the Committee on economic and monetary affairs. As can be seen, with the exception of one presentation of the ECB's report to the plenary once a year, the parliamentary scrutiny of the ECB is more or less vested in the hands of a specialised body, namely the 'EP Committee on economic and monetary affairs'. The latter receives the support of a 'monetary expert panel' whose role is to produce reports in preparation of the monetary dialogue (Amttenbrink & van Duin, 2009).

With the introduction of parliamentary questions to the ECB in the Rules of Procedure in 2002, the situation has changed. Any MEP is nowadays entitled to address written questions to the ECB given that they respect a few formal constraints (*e.g.* to fall within the limits of the competences of the addressee, to be of general interest, to be concise and contain an understandable interrogation). As for the written questions in general, questions to the ECB can have several signatories, which enable MEPs to highlight how important they are to them. Besides, the number of questions is limited to a maximum of six per month. While the content

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<sup>26</sup> The report is also submitted to the Council of the EU, the European Commission and the European Council.



of questions is the sole responsibility of their authors, the questions have to be submitted to the Chair of the Committee on economic and monetary affairs who decides on their admissibility before notifying them to the ECB. A similar arrangement was established allowing MEPs to put questions to the Chairs of the ECB Supervisory Board, the Single Resolution Mechanism Board and the Single Supervisory Mechanism Board. Interestingly, written questions to the latter three institutions have to be subtracted from the maximum of six per month to the ECB.

Parliamentary questions therefore constitute a new opportunity for the dialogue between the ECB and the EP, which is according to Christine Lagarde ‘an essential element of the ECB’s accountability’. In her answer to a written question from MEP Nuno Melo, the president of the ECB goes on stating that ‘[She] thus look[s] forward to continuing discussing with the European Parliament the substance of our monetary policy actions’ (Lagarde, 2020). In what follows, we analyse the questioning activity of the EP in relation to the theoretical expectations discussed above.

#### 4.4.2 *The salience of monetary policy and the parliamentary accountability of the ECB*

The quantity of questions MEPs address to the ECB gives a first, rough, indication of their readiness to hold the ECB accountable and to influence its monetary policy.<sup>27</sup> As revealed by Table 4.1, while MEPs can ask questions to the ECB since 2002, their number only became really significant during the 7<sup>th</sup> parliamentary term (2009-2014), when the ECB received 129 questions. As already mentioned, during the following term (2014-2019), the EP also received the right to send questions to newly established financial agencies, namely to the Chairs of the ECB Supervisory Board, of the Single Resolution Mechanism Board and of the Single Supervisory Mechanism Board. Compared to the ECB, these specialised bodies, which exercise narrow and complex responsibilities, receive much less attention from the EP. Questions to these specialised bodies do not even compensate for the decline in the amount of questions to the ECB as from 2016.

Table 4.1 Number of questions to ECB and other financial institutions by legislative term.

	EP 6	EP 7	EP 8	EP 9	Total
European Central Bank	13	129	479	36	657
Chair of the ECB Supervisory Board			21	16	37
Chair of the Single Resolution Mechanism Board			14	1	15
Chair of the Single Supervisory Mechanism Board			79	7	86
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>593</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>795</b>

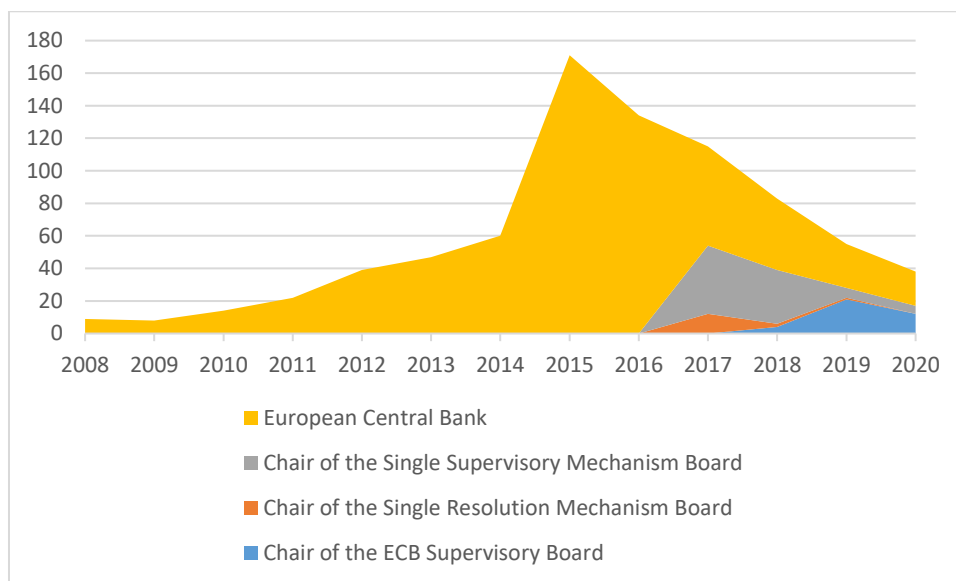
Source: authors’ calculations based on data available on the official webpage of the EP

How to explain changes in the quantity of questions to the ECB? According to the theory of salience (see: *supra*), the attention to monetary and financial institutions should hinge on the prominence of monetary and financial issues in the public debate and on how much MEPs care about them. Figure 4.4 gives support to this expectation. Indeed, the number of questions to the ECB followed an upward trend during the whole European sovereign debt crisis which

<sup>27</sup> The authors would like to warmly thank Axel Gougelet (ESPOL, Lille Catholic University) for his valuable help in compiling a new dataset of parliamentary questions to the ECB.

started in 2009 and culminated in 2012. Then, the great number of questions to the ECB in the following year can be directly linked to the debates and controversies surrounding the endeavours to reform the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). For the record, in December 2012, a report entitled ‘Towards a genuine Economic and Monetary Union’ was issued by the four presidents of the Council, the European Commission, the ECB and the Eurogroup; it was followed by the entry into force of the Six-Pack in December 2011, Fiscal Compact in January 2013 and Two-Pack in May 2013. The peak in the number of questions in 2015 coincides with the presentation of another report entitled ‘Completing Europe’s Economic and Monetary Union’ co-authored by the presidents of the Council, the European Commission, the ECB, the Eurogroup and the EP, in view of further reforming and deepening the EMU. The concomitance of the reform of the EMU and the questions to the ECB is therefore fully consistent with the policy salience explanation.

Figure 4.4 Yearly number of questions to the ECB and other financial institutions.



Source: authors’ calculations based on data available on the official webpage of the EP  
 Note: Until 16 June 2020

**4.4.2. The politics of parliamentary questions to the ECB**

The number of parliamentary questions to the ECB raises the issue of who the MEPs the most involved in this activity are and what their motivation is. Certainly, we do not expect all MEPs to be equally eager to examine and challenge the work of the ECB. As mentioned before, MPs generally tend to recourse to parliamentary questions strategically according to the party to which they belong. In the case of the MEPs’ questions to the ECB, we therefore expect that partisanship will equally play a determining role. Specifically, we anticipate that Eurosceptic MEPs and those belonging to opposition parties will ask more questions to the ECB. By opposition parties, we mean those outside the ‘grand coalition’ that more or less dominates politics in the EP, namely the EPP and PES since 1979 (Hix *et al.*, 2007).

Empirical data lend some support to our hypothesis. A disproportionate number of questions comes indeed from the GUE/NGL and (to a lesser extent) Greens/EFA groups (Table 4.2). On the contrary, MEPs from the largest EP groups, in particular the EPP, are less eager to ask questions to the ECB and other financial institutions. This finding confirms what has been

observed with EP's questions to EU agencies in general, namely that MEPs from minority groups as well as non-attached and Eurosceptic MEPs concentrate more questions than MEPs from the largest pro-EU groups (Font & Pérez Durán, 2016). It is thus the MEPs who are the most critical or who have the less access to government circles who are the most active as regards the scrutiny of the ECB.

Table 4.2 Questions to the ECB by party group.

	EP 6	EP 7	EP 8	EP 9	Total
EPP	4	50	50	10	114
S&D		4	85	8	97
ALDE – Renew		5	17	4	26
GUE/NGL	2	15	229	6	252
Greens/ALE		11	62	12	85
UEN – ECR	4	4	34	5	47
EFD – EFDD		21	54		75
ENF			43		43
ID				10	10
Non-attached	3	19	19	5	46
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>593</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>795</b>

Source: authors' calculations based on data available on the official webpage of the EP

List of acronyms: EPP – European People's Party; S&D – Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats; ALDE – Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe; GUE/NGL – European United Left/ North Green Left; ALE – European Free Alliance; UEN – Union for Europe of the Nations; ECR – European Conservatives and Reformists; EFD – Europe of Freedom and Democracy; EFDD – Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy; ENF – Europe of Nations and Freedom; ID – Identity and Democracy

This partisan pattern of the 'questioning activity' highlights the fact that the introduction of parliamentary questions to the ECB, on top of the already established accountability mechanisms, was not only a technical innovation in the relationship between the EP and the ECB; it also changed the internal equilibrium of the EP. Indeed, the task to scrutinise and control the ECB is not limited anymore to the members of the Committee on economic and monetary affairs: thanks to parliamentary questions, this task is now open and accessible to any MEP. Whether MEPs outside this committee make use of this possibility at all is, of course, an empirical problem, which we explore by looking at the political profile of individuals asking the most questions (Table 4.3).

Table 4.3 MEPs asking the most questions to the ECB.

EP7		EP8	
Nuno Melo (EPP, Portugal, LIBE)	26	Fabio De Masi (GUE/NGL, Germany, ECON)	42
Mario Borghesio (ENF, Italie, LIBE)	11	Jonás Fernández (S&D, Spain, ECON)	35
Nikolaos Chountis (GUE/NGL, Greece, ECON)	11	Dimitrios Papadimoulis (GUE/NGL, Greece, ECON)	26
Sven Giegold (Greens-EFA, Germany, ECON)	10	Marco Zanni (NI, Italy, BUDG & ECON)	24
Auke Zijlstra (ENF=NI, Netherlands, LIBE)	7	Kostas Chrysogonos (GUE/NGL, Greece, DEV & CONSTI)	19
		Luke Ming Flanagan (GUE/NGL, Ireland, AGRI & COCOBU)	19
		Miguel Viegas (GUE/NGL, Portugal, ECON)	19
		Sven Giegold (Greens-EFA, Germany, ECON)	19

Source: authors' calculations based on data available on the official webpage of the EP

Note: For each MEP, we give its name, political group, country of election and parliamentary committee (full membership).

Acronyms of political groups: see below Table 4.2

Acronyms of parliamentary committees: DEV – Development; BUDG – Budgets; COCOBU – Budgetary Control; ECON – Economic and Monetary Affairs; AGRI – Agriculture and Rural Development; LIBE – Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs; CONSTI – Constitutional Affairs.

During the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup> parliamentary terms, respectively 37 and 80 individual MEPs addressed at least one question to the ECB (*i.e.* they were the main author for such a question); of them, only 20 and 49 (respectively) asked more than one question. In other words, during the two terms under consideration, 2.6 and 6.5 per cent of all MEPs respectively asked 86.8 and 94.8 per cent of all the questions to the ECB. The scrutiny of the latter institution through parliamentary questions is thus concentrated in a few hands. This is in line with earlier research that has shown that less than one-third of MEPs ask questions overseeing EU agencies (Font & Pérez Durán, 2016). During the 7<sup>th</sup> term, the most active MEPs seated in the ECON and LIBE committees. During the 8<sup>th</sup> term, they also belonged to the BUDG, DEV, CONSTI, AGRI & COCOBU committees even though MEPs from the ECON committee were clearly the most active. This suggests that there is a certain degree of specialisation taking place, which may result from how much MEPs care about monetary policy. The fact that MEPs originating from Southern European countries and Ireland are particularly well-represented among the most active MEPs is clearly significant as these countries were the most affected by the European sovereign debt crisis.<sup>28</sup>

Finally, we look at the co-authorship of parliamentary questions to the ECB as an indication of their political meaning. It is first noteworthy that these questions are increasingly co-authored. Initially, the questions were put forward by only one MEP and there were only three exceptions between 2009 and 2014; 16.5 per cent were co-authored during the 8<sup>th</sup> term and 18.3 per cent during the 9<sup>th</sup> term. Co-authorship is an indication of the MEPs' willingness to collaborate and to give more weight and visibility to their scrutiny actions. In particular, questions originating from more than one party group may be taken as an indication that, beyond political competition, MEPs want to assert collectively the importance of accountability to the EP. During the 8<sup>th</sup> parliamentary term, one tenth of the questions to the ECB (9 out of 98) had a

<sup>28</sup> It should be noted that Fabio De Masi, who was elected in Germany in 2014, holds a double German-Italian citizenship.

trans-partisan nature. Interestingly, the one question with the most authors, which was signed by 39 MEPs, related to the ‘Deficit in transparency and democratic decision-making in the ECB’ (Papadimoulis *et al.*, 2017).

Table 4.4: Number of authors per question

	EP6	EP7	EP8	EP9	Total
1	13	126	495	49	683
2		2	58	3	63
3			6	2	8
4 and more		1	34	6	41
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>593</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>795</b>

Source: authors’ calculations based on data available on the official webpage of the EP

## 4.5 Discussion

Our assessment of the EP’s effort to scrutinise EU executive institutions and agencies has focused on parliamentary questions. In contrast to other instruments of scrutiny and control which are used only in extraordinary circumstances, questions are part of the day-to-day work of the Parliament and they provide a regular channel of communication between the EP and many other EU institutions. Moreover, questions (more precisely, written ones) are a tool which MEPs may dispose of individually and discretionary. They are thus particularly relevant to analyse the individual motivation of MEPs to exercise their powers of scrutiny and control.

The quantitative analysis of parliamentary questions reveals that MEPs are taking their function of scrutiny and control seriously, as more and more questions are originating from the EP. Only a change in the Rules of Procedure limiting the number of questions an MEP is entitled to ask has reduced the overall number of questions. This points to the importance of institutional design and procedural constraints in analysing the individual and collective behaviour of parliamentarians. The institutions to whom MEPs can address their questions has expanded over time. However, MEPs have increasingly concentrated their efforts on the European Commission at the detriment of the Council of the EU.

Focusing on the parliamentary scrutiny of the ECB, empirical data indicate that, in line with the theory of salience, MEPs are more inclined to question its activities when monetary and financial policies are high on the public agenda. Besides, we have shown that the MEPs’ ‘questioning activity’ in this policy field obeys to strategic and partisan considerations. In particular, we observed that about one out of ten co-authored questions had a trans-partisan nature. This is a sign that in some circumstances MEPs are ready to act collectively to defend the interests of the institution to which they belong. However, most of the co-authored questions are signed by MEPs from the same party group and even more questions have only one author. In general, MEPs from the smallest groups and from Eurosceptic parties tend to ask more questions to the ECB than their colleagues. It is not clear, however, whether these MEPs are also more often member of national opposition parties, as has been observed for questions to other EU institutions (Font & Pérez Durán, 2016; Jensen *et al.*, 2013). This might constitute a promising venue for future research.

## 5. Representativeness and effectiveness? MPs and MEPs from opposition parties in inter-parliamentary cooperation

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A growing part of the interinstitutional relations in the EU has developed in inter-parliamentary cooperation, especially since the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon. There is a profusion of initiatives in the field of inter-parliamentary dialogue, which has been enriched over time but has shown clear limits and has been the object of criticism.

The Treaty of Lisbon, in particular through its Article 12 TEU and the two first protocols attached to it, has made national parliaments direct interlocutors of the Union's institutions, involving them in a series of procedures set in EU primary and secondary law (Kiiver, 2007; Raunio, 2009; Olivetti, 2012; Jancic, 2017). As established in Article 12 TEU, national parliaments contribute actively to the good functioning of the Union, also by taking part in inter-parliamentary cooperation amongst them and with the EP, according to the Protocol on the role of national Parliaments in the EU (Article 12.f TEU and Protocol no 1).

This section aims to push the current understanding of inter-parliamentary cooperation a bit further. In particular, it aims to assess the effectiveness of inter-parliamentary cooperation and the representativeness of its parliamentary channels, focussing on what can be deemed its more advanced instruments: inter-parliamentary conferences. Indeed, inter-parliamentary conferences are by far the most formalized and regulated mechanisms of inter-parliamentary activity; they are characterized by rules of procedure, regularity and frequency of the meetings, as well as stability over time. As a first approximation here, by representativeness we mean the capacity to create a link between the represented and the representatives, whereby the latter are meant to faithfully reflect the many points of view stemming from a specific polity. By effectiveness, we refer to the ability to deliver – that is, to fulfil the functions one is assigned or expected to exercise. In the case of inter-parliamentary cooperation, as it will be illustrated, these functions may vary from the mere exchange of information and sharing of best practices up to forms of joint scrutiny on the EU and national executives.

Representativeness and effectiveness of inter-parliamentary cooperation are empirically evaluated in relation to inter-parliamentary conferences' capacity to include (national) opposition parties, including those displaying a Eurosceptic rhetoric. To study how the views of opposition parties are channelled at EU level through national parliaments and the EP is of crucial importance. Indeed, perhaps the most important added value of having national parliaments involved at the supranational level – and what makes them different from national governments, acting within the Council's formations and the European Council –, is precisely the ability to publicly express and represent also the viewpoints of the opposition and the of political minorities beyond them.

The participation of opposition parties in inter-parliamentary conferences will be assessed by analysing the composition of national parliaments' delegations and of the EP's ones attending the most controversial meetings – as for the breadth of their mandate, their uncertain composition and their limited deliberative capacity – among these inter-parliamentary conferences, namely the ones on stability, economic coordination and governance in the EU – as established in 2013. The paper investigates the kind of contribution (national) opposition parties have managed to give to these conferences' activity. Indeed, the political side of the inter-parliamentary relationships, which is intimately linked also to national forms of government and party politics 'in between' the domestic and the supranational level has remained so far largely overlooked in the study of inter-parliamentary cooperation (for an exception, see Brack & Deruelle, 2016).

By adopting these two different although complementary perspectives (the one of national parliaments and the one of the EP), the objective is to assess, on the one hand, the democratic representativeness inter-parliamentary cooperation is able to ensure, and, on the other, its effectiveness in the fulfilment of the functions it is traditionally assigned.

This contribution seeks to answer the following research questions: whether representativeness is ensured in inter-parliamentary conferences through the involvement of opposition parties (in the selected casestudy); and whether and how this influences the effectiveness of such a conference. In particular, an attempt will be made to understand firstly whether and how many opposition parties participate in inter-parliamentary conferences and, secondly, what their dominant attitude is. It will be evidenced, therefore, whether members of the opposition parties took the floor, on what issues they did, whether they did it with a collaborative or offensive approach and, finally, in certain cases, if they changed their attitude when their parties shifted to the majority.

According to the perspective of the 'Euro-national parliamentary system' (Manzella & Lupo, 2014), inter-parliamentary cooperation is included in the 'polycentric' paradigm that structures the composite European Constitution (Besselink, 2007). Thus, 'the EU should be viewed not only as the result of separate 'levels' – as the 'multilevel' paradigm suggests – but mainly as a constitutional order that is more truly a composite order, a product of polycentric rather than hierarchical relationships' (Griglio & Lupo, 2018). In this framework, inter-parliamentary cooperation is 'not just a marginal element of the activity of every national parliament of the EU' (Fasone & Lupo, 2016), but a vital dimension of their activity. It is this understanding of the role of the many parliaments in the EU that will guide the analysis investigating the role of the opposition parties in inter-parliamentary cooperation and then how MEPs consider interparliamentary cooperation.

To do so, the section examines the potential role of the opposition parties (among which most of the Eurosceptic parties are placed) in inter-parliamentary cooperation, arguing that their inclusion in inter-parliamentary conferences can be among the added values they can bring to the EU decision making in terms of increased democratic representativeness. Potentially, inter-parliamentary conferences could even become the preferred locus of the Europeanization of (Eurosceptic) opposition parties. This potential role is then assessed empirically by analysing the representation of opposition parties in inter-parliamentary conferences on stability, economic coordination and governance in the EU. We then explore the attitudes and

behaviours of parliamentarians toward inter-parliamentary cooperation. Finally, some conclusions are drawn.

## 5.1 Inter-parliamentary cooperation: functions and challenges

Inter-parliamentary cooperation has featured the activity of the EP and national parliaments for many decades now. Thus, this subsection will briefly trace its evolution and focus on the functions fulfilled and the problems that have arisen in their exercise.

First, the functions of inter-parliamentary cooperation will be investigated. Indeed, the functions of inter-parliamentary cooperation may change according to the way in which such cooperation is conceived. Second, the expected results, as well as the effectiveness of inter-parliamentary cooperation and its limits will be assessed, based on existing studies.

### 5.1.1 *The functions of inter-parliamentary cooperation: the issue of representativeness*

Inter-parliamentary cooperation was originally conceived (partly but not only) to tackle the problem of the democratic deficit, a formula that has been very successful in European studies and that has also been used by the EP to seek – once directly elected – an expansion of its powers (Marquand, 1979; Della Cananea, 2003; Ziller, 2013).

Then, when it became clear that this strategy was not sufficient, action was taken on the role of national parliaments. Indeed, democratic legitimacy has always been reflected in two different channels, by the centrality of the representation principle: that of the EP and that of the parliaments of the Member States. There is a ‘double legitimacy’ of the institutions of the Union: the ‘indirect’ one (also called the ‘mediated’ one – Ridola, 2010), which works through the national level, whereby the Governments must be responsive for what they do in Europe in front of their respective parliaments; and the ‘direct’ one, which works through the EP, at least since it was directly elected by the citizens of the Union (see also art. 10 TEU; Crum & Fossum, 2009; Griglio & Lupo, 2012).

The European integration process has produced a strengthening effect on governments (Curtin, 2014), both at the domestic and at supranational levels (Puetter, 2014; Bressanelli & Chielotti, 2017), and an internal change in the dynamics of the national forms of government. At the same time, however, a ‘de-parliamentarization’ process – *i.e.* the taking away of traditional areas of intervention from national parliaments – has also been detected between the EU and the Member States (Cygan, 2013). This is so also due to the fact that the ‘fragmented’ executive power of the EU (Magnette, 1999; Curtin, 2014) increased its strength following the sovereign debt crisis. A revamped intergovernmental dynamic took over and the role of the European Council and of the Eurogroup has become increasingly central. This executive dominance would have required an adequate parliamentary counterweight. Yet, in recent years it appeared clearly that the EP is unable to exercise effective oversight over the European Council and, to a large extent, over the Council (Wessels *et al.*, 2013).

By the same token, national parliaments were likewise unable to control the European Council and the Council. Each national parliament can keep track of its representatives in the European Council and in the Council and of how national interests have been protected in these venues, but there is no democratic control of this institution from a European-wide perspective. Therefore, more than a lack of democracy in Europe, the problems stem from the ‘democratic



disconnect' (Lindseth, 2010) between levels of government and forms of accountability and control. 'In the EU institutional architecture, parliamentary oversight is weakened by the existence of spheres of activity that tend to escape from the two ordinary channels of parliamentary representation' (Griglio & Lupo, 2018). There is a gap in the oversight mechanisms and for this reason, it is important to understand what role, if any, inter-parliamentary conferences can play, 'considering inter-parliamentary cooperation not as an autonomous channel for representation, but as an instrumental dimension that could help the EP and national parliaments to tighten their oversight capacity, in their respective domains' (Griglio & Lupo, 2018), to 're-connect' the national and the European democratic dimensions.

The parliamentary oversight function cannot be located solely at the national level but must be included in the broader relationships that today see parliaments and executive bodies as protagonists in the EU. Indeed, the 'fragmentation' of the executive power makes it elusive to ordinary channels of political responsibility. In this sense, parliamentary oversight often fails to be effective; in order to be effective, given that it is already quite fragmented, it should be more coordinated. First, at the national level: oversight over the executive should work internally and when it operates in European bodies. Secondly, at the level of the EP. Thirdly, the last piece of oversight could take place in a synergic and cooperative manner through inter-parliamentary relationships. Yet, inter-parliamentary cooperation does not have as its ultimate objective that of carrying out a coordinated intervention by national parliaments to exercise the functions of control and direction over the fragmented European executive.

Yet, joint inter-parliamentary oversight is just one and, maybe not the most evident, function inter-parliamentary cooperation can carry out. Indeed, it can fulfil several functions. In the first place, it can be a tool for national parliaments to coordinate with each other and to influence the EU's decision-making process.

Although inter-parliamentary cooperation is encountering difficulties in carrying out its potential coordinated oversight role and it does not (yet) provide a 'democratic counterweight' to the dominance of the EU fragmented executive (Esposito, 2014), this does not mean that inter-parliamentary cooperation is useless. In particular, the cooperation between national Parliaments and the EP can be seen as essential in bringing the EU closer to its citizens. At the same time, cooperation may raise awareness in national parliaments of the European added value of supranational decisions and of the European dimension in which Member States' decisions fit.

The main objectives of inter-parliamentary cooperation are to enhance the exchange of information and the sharing of best practices between the EP and national parliaments, to address the problem of information asymmetry affecting democratic legislatures (Lipps, 2020); and to supervise the enforcement of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. Inter-parliamentary cooperation is a forum for systemic collaboration between the EP and national parliaments on the merits of political decisions taken at supranational level. Relatedly, the sectoral conferences that have been created in recent years have affected policy fields in which the role of national parliaments in their respective legal systems has been gradually weakened (Esposito, 2014) and where the EP is not a decision-maker on an equal footing with the Council. In short, as has been noted, 'inter-parliamentary cooperation is important because it can help both national Parliaments and the EP better carry out their duties' (Lamoso González, 2020; Pokki, 2016). Indeed, 'new powers for the EP cannot fully compensate for the national

Parliaments' loss of authority' (Chatzistavrou & Papanikolaou, 2020; Cooper, 2013). By the same token, the mere strengthening of national Parliaments' prerogatives in the EU cannot balance the limited reach and scope of the EP's powers in certain areas of the EU policy-making.

In addition, inter-parliamentary cooperation has favoured a progressive hybridization of the parliamentary procedures and practices of each assembly through a process of cross-fertilization (Esposito, 2014). In this way, although it remains complicated to imagine a joint exercise of the oversight function by national parliaments through inter-parliamentary cooperation, a 'parliamentarism by connection' has nevertheless been created (Manzella, 2013) which has structured more efficiently the Euro-national parliamentary system. In this sense, the network of conferences and inter-parliamentary meetings allows a mutual influence between the EP and national parliaments, both on the broad orientations and specific issues (Esposito, 2014).

From what has just been outlined in term of functions of inter-parliamentary cooperation, it follows that this form of collaboration amongst legislatures has some potential to enhance the democratic representativeness of the Union. Representativeness is a polysemic word. In constitutional theory, the representativeness of a body is given by the presence in the right proportions of the representatives of most political forces active in a certain polity. In particular 'representativeness requires that there is a link (and at the same time some relative autonomy of both poles) between society and political institutions' (Goldoni, 2015; Urbinati, 2006).

Inter-parliamentary cooperation is not 'embodied' in a specific institution, and as such its representativeness is not fixed once and for all. The representativeness of inter-parliamentary cooperation rather depends, on the one hand, on the varied and moving composition of its venues, in particular of inter-parliamentary conferences; notably on how inclusive they are, on whether they try and manage to faithfully reflect the composition of the parliaments they are made of, especially representing the opposition, which are otherwise excluded from any possibility to make their voice heard or to channel their discontent at supranational parliamentary level. On the other hand, the representativeness of inter-parliamentary cooperation is endowed in the linkage function of the latter: namely, the aim of inter-parliamentary cooperation to reconcile the European and national interests of the European citizens across the Member States at the supranational level. Once again, also in this case, the ability to re-connect and make known the national minorities/oppositions' views in the EU is, potentially, an important representative function that none but parliaments together and in a coordinated manner can fulfil institutionally.

### ***5.1.2 The effectiveness of inter-parliamentary cooperation and its limits***

Today, after 30 years of Conference of Community and European Affairs Committees of Parliaments of the European Union (COSAC) activities and after almost seven years since the setting up of the Conference on stability, coordination and governance in the EU, it is possible to provide a first critical assessment of inter-parliamentary cooperation's effectiveness – that is, the ability to deliver the public goods it is expected to provide amongst the many identified in the previous section (offering a tool of collaborative inter-parliamentary scrutiny, rebalancing the information gap through exchange of views and practices, favouring a process of mutual learning through national parliament's Europeanization) and that can be ultimately traced back to the final goal of strengthening democratic representativeness (and accountability) in the EU.

The prevailing opinion on inter-parliamentary cooperation, however, is that, its outputs are marginal and disappointing compared to the expectation of democratic enhancement of the EU decision-making process it has triggered. Members of Parliament attend these meetings but not much happens afterward (Fasone, 2012).

If the objective is to control the fragmented European executive, this criticism is probably justified. However, as mentioned above, other important results have been achieved by inter-parliamentary cooperation: countering the problem of the information asymmetry of parliaments; stimulating greater awareness of the European dimension of parliamentary activity; promoting the hybridization of parliamentary procedures and practices; increasing in multilateral and bilateral relations between parliaments (Esposito, 2014). Ultimately, the combination of these functions has produced some concrete results. However, the sentiment that seems to prevail is that of the limited effectiveness of inter-parliamentary cooperation.

In part, this disappointment about the results of inter-parliamentary cooperation is well-grounded. For example, COSAC, the oldest interparliamentary conference at committee level still lacks tools to effectively intervene in the European decision-making process – also, given the fact that its decisions are not binding on the European institutions or on the national parliaments.

Another point that further weakens the effectiveness of inter-parliamentary cooperation is that there are different perceptions about its objectives amongst national Parliaments and between them and the EP. Some consider inter-parliamentary cooperation only suitable for debates on general issues, or ‘discussion forums’ (for example: the EP), whereas others consider it a useful way to scrutinize EU affairs, and to create a ‘supervisory body’ – as is advanced by the French Parliament (Lamoso González, 2020; Esposito, 2014).

The potential of inter-parliamentary cooperation has not been fully exploited, due to organizational inefficiencies. Meetings on general topics and the tendency of parliamentarians to read pre-made speeches are some of the symptoms of this sub-optimal achievements of inter-parliamentary cooperation. The meetings are often not adequately prepared and the parliamentarians who participate in the meetings are appointed at the very last moment and therefore without a necessary preparation (Esposito, 2014).

Furthermore, the effectiveness of inter-parliamentary cooperation has been influenced by some different visions of its role. Art. 12 TEU is an invitation to cooperation between the national and the European legislatures, as opposed to the competition that existed between both levels of legislatures in the past. Initially, there was a real reluctance from the EP to engage in inter-parliamentary cooperation (Casalena, Lupo & Fasone, 2013; Neunreither, 2005).

So the issue of power-relations between the EP and national parliaments in inter-parliamentary conferences triggered a tense situation, which hid a much more important issue behind it. A deeply-rooted diversity of approaches to inter-parliamentary cooperation (Kreilinger, 2013; Cooper, 2014; Cooper, 2016a): the EP, with the support of a few national parliaments, advocated a model of centralized oversight, in which there is only one EU-level parliamentary body exercising scrutiny over the EU, the EP itself (Cooper, 2016b).

Such conceptions are based on Articles 9 and 10 of Title II of Protocol no. 1 attached to the Lisbon Treaty, which outlines two distinct models of inter-parliamentary cooperation: one

general and which sees the EP as co-protagonist, the other focused on the COSAC model, in which each parliament has an equal weight. The issue also has an impact on the role of inter-parliamentary conferences on stability, economic coordination, and governance in the EU: 'by implication, in the first model, the Article 13 Conference is and ought to remain a body of marginal importance that merely enables inter-parliamentary consultation, whereas in the second model it should play a direct and robust role in the parliamentary oversight of EU economic governance' (Cooper, 2016b: 2).

These conflicts divide national parliaments and the EP on the nature, scope, and objectives of sectoral conferences in the general framework of inter-parliamentary cooperation. Because of these conflicting views, the 'multilevel parliamentary field' (Crum & Fossum, 2009) often turns into a 'battlefield' in which relations between national parliaments and the EP are guided by competition rather than cooperation models. European democracy is still heavily based on legitimacy and democratic resources drawn from national parliaments (Bellamy & Kröger, 2014).

Those who start from this last assumption, however, then see as disappointing the fact that traditional models of inter-parliamentary cooperation within the EU, although they have developed considerably in recent decades, have failed to go much beyond the exchange of good practices and, in the best case, information between the various parliamentarians (Fasone, 2009; Crum & Fossum, 2013; Esposito, 2014).

This diversity of conceptions was also present when the new sectoral inter-parliamentary conferences were established (the CFSP-CSDP and the SECG Conferences), in policy-fields where inter-governmental decision-making method prevails.

Inter-parliamentary conferences recently set up, on foreign and defense policy, and then on the economic governance, following Art. 9 of Protocol no 1 to the Treaty of Lisbon, tend to endorse the EP's perspective of the unequal representation of the parliaments in favour of the supranational legislature (in contrast to COSAC). Yet, the format is not particularly innovative and its implementation has not opened up new perspectives for inter-parliamentary cooperation. Moreover, the establishment of these inter-parliamentary conferences has proved to be very tiring so far and the first steps they have taken have not been encouraging (Lupo, 2014a).

If, on the one hand, some believe that these new inter-parliamentary conferences may be a new way for more effective parliamentary oversight, on the other hand, others consider that, for example, the passage from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Western EU (WEU), dissolved in June 2011, to the new Inter-parliamentary Conference on CFSP, established after long negotiations (Wouters & Raube, 2012; Esposito, 2014) in April 2012, resulted in a weakening of inter-parliamentary cooperation mechanisms. Indeed, national parliaments lost a permanent assembly for exchanging their views with European institutions, organized in transnational groups and specialized committees, and gained an inter-parliamentary conference, organized in national delegations, without any secretariat and with little interaction with European decision-makers (Herranz & Surrallés, 2014). This also explains well the difficulties first encountered in drafting and in implementing the rules of procedure of inter-parliamentary conference on stability, economic coordination and governance in the EU.

It is these conferences that will be treated in the next subsections of the paper as the case study for our analysis. In order to assess if and how inter-parliamentary cooperation contributes to democratic representativeness, a comparative quantitative analysis of the delegations sent to this conference will be offered, with a special focus on the representation of the oppositions; subsequently the effectiveness of this conference will be tested through a qualitative analysis of the debates that took place in two representative inter-parliamentary conferences on stability, coordination and economic governance in the EU to check if and how MPs and MEPs from the opposition parties participate in the conferences and with what attitude. The result of the ESPOLE-EPG MEP survey (2020) will complement the investigation by providing hints on the MEP's perception on inter-parliamentary cooperation's effectiveness and ability to enhance the democratic representativeness. It confirms the traditional reservations of the EP toward shifting the function of inter-parliamentary cooperation from forum of exchange of information and of best practices to joint parliamentary control.

## 5.2 The composition of delegations to inter-parliamentary conferences: in particular, the presence of the opposition parties

As anticipated, scholars have detected at least three kinds of possible 'added value' brought by the involvement of national parliaments in the EU and by the engagement in inter-parliamentary cooperation. First, an increase in the level of dissemination of information about the EU and a greater awareness of the national public opinions (Griglio & Lupo, 2018). Second, a more effective supervision of the EU fragmented executive, which the instruments of inter-parliamentary cooperation should help make it more accountable (Griglio & Lupo, 2018). Thirdly, the participation of opposition parties in EU decision-making (Bellamy & Kröger, 2014; Kröger & Bellamy, 2016; Karlsson & Persson, 2020). For all of these three forms of 'added values', the participation of opposition parties is decisive although it is made directly visible only in the third one. As regards the first aspect, national public opinions will probably regard inter-parliamentary cooperation in which opposition parties also participate as more democratic. Not only that: the latter could also give more information on inter-parliamentary conferences in which they participated, even if in a way that contrast or oppose the results achieved; and, yet, this improves the process of democratic deliberation. As regards the second aspect, it is clear that an effective parliamentary control cannot be kept separated from the participation of opposition parties. On the third aspect, the involvement of national opposition parties in European decision-making can also be ensured through their participation in inter-parliamentary conferences.

Participation in the various inter-parliamentary formats is in itself a way to involve national parliaments and, indirectly, (national) public opinion in the EU decision-making process (Lupo, 2013; Heffttler *et al.*, 2015). In particular, it is precisely the presence of representatives of opposition parties that can best achieve these objectives.

The hypothesis behind the empirical research is that the presence of opposition parties in inter-parliamentary conferences can somehow increase the democratic representative capacity of inter-parliamentary cooperation and of the euro-national parliamentary system, more in general. Indeed, given that most Member States have parliamentary forms of government, only the executive, and thus its majority, is represented in the European intergovernmental institutions, such as the European Council and the Council.

It should be immediately clarified that the national delegate selection procedures are not dealt with in this research (which would open up a whole other stream of investigation linked to national constitutional and parliamentary law). On the contrary, the present research aims to analyse the composition of selected national delegations, looking for members of the opposition parties within these delegations. It suffices to say that in the EP (elected in 2019) some 400 members are from parties that are not part of the national governments' majorities.

The involvement of the opposition parties at national level in European decision-making may, in some way, institutionalize them, especially regarding those from the Eurosceptic front. The latter grew in various European states in the aftermath of the financial crisis (Borriello & Brack, 2019) and have been further nurtured within the several crises the EU has faced lately (the migration and refugee crisis, the rule of law crisis up to the pandemic).

Thus, several parties usually labelled as 'Eurosceptics' and 'populists' (of course, these are different phenomena, although they often tend to coincide) have benefitted from an increasing electoral success until now (De Vries & Hobolt, 2020). They can be located on both sides of the political spectrum and are articulated with various ideological positions. While there are xenophobic and anti-migration positions (Front National/Rassemblement National, PVV), other support egalitarian, and anti-austerity positions (Podemos, Syriza, La France Insoumise), or more ambiguous positions (Movimento 5 Stelle) (Borriello & Brack, 2019).

Their success has been evident in the so-called 'debtor States': one case at hand is Italy, where two populist parties made up a quite heterogeneous governmental majority from June 2018 to August 2019, and one of them is still the major partner of a coalition government. In Greece, Syriza ruled the country from 2015 to 2019. However, the success of the FPÖ in Austria and the results of the AfD in the German parliamentary elections, or even the case of the French sovereignist party of Le Pen, have shown that this trend is not limited to southern countries. These parties share a common opposition to the current European political system, although for different reasons (Borriello & Brack, 2019; Brack, 2018; Zeitlin *et al.*, 2019).

Therefore, the involvement of the opposition in inter-parliamentary cooperation and, in particular, in inter-parliamentary conferences, is a factor capable of changing the face and functions of inter-parliamentary relationships themselves. If the delegations to inter-parliamentary conferences would be only composed majority parties in government, it is highly probable that they would simply replicate the positions of the governments within the conferences. It would, therefore, have, at most, a function of exchange of best practices, but it would not bring anything more in democratic terms. Indeed, 'a parliament is not a homogeneous bloc, but a *lieu* of political antagonism where big or small majorities have the last say on formulating parliamentary positions' (Chatzistavrou & Papanikolaou, 2020: 178).

The partisan composition of delegations is important for at least two reasons: it is key to the democratic representativeness of the deliberative process itself; it is likely to have an impact on the outcome and, thus, on the effectiveness.

While there is intense research on the institutional dimension of inter-parliamentary cooperation, much less is known about the involvement of partisan actors, and more specifically of opposition (and anti-EU parties) in it. Our research is a first step toward filling this gap.

The analysis of the composition of delegations to inter-parliamentary conferences and of the role of representatives from opposition parties within the delegations is useful to see if there is a connection between effectiveness and representativeness. The idea is that participation in inter-parliamentary cooperation of opposition parties and, in particular, of the Eurosceptic parties, may serve to ensure them a role in the decision-making process and to make them somehow involved in it.

### ***5.2.1 The case study: Inter-parliamentary Conference on stability, economic coordination and governance in the EU***

Without doubts, the economic and financial crisis has not only brought turmoil in the national party systems, as just explained, but has changed the role of parliaments in European economic governance and consequently also in inter-parliamentary cooperation (Crum, 2018; Lupo & Griglio, 2018). If someone had seen them as losers of European integration (Maurer & Wessels, 2001; Kiiver, 2006), their condition could be considered even worse – for some of them, at least – with the creation of the European Semester, at the same time national legislatures ‘have made first steps in adapting to the crisis-induced EU fiscal regime within the margins of the Treaties and domestic constitutions’ (Jancic, 2016, 3). In fact, ‘they have acquired various rights of approval in the European Semester, strengthened the accountability of national governments, reinforced their scrutiny over budgeting and EU decision making, improved their access to information and created new domestic and supranational avenues for debate and political contestation of EU fiscal integration’ (Jancic, 2016: 3).

This optimistic view is counter-balanced by those who highlight a process of asymmetric disempowerment of national parliaments, depending on the constitutional, political and economic situation they are confronted with. Inevitably all national legislatures are called to face important information asymmetries in respect to their executives, that are placed at the core also of the European part of the procedures, as members of the European Council and the Council (Crum, 2018). By contrast, the EP could control the adoption of some of the Euro-crisis measures but not their implementation.

The crisis, with the use of unpopular austerity measures, has probably led to a degradation of the output legitimacy of the EU. This has led to a more incessant need for the proper functioning of the mechanisms of legitimacy based on input and also of those that leverage the procedures with which decisions are made, recently traced back to the third form of legitimacy, defined as throughput legitimacy (Schmidt, 2012). For this reason, too, it was decided, within the framework of the Fiscal compact, to strengthen the democratic accountability of the EU’s new procedures, making full use of the resources of parliamentary representation, in the EP as well as in the national Parliaments (Habermas, 2012; Nicolaidis, 2013; Bellamy, 2013). Inter-parliamentary conference on stability, economic coordination and governance in the EU is a by-product of the sovereign debt crisis. Article 13 of the Fiscal compact thus established that parliaments, under the provisions of Protocol no. 1 on the role of the national parliaments annexed to the TEU, together with the EP, define the organization and promotion of a conference of representatives of the respective committees responsible for matters of the EP and of the national parliaments for the discussion of budgetary and other policies matters falling within the scope of the Treaty itself. This conference includes representatives of the EP and of the national parliaments of all the Member States of the EU, and not only of those signatories of the Fiscal Compact or those of the Eurozone (Esposito, 2014). The possibility of

configuring a restricted – or in any case ‘variable geometry’ – inter-parliamentary conference was not pursued, as had been hypothesized in the literature (Martinico, 2012).

The ambiguous formulation of the provision – which refers to Title II of Protocol no. 1, and therefore both to Article 9 and to Article 10, which, as mentioned above, outline two distinct models of inter-parliamentary cooperation – is due precisely, in a fairly rapid, but remarkably complex, negotiating process (Kreilinger, 2013; Esposito, 2014), to the desire not to give credit, at that stage, neither to the EP (which pushed for the reference to Article 9) or to the national Parliaments (which would have preferred an explicit reference to Article 10).

The implementation, very tiring and unsatisfactory to date (Kreilinger, 2013; Lupo, 2014b), of this inter-parliamentary conference was precisely hindered by this same contrast. Indeed, the creation of the conference itself was the subject of heated debates, especially about its structure and composition, and was formally established by the conference of the presidents of the parliaments of the EU on April 23, 2013, in Nicosia. It then met for the first time in Lithuania on 16 and 17 October 2013 and struggled to adopt stable internal rules. The Rules of Procedure of the conference were adopted only in 2015.

Relatedly and from the perspective of the majority-opposition dynamic, the inter-parliamentary conference on stability, economic coordination and governance in the EU is an interesting example. ‘The early history of the Article 13 Conference may be understood as an instance of the politicization of inter-parliamentary relations in the EU’ (Cooper, 2016b, 1), looking at potential political conflicts cutting across the different delegations. However, ‘the principal cleavage among the participants was not a left-right divide over economic policy (eg pro- vs. anti-austerity), which is perhaps surprising given that this was the ostensible subject matter of the conference, as well as probably the most salient policy question facing the EU at that time. Nor was it a cleavage between proponents and opponents of European integration’ (Cooper, 2016b: 1)<sup>29</sup>.

In the case of the conference on stability, economic coordination, and governance in the EU (SECG), the function of democratic control is regulated in Article 2.1. of the Rules of Procedure. According to Article 2.1. RoP, the Conference is entitled both to provide a framework for debate and exchange of information and best practices and to ‘ensuring democratic accountability in the area of economic governance and budgetary policy in the EU, particularly in the EMU, taking into account the social dimension and without prejudice to the competences of EU Parliaments’ (Article 2.1. RoP).

The Presidency conclusions adopted at the end of the meeting held in Vilnius on 16-17 October 2013 (paragraph 5) highlighted that the first purpose of the Conference is ‘to find the right

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<sup>29</sup> In fact, ‘the principal cleavage was over the internal question (of little concern to the general public) of whether to create a weak conference with a narrow scope (as preferred by the EP and its allies) or a strong conference with a broad scope (as preferred by some parliaments)’ (Cooper, 2016b, 2). As Cooper continues: ‘For these purposes, a ‘weak’ conference is one that cannot make collective decisions, whereas a ‘strong’ conference has at least the minimal power to do so (eg by adopting non-binding ‘conclusions’); moreover, a conference with a ‘narrow’ scope is focused on the implementation of the terms of the Fiscal Treaty, *i.e.* budgetary rules and economic policy coordination, whereas one with a ‘broad’ scope covers a wider array of issues, including e.g. financial regulation’.



balance between national parliaments and the EP in organizing the exercise of parliamentary control in the area of the economic and financial governance’.

We must also bear in mind that there are strong asymmetries in the control powers of the national parliaments on the actions of their governments in the field of economic policy (Auel & Höing, 2014). From this point of view, therefore, stronger parliaments could have the opportunity, in this venue, to share not only their information but also their experiences. Potentially, this Conference provides an opportunity to exchange information on best practices in implementing the Semester cycles and to strengthen cooperation to scrutinize the actions of the executive at national and European levels.

It should be noted that the composition of each national delegation has not been defined since it has instead been established that it will be up to each Parliament to determine its size: an evident sign of the difficulty of finding an agreement in this regard, which instead could have been outlined – as claimed by the EP (Esposito, 2014) – on that achieved for the inter-parliamentary conference on the CFSP-CSDP (6 members for each national Parliament, 16 members for the EP). A body with a generalized and quantitatively uncertain composition has difficulty in making decisions as well as in exerting an effective control (Lupo, 2014b).

The conference meets twice every year. Also on the frequency of the conference’s meetings, there were several proposals. In the end, it was decided to hold two meetings per year: in the first part of the year, on the occasion of the ‘EPary Week’, the conference is hosted by the EP (and co-hosted and co-chaired by the EP and the presidency parliament), while the meeting in the second half of the year is hosted and chaired by the presidency parliament.

The decision to have the first meeting of the conference held every year within the so-called EPary Week has both advantages and disadvantages. The EPary Week attracts a high number of MEPs among the parliamentarians. This tends to draw more attention from European institutions than the other SECG meetings. Such inter-parliamentary meetings can also offer opportunities to interact with Commission members (and with the Directorate-Generals). However, it has been argued that were meetings of the SECG Conference better synchronized with the calendar of the European Semester, it could considerably strengthen democratic scrutiny of both European and national executives (Barrett, 2018). The choice to hold the first conference during the EPary week raised some doubts, given that the European Semester is just at the beginning in that period: ‘this is extremely early in the ‘European Semester’, as it takes place just after the Commission publicizes the Annual Growth Survey (AGS) at the end of the previous year’ (Cooper, 2016b: 10). But before most of the key decision-making points in the cycle, such as when EU leaders endorse economic priorities based on the AGS (March), or when the Commission adopts country-specific recommendations (May-June) which are then debated and endorsed by national ministers and EU leaders (June-July)’ (Cooper, 2016b: 10). The apparent *rationale* for holding the meeting so early, according to an EP document explaining the European semester, is that in this way the EP may consult with national parliaments before holding its debate on the Annual Growth Survey (Cooper, 2016b).

In general, the added value of this conference, given that its conclusions have no binding force, ‘is not in the power of decision making but in the deliberation that informs and legitimizes this process’ (Jancic, 2016; see also Maurer, 2013; Kunstein & Wessels, 2013; Buzogány, 2013) and in the fact that it restricts ‘the information gap between parliamentarians, the highly

interdependent domestic budgetary processes profit from less political fragmentation and alienation' (Jancic, 2016: 18; see also Wessels, 2013). On the other hand, although they cannot make decisions, there is the possibility of approving 'conclusions', which can produce some politically relevant effect, above all in terms of 'joint oversight'.

### ***5.2.2 The selection of national parliament's delegations***

To verify the participation of the opposition parties in Inter-parliamentary conference on stability, economic coordination and governance in the EU, a choice had to be made regarding national delegations to consider in this study, on top of the EP's delegations. The parliamentary delegations selected are those of Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Poland and Spain.

This selection of countries is representative of both founding countries and newly acceding countries; but also large, medium and small countries; Eurozone and non-Eurozone Member States; and northern and southern European countries. Indeed, as anticipated, the financial crisis has also given rise to asymmetries between the parliaments of creditor and debtor states. We intend to consider also the role of the Eurosceptic parties especially in those States where they are in opposition (see: de Vries, 2018). In Poland and Italy, for example, we can try to see if and how the participation of MPs changed before and after, respectively, 2015 and 2018 (when the Eurosceptic parties moved from the opposition to the Government). We can try to see what was the change in inter-parliamentary cooperation before these political forces went to the government and later.

The period of inter-parliamentary cooperation that will be considered is the one that begins in 2013, when Inter-parliamentary conferences on stability, economic coordination, and governance in the EU, the focus of our analysis, was established, until today. Indeed, especially for Eurosceptic parties, the issue of European economic governance is central and many of their claims revolve around the European fiscal rules.

Within the Conference on stability, coordination and governance in the EU, the role of opposition parties (and Eurosceptic parties) is expected to be of fundamental importance, because fiscal issues are central in the political programmes of many of these parties. On the economic and financial issues, precisely following the economic-financial crisis and public debts, many opposition parties have leveraged to make very strong criticisms not only of the government majorities but also of the EU itself and the Economic and Monetary Union.

In the countries of southern Europe, for example, there was a strong controversy against austerity policies, which was seen as imposed by the Economic and Monetary Union. Conversely, the opposition parties of the northern European countries have stirred the opposite controversies, accusing their governments and the EU of having done too much for the debtor states, overlooking the interest of the national citizens and taxpayers.

On the other hand, it is easy to criticize, for the oppositions, what the government – and therefore the parliamentary majority – did in Brussels, given that the opposition parties have no role in those decisions. Just as the EU has been used by government and majority parties to release responsibility for certain choices, in the same way, it is easy for opposition parties to attack government and majority on European issues. *A fortiori*, on economic and financial

issues: it is not only a matter of absolute importance in the political dynamics, but also in these issues the opposition parties have been able to unload all their Euroscepticism.

It can also be seen in 2020 how often some topics related to the economic and monetary governance of the EU are easy targets of opposition and populist parties. Among others, for example, it is useful to recall the political controversy that arose in Italy on the possible use of the European stability mechanism following the Covid-19 crisis. Another example is the clashes that arose between the ‘frugal four’ and the other member states on the architecture and the functioning of the recovery fund.

### ***5.2.3 The representativeness of the delegations to inter-parliamentary conferences on stability, economic coordination and governance in the EU: the place of opposition parties***

This first part of the empirical analysis will look at the composition of the parliamentary delegations to inter-parliamentary conference on stability, economic coordination and governance in the EU, at their representativeness and inclusion of representatives from opposition parties in the selected cases.

It was possible to find the lists of participants to all the meetings of this inter-parliamentary conferences, except for those that took place in Nicosia in 2013, in Brussels in 2014, and in Luxembourg in 2015. The list of participants in the meetings (in a few cases in draft version) was available online. It included very often also the party affiliation of the participants. When the information was not available, the party affiliation has been derived from the names of the MPs.

In addition, it can be noted that the European political family of which the parliamentarians of the national delegations are part of is also reported online for the conferences organized in Brussels. Yet, for meetings organized by national parliaments only, the lists of participants do not follow a uniform procedure. Sometimes, the political families to which they belong are disclosed; other times, however, only their position and function within the national Parliament is made available. Indeed, it should be noted that the lists that can be retrieved online also present significant differences: while some indicate not only the name of the national parliamentarians who participate in the conference but also the party to which they belong and the European political party, others report only the name of the European political group and, some, only the name and the role of those attending the meeting (sometimes not even dividing the members between the upper and lower houses in the cases of bicameral national parliaments). In our database, to report which parties were in the majority and in opposition within the national forms of government at the time of the various conferences we used the platform [www.parlgov.org](http://www.parlgov.org).<sup>30</sup>

We considered two types of information: first, the composition of delegations to inter-parliamentary conferences (name of the delegates and party affiliation); second, the composition of national parliaments and cabinets. Therefore, the contribution analyses the parliamentary delegations of seven countries, linking them to the governmental majorities then in place, and we evidence how many members of the opposition parties attended inter-

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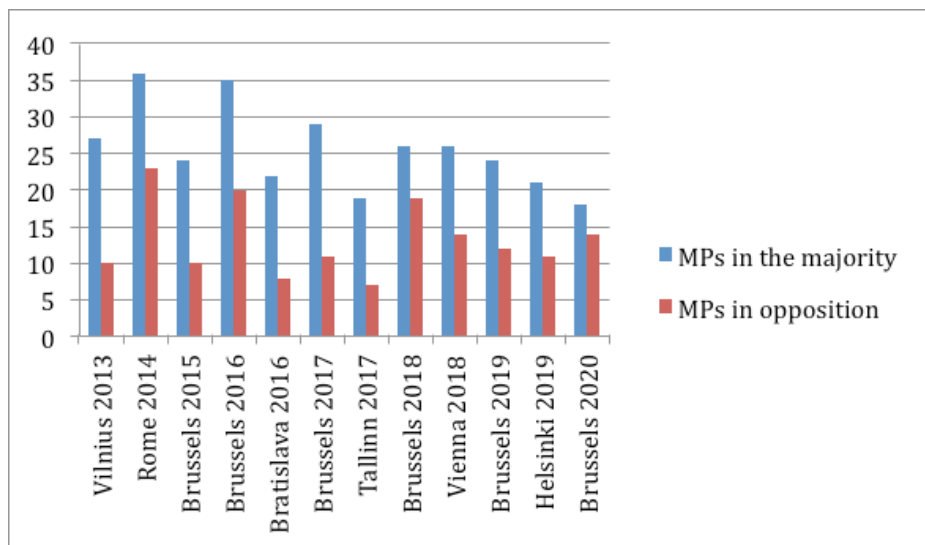
<sup>30</sup> ParlGov is a data infrastructure for political science and contains information for all EU and most OECD democracies (37 countries). The database combines approximately 1700 parties, 990 elections (9300 results), and 1600 cabinets (3800 parties).

parliamentary conferences and from which parties, as well as how they have contributed to the conference’s activities. For all delegations, we have considered the effective attendance to 12 Inter-parliamentary conferences on stability, economic coordination, and governance in the EU.

The analysis shows, first of all, that the parliamentary delegations of the various Member States are very different as for their size and composition: this reflects the diverse structure and size of national parliaments. Second, it emerges that opposition parties are often represented to a good extent. The averages were calculated by taking the total number of members of each national delegation at all inter-parliamentary conferences on Stability, economic coordination and governance and, then, by averaging those who were parliamentarians of the majority parties and those of the opposition parties participating in the 12 conferences examined.

These averages are useful also for understanding how many members of the majority parties took part, on average, in the same conferences. In this way, we can see if the participation of the opposition parties is robust or sporadic, even though the average does not allow to compare the representativeness of the delegation *vis-à-vis* to the specific Parliament considered – which can be more or less fragmented in terms of political groups in which it is divided.

Figure 5.1: Overall number of MPs of the 7 national delegations analysed, divided by majority and opposition, attending the conferences



Source: Website of inter-parliamentary conferences at ipex.eu

Let us now go into more detail, at the level of individual delegations.

The Danish Folketing, a unicameral Parliament, has 179 members and sends on average 1.08 parliamentarians to the conference of whom 0.6 are of the opposition. However, it can be seen that in 7 out of 12 conferences there is only one parliamentarian (of the majority or the opposition) at inter-parliamentary conferences, while just in one meeting there was more than one parliamentarian (5 in Brussels 2018). The Folketing did not send any MP to 4 conferences. In the period covered 2013-early 2020, 5 governments followed one another (Thorning-Schmidt I governments; Thorning-Schmidt II; Rasmussen L II; Rasmussen L III and Frederiksen). They were all minority governments, and this may partly explain the results. In essence, the

Danish Parliament, within a non-Eurozone country, hardly participates in the Conference and, when the delegation has participated, it has represented the opposition better than the majority.

The French National Assembly currently has 577 members, while the French Senate has 348 seats. In France, over the period considered there were seven governments (Ayrault II; Valls I; Valls II; Valls III; Cazeneuve; Philippe I and Philippe II) and two Presidents. The French delegations, on closer inspection, are quite heterogeneous over time in terms of size and composition. The members of the National Assembly are more numerous than those of the Senate. On the whole, the average number of parliamentarians attending the conferences is 7.9; of these, on average 2.1 were opposition MPs. Clearly, this is not a very high number of opposition representatives compared to those of the majority, the lowest compared to the other founding Member States in the sample, Germany and Italy. The National Assembly sends 4.5 parliamentarians on average, 0.5 of whom from opposition parties. The Senate, on the other hand, sends an average of 3.4 MPs and an average of 1.6 MPs from the opposition and, as well know, it does not entertain a confidence relationship with the Government. The data, therefore, shows that the members of the National Assembly are slightly more numerous than those of the Senate; in the Senate, however, there is often an equal composition of the delegation between majority and opposition parties; the latter, on the contrary, are poorly represented in the delegation of the National Assembly.

The *Congreso de los Diputados* currently has 350 members, while the *Senado de España* 265 members. In Spain, there were 7 governments from 2013 to 2020, with three different parliamentary majorities (the Rajoy governments were supported by the Popular Party, the first two Sanchez governments by the Socialist Party and the Catalan Socialist Party, while, as is known, the last government led by Sanchez, currently in office, is supported by a majority made up of several parties). On average, 4 Spanish parliamentarians have participated in the conference's meetings, a smaller number than the other delegations analysed here, similar to the Italian one, but smaller than the French and German delegations. There are no appreciable differences between the *Congreso de Los diputados* and *Senado*. Within the Spanish delegations on average there were 2.3 parliamentarians of the opposition parties. Therefore, the Spanish delegations are unbalanced in favor of the opposition and this can be probably traced back to the phase of unprecedented governmental instability Spain has faced over the last few years and to the formation of minority governments. A parallel can be drawn with the Danish Parliament: as can be seen from the data, the Spanish Parliament sends few representatives to the conferences and, in some of them (Brussels 2016 and 2018, Vienna 2018, Brussels 2019 and 2020) the opposition is more represented than the majority.

At present the *Bundestag* has 709 members, while the *Bundesrat* has 69 members. Germany has had only two governments since the end of 2013, both chaired by Angela Merkel and both supported by the grand coalition between CDU, CSU, and SPD. The analysis of the German delegations at inter-parliamentary conferences shows that the German Parliament has always been represented by a rather large delegation. In particular, that of the *Bundestag*, which in the 12 conferences taken into consideration never falls below 5 representatives. The same cannot be said of the *Bundesrat*: if in two conferences (Vilnius and Brussels 2015) its delegation was made up of 3 members, it often did not send any representatives to the conferences considered. In general, between the *Bundestag* and the *Bundesrat*, there is an average of representatives at the 12 meetings of 7.25 parliamentarians and, among these, an average of

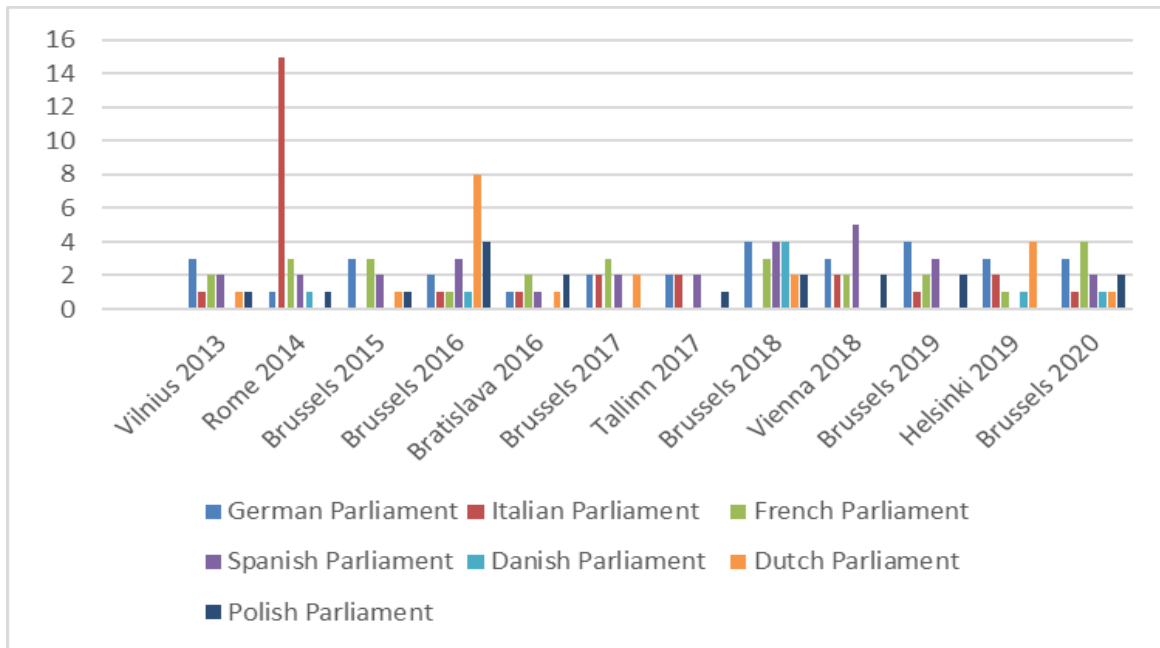
2.5 opposition MPs. In particular, an average of 8.5 MPs from the *Bundestag* was present, while an average of 1.08 MPs for the *Bundesrat*. The asymmetric representation of the two Chambers can be explained by their role in the German constitutional system, the *Bundestag* being the House representing the People, while the *Bundesrat* represents the *Länder*. Moreover, only the *Bundestag* is linked to the Government through the confidence relationship and has a general power to pass legislation. From the perspective of the political composition of the German delegation, the members of the opposition have grown over time: if they were 3 out of 12 in Vilnius in 2013 and 1 out of 7 in Rome in 2014, they became 3 out of 7 members in Vienna in 2018, even 4 out of 7 members in Brussels in 2018 and 4 out of 8 members in Brussels in 2019 (to then settle at 3 out of 6 members in Helsinki 2019 and Brussels 2020). Of the members of the national oppositions who attended the meetings, those of the parties Die Linke, Verdi, and AfD prevail.

The Italian Chamber of Deputies currently has 630 members, while the Senate of the Republic 320. From 2013 to 2020, Italy had six different governments (Letta I; Letta II; Renzi; Gentiloni; Conte I and Conte II) supported by different parliamentary majorities. The analysis of the Italian delegations shows first of all how Italy, for example in comparison with the German delegations, sends rather small delegations to inter-parliamentary conferences, generally made up by a couple of parliamentarians for each chamber in a system featured by a symmetric bicameralism. The average number of parliamentarians attending the conferences is in this case influenced by the 2014 inter-parliamentary conference in Rome, in which 19 deputies and 12 senators took part, within an unusual delegation of 31 parliamentarians. If we do not consider the Rome conference, however, the average of parliamentarians attending was 4.36 and that of opposition was 1.18. The Chamber of Deputies sent an average of 3.41 deputies, while the Senate of the Republic an average of 3.25. There is a significant difference here with the German delegations, in which the role of the *Bundestag vis-à-vis* the *Bundesrat* stood out. The Italian delegations of the two chambers have almost the same size, but this is probably due to the already recalled symmetric bicameralism, where both Chambers can confer or withdraw the confidence to the Government, and to the Senate's very active participation in EU affairs (Bartolucci, 2014). In general, as can be seen from the data, the delegation of the Italian Parliament has become thinner over the years.

The Dutch lower house (*Tweede Kamer*) has 150 members and the higher one (*Eerste Kamer*) 75. Just like in the case of the Italian delegations, one stands out in number in the Dutch case: the delegation sent at the EPary Week in 2016 co-hosted and co-chaired by the Dutch Parliament and the EP. There were 17 parliamentarians attending, 9 from the majority and 8 from the opposition.

The Polish lower house (*Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*) has 460 members, while the Polish Senate 100 members. Poland has had 5 governments since 2013 (Tusk II; Kopacz; Szydło; Morawiecki I; Morawiecki II). In particular, the October 2015 elections marked a real turning point in Polish politics. If, in fact, before that date, the Tusk II and Kopacz governments were supported by the Civic Platform and Polish People's Party parties, after the 2015 elections the governments were single-colored PiS (Law and Justice Party). On average, the Polish Parliament sends 5.3 parliamentarians to each conference: in particular, between the two chambers, 3.8 majority parliamentarians, and 1.5 parliamentarians from the opposition parties. There are no noticeable changes in the pre and post 2015 delegations.

Figure 5.2: Representation of MPs from the opposition in the Conferences by national Parliament



Source: Website of inter-parliamentary conferences at ipex.eu

Finally, it is important to analyse the EP’s delegations at the same conferences. As evidenced in state of the art, interparliamentary cooperation at the EU level is most often envisaged through the role, power and viewpoints of national parliament(arian)s. This is not particularly surprising: national MPs are more numerous and they are the originally external actors<sup>31</sup> for which the successive EU treaties paved the way for participation in EU decision-making. The EP, in contrast, is most often studied for its increased powers and independence within the EU polity (see: *supra*). Interparliamentary cooperation nevertheless includes both national and EU parliaments, while the EP has proved particularly influential in determining the evolution of such cooperation (for an overview of its initiatives, see: Fromage, 2016) and ultimately to enhance its own position (Brack & Deruelle, 2016: 145). Accordingly, the aim of this sub-section is to introduce and give substance to the EU-branch.

In terms of data, we rely on the composition of interparliamentary body to analyse, much like we do with national parliaments, who among MEPs sits within these bodies. To this end, we considered the national party of EP’s delegates, and checked whether for each conference that party was in the majority or in the opposition at the domestic level. We used this method of analysis also given the highly variable majorities in the EP and the fact that the European Commission is usually invested with a large majority, then almost never replicated in

<sup>31</sup> Although prior to 1979, MEPs were indeed national MPs designated by their respective parliaments, and the introduction of direct elections in 1979 did not automatically suppressed that type of dual mandate, a European Council decision of 2002 states that ‘From the EP elections in 2004, the office of MEP shall be incompatible with that of member of a national parliament’. [Council Decision of 25 June and 23 September 2002 amending the Act concerning the election of the representatives of the EP by direct universal suffrage, annexed to Decision 76/787/ECSC, EEC, Euratom (2002/772/EC, Euratom) – *Official Journal* L 283, 21/10/2002, pp.1-4].

subsequent deliberations (on the absence of the majority/opposition cleavage in the EP, see Rizzoni, 2013).

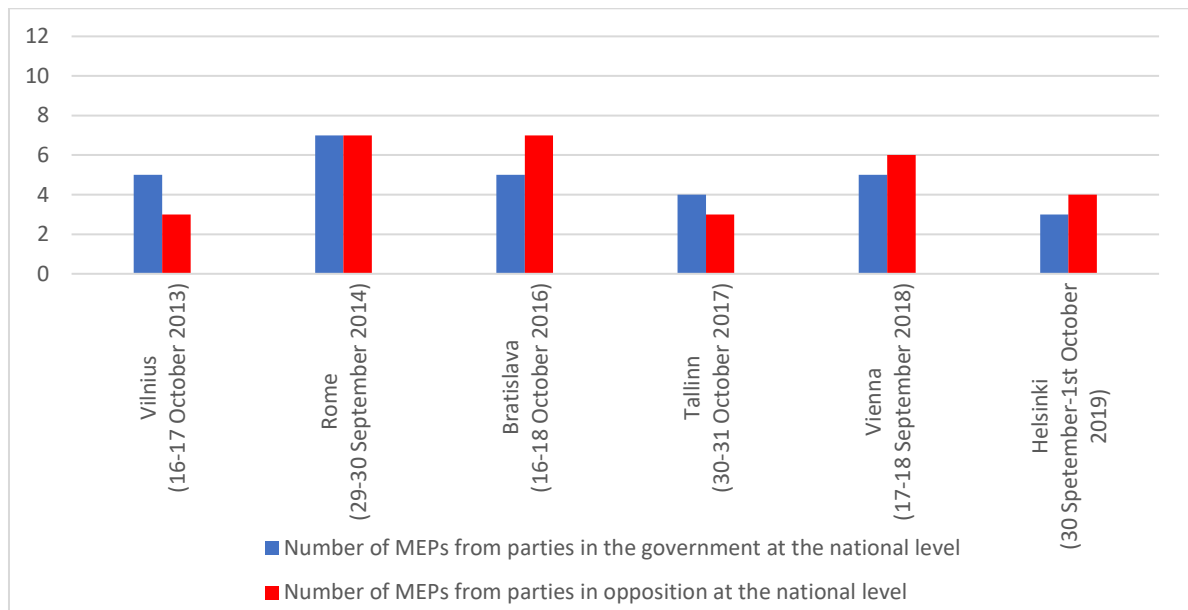
It should be noted, however, that for inter-parliamentary conference on stability, economic coordination and governance in the EU taking place in Brussels – generally in February – while the list of participants from national parliaments is available online, the composition of the EP’s delegations participating in inter-parliamentary conference is not reported. Therefore, we analysed only the EP delegations attending the conferences in Vilnius, Rome, Bratislava, Tallinn, Vienna and Helsinki.

In general, the average number of parliamentarians from the EP delegation is 8.6 compared to an assembly composed of a number of MEPs that has ranged from 751 following the 2014 European elections to 705 since the January, 31, 2020. Just as we noted for the national parliamentary delegations of the various Member States, the various delegations of the EP overtime are also very different as for their size and composition. Yet, in contrast to national parliamentary delegations, this does not particularly seem to reflect the composition of the EP. A notable exception concerns the last two conferences where the opposition at the EU level was better represented, possibly accounting for the more diverse composition of the EP and decreasing influence of the Grand Coalition (+ALDE) over the last years (see Figure 5.3-2).

Turning to the issue of how national majorities and oppositions are represented in the delegations, we coded the position of the parties in the national arena at the times of each of the conferences. The results show that national opposition parties are very well represented in EP delegations, most often surpassing the representation of national government parties (see: Figure 5.3-1). This is not particularly surprising: EP ‘second-order’ elections are often described as sanctions against or signals to national governments, which essentially means that parties in government do less well in sending MEPs to the EP than what their national MPs to their respective assemblies (Kritzinger, & al, 2020; Manow & Döring, 2008). This results in the Strasbourg’s assembly that overall poorly reflects the state of political forces at the national level.

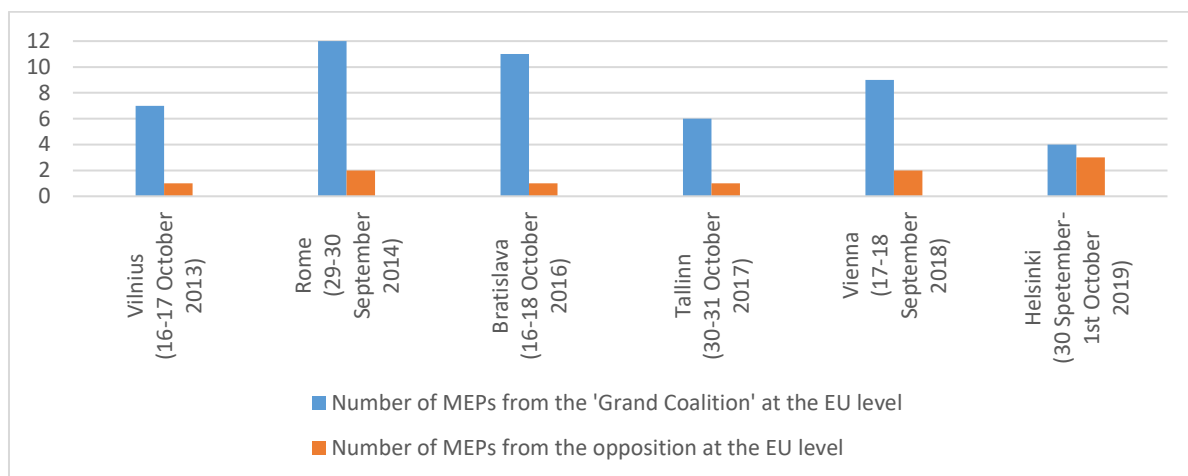


Figure 5.3-1 Number of MEPs attending the conferences sorted by whether their party was in the government or opposition at the national level at the time



Source: Website of inter-parliamentary conferences at ipex.eu

Figure 5.3-2 Number of MEPs attending the conferences sorted by whether their EP group was part of the Grand Coalition (+ALDE) at the EU level



Source: Website of inter-parliamentary conferences at ipex.eu

### 5.3 Attitudes and behaviours of parliamentarians toward inter-parliamentary cooperation

In a final assessment of their representativeness and effectiveness, we shed light on the practice of inter-parliamentary conferences from the parliamentarians’ perspective. In fact, the mere inclusion of opposition parties in inter-parliamentary delegations might not mean much if these delegates are not able to make a difference. It thus seems useful to explore empirically the concrete involvement of parliamentarians (in particular opposition parties’ representatives) in inter-parliamentary forums and their attitudes toward inter-parliamentary cooperation in general. Here the analysis will proceed in two steps. First, we assess the behaviour of national

MPs in three conferences in order to see what the attitude of the members of opposition parties has been. Second, we focus on the MEPs' attitudes towards inter-parliamentary cooperation, as they may contribute to the emergence of a multilevel parliamentary field in the EU.

### ***5.3.1 A (brief) qualitative analysis: the effectiveness of inter-parliamentary cooperation through the behaviour of the parliamentary delegations' members***

The main objective of the sub-section is to observe how opposition parties' behaved, if they took the floor during the conferences, on what issues and if with a collaborative or offensive approach. We are also interested in checking whether they changed lines when their party went to government. In Poland and Italy, for example, we can try to see if and how the participation of MPs changed before and after, respectively, 2015 and 2018 (when the Eurosceptics moved from the opposition to the Government). We can try to see what was the change in inter-parliamentary cooperation before these political forces went to the government and afterwards.

We therefore qualitatively analysed three of these conferences: in particular, the one in Rome in 2014, the one in Vienna in 2018 and the one in Brussels in 2020 (which took place during the EPary Week in February). We chose the Vienna conference because it came exactly four years after that of Rome, in a context that differed in many ways – both from the point of view of the economic cycle, still under stress in 2014 (while much better in 2018), and for the different political conditions in some states – *i.e.* in Italy and Poland, countries in which Eurosceptic parties in 2018 were in government. It therefore seems particularly interesting to analyse their behaviour at this conference. For this analysis we watched the videos, on the internet, of both conferences (Rome and Vienna). It seemed interesting to us to then also analyse a more recent conference, and also one of a different nature as it was held in Brussels as part of the EPary Week.

At the Rome Conference of September 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>, 2014, in the first two sessions (dedicated respectively to 'The European way to growth: the relaunch of investments and the reduction of inequalities' and to the 'Economic and financial governance instruments of the EU')<sup>32</sup> for Italy, in addition to the Minister of Economy Padoan, Paolo Guerrieri Paleotti and Marco Causi, both of the Democratic Party, took the floor (majority in 2014). It should be recalled that the Italian delegation, at that conference, was particularly numerous (see section 5.3). For this reason too, many leaders of the opposition parties took the floor.

One speaker was in particular Francesco Cariello of the 5 Star Movement. While stressing that the goal of the conference unites everyone, said that the preferred tools of political economy to be used are profoundly different. A mixed attitude was observed, partly collaborative and partly non collaborative. Collaborative, because while recognizing a dichotomy between austerity and flexibility, it also stated that the M5S hoped that all countries will find harmony in this dichotomy and that the only valid instrument of the Fiscal compact is Article 13 in that it envisages the functioning of a new mechanism of democratic accountability. Destructive, since

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<sup>32</sup> The parliamentary conferences in question are generally divided into two days and four sessions. Often, as in this case, the first two sessions are dedicated to broader topics while the second two are of a more technical nature (this also seems to have some effect on the tones of the members of the national delegations and in particular on those of the members of opposition).

he argued that the rewriting of the rules of European economic governance is the only solution to the dichotomy.

Two parliamentarians from Forza Italia, who were in the opposition in 2014 but cannot be considered a Eurosceptic party, then intervened. In particular, Lucio Malan criticized austerity as a brake against growth. However, the tone of his speech showed a collaborative attitude. Franco Carraro spoke out from the same party: he expressed criticism on the European economic rules and on the intertwinement of responsibilities between the Union and the Member States. However, even his attitude was ultimately collaborative.

Lastly, Giancarlo Giorgetti of the Italian Lega Nord – perhaps the most Eurosceptic of the major Italian political parties and in opposition back then – took the floor: in fact, this was a polemical intervention, also attacking the fiscal compact and the other rules of European economic governance rather clearly and harshly.

For Poland, two member of the parliament of Civic Platform took the floor. For France, three member of the Socialist Party took the floor. For Spain, one MP of the Popular Party intervened. For Germany, one member of the SPD and three members of parliament of the CDU did. These are thus members of political parties who, in 2014, were all part of the majority. These have had, albeit with all the shades of the case, a predominantly pro-European position.

On the second day, 30 September 2014 (sessions 3 and 4, dedicated to ‘The completion of the banking union and the financing of the real economy’ and to ‘The coordination of European tax policies and the case of the digital economy’) one member of the parliament of the Greens (*Bündnis 90/Die Grünen*) and one of the CDU took the floor for Germany. Later, a Spanish parliamentarian took the floor, and two party members of the Dutch Labor Party (*Partij van de Arbeid*) also did. For Poland, we noted the participation of one MP from the Civic Platform.

For Italy, one MP of the Democratic Party stepped forward. Then Sebastiano Barbanti of the 5 Star Movement took the floor: although being a member of the opposition, his intervention, cannot be considered non collaborative. Then, Barbara Lezzi (also of the M5S), unlike her colleague, addressed many criticisms of the European economic and financial constraints. Furthermore, Giovanni Paglia (Left Ecology and Freedom) intervened: he too lashed out against the six-pack and its consequences. Lastly, Raffaella Bellot of the Lega Nord stepped in with a controversial intervention towards the single market and its dishomogeneity.

The second conference here analysed was inter-parliamentary conference on stability, economic coordination and governance in the EU (SECG) which was held on 17 and 18 September 2018 in Austria, Vienna.<sup>33</sup>

In the first session, dedicated to the implementation of the EU Fiscal Governance Framework, one MP (from the FDP) intervened for Germany, underlining the importance of the fiscal responsibility of the Member States. Then three members of the UCD, and one MP of the SPD (both parties of the majority) took the floor. For the French delegation, one MP of *En Marche* and one of *Les Républicains* intervened – both being parties of the majority.

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<sup>33</sup> The agenda will include current matters of budgetary and fiscal policy such as the Multiannual Framework or the Projects in support of the completion and deepening of the economic and monetary union.

For the Netherlands, one MP of the relative majority party (*Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie*, VVD) stepped in. For Poland, one MP of the PiS intervened, though he did so in the fourth session, dedicated to 'Digitalisation and its impact on employment': it was therefore a politically less 'hot' topic than to those of the first sessions. For Spain, one MP from the *Partido Popular* (at the time in opposition in Spain, although not a Eurosceptic party) took the floor. She also intervened in the fourth session, without going into too divisive political issues.

The third inter-parliamentary conference on stability, economic coordination and governance in the EU that we have qualitatively analysed is the one that was held in Brussels on 18 and 19 February 2020, as part of the EPary Week. In particular, we analysed three plenary sessions, that of February 18 afternoon and those of February 19. Also in this case it is interesting to analyse how many members of the opposition parties spoke during the plenary sessions and, if necessary, to verify the content of their interventions.

Of the majority parties of the national delegations of the seven countries considered for the purposes of the research, an MP from the Dutch delegation, three members of the German parliament (two from the CDU and one from the SPD), a Polish MP (PIS), as well as one Italian (M5S) and two French (*En Marche*) ones did step in.

In contrast, from the opposition parties, only one Italian MP (Lega Nord), spoke twice; seconded by two Spanish parliamentarians (one from the People's Party and one from *Vox*). The Italian MP of the Lega Nord, Massimo Garavaglia, spoke twice. The first time he asked two questions. In particular, he said that the Italian Prime Minister and the Italian Minister of the Economy said they are still negotiating for the European Stability Mechanism when it seems that the negotiations were closed. Garavaglia therefore asked to know where the negotiations were at. He then focused on the low economic growth in Italy and in other European countries, speaking in particular of the problem of small and medium-sized enterprises and asking what intentions they have in relation to this problem.

This is undoubtedly an interesting intervention as a member of a national opposition used the occasion of the EPary Week to raise a political controversy towards his national government and to ask for clarification regarding something his government has said at national level. As has been noted, Eurosceptic MPs have something to gain from critically discussing and communicating EU affairs to their citizens (Kinski, 2020).

The European Commissioner Gentiloni also replied to this question, stating that the general agreement on the ESM has been reached but the negotiations are continuing for some details.

In the second intervention, of a more technical nature, Garavaglia focused on the Green deal and on some issues that this raises in relation to the role of methane gas and its effects on agriculture. It was not a particularly polemical intervention.

Then, the two members of the Spanish opposition (PP and *Vox*) took the floor, both dwelling on issues concerning the world of work and education systems. It was therefore a general intervention, not polemical either towards the EU or towards the national government.

It is noted, therefore, in general, that the members of the opposition parties did not take the floor very often despite their representation in the delegations. At the Vienna conference, no parliamentarians of the Italian delegation, composed of five members, took the floor. Also

analysing the other delegations in both conferences, it is noted that the members of the majority parties are those most engaged in inter-parliamentary debates, while representatives of the opposition tended to remain at the margin. In general, it has been noted that, with the exception of the Italian delegation (the largest, given the location of the first conference analysed), almost exclusively members of the government majority took the floor within the other six delegations examined.

It must be considered, moreover, that when the second conference analysed was organised, the context was peculiar in Italy, as the M5S-Lega Nord government was inaugurating the debate on the budget bill, originally without respecting the European rules, which produced a long interlocution with the institutions of the EU: it is therefore surprising that no member of these two parties, despite being part of the governmental coalition, took the floor during the Vienna conference.

It is therefore not easy to give an account of the positions taken in the debates in the conference. Opposition members did not seem to use the conference as a window of opportunity to criticize the national government publicly and internationally. In fact, the talks at the two conferences have always been held on a very general and European level, without ever going down to analyse and, in case, challenge the positions of national governments.

From this limited qualitative analysis it can be concluded that members of national opposition tend to use self-restraint in inter-parliamentary conferences, leaving space to representatives of the majority parties. This may lead to some conclusions, also in relation to the initial thesis regarding the correlation between representativeness and effectiveness. From this qualitative analysis, it is clear that in the end, in this type of inter-parliamentary conferences, the logic of the national delegations prevails more than that of the party cleavages.

### ***5.3.2 The attitude of MEPs toward inter-parliamentary cooperation: a new viewpoint***

To understand the MEPs' views and uses of interparliamentary cooperation, we rely on the battery of questions dedicated to the issue in the ESPOL-EPRG MEP survey (2020) in order to explore how MEPs view and participate in this part of the EU activities – which is arguably part and parcel of MEPs' day-to-day work.<sup>34</sup> This is assessed in particular through five questions, the details of which are given below (for the list of questions, see: Appendix 1).

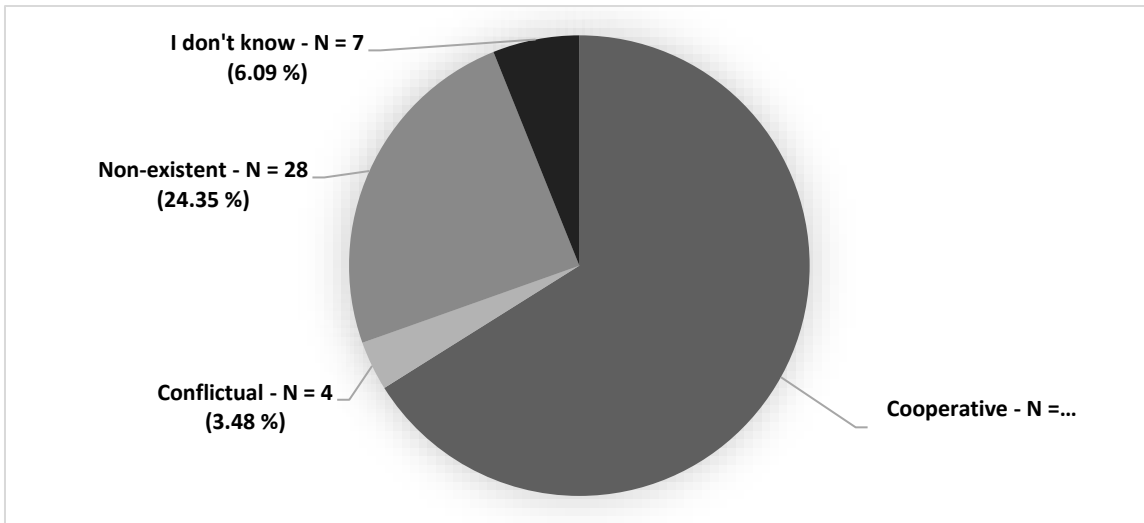
A first question asked MEPs to describe their relation with National Parliaments (see: Figure 5.4). Among our 115 respondents<sup>35</sup>, the vast majority described it as 'cooperative', while almost a quarter (28; 24.3 %) reported the non-existence of such relations. In other words, many MEPs just do not take part in the interparliamentary proceedings, whichever their format. Those MEPs are then excluded from the analysis in the next questions. It could be added that only very few MEPs qualified their relation with national parliaments as conflictual, while a few more refused to qualify it all together.

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<sup>34</sup> Details about the ESPOL-EPRG MEP survey (2020) can be found in Section 3.

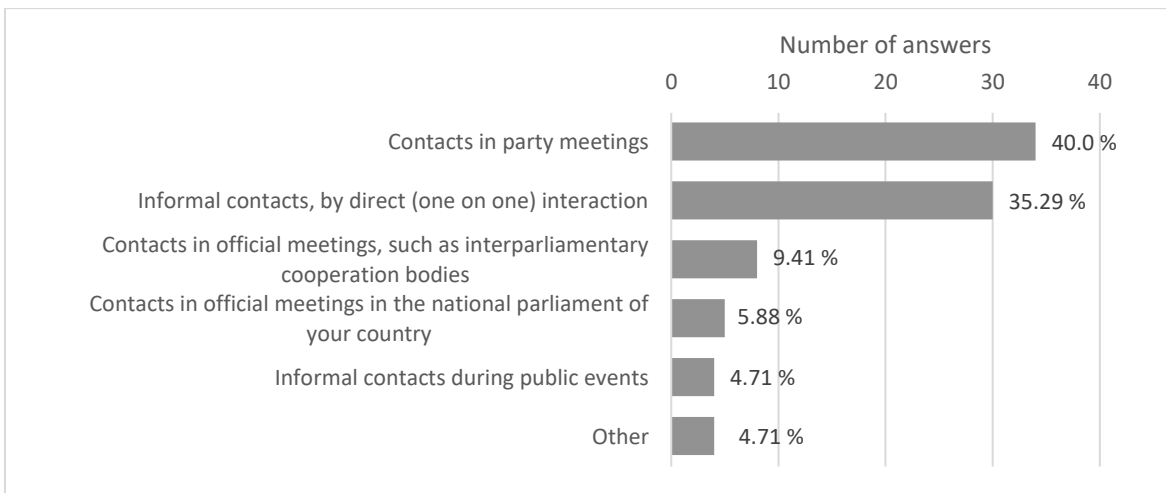
<sup>35</sup> As a reminder, the number of respondents may vary per question, due to filters, but also as MEPs were left with the possibility to answer or not each question.

Figure 5.4: MEPs' views of their relations with National Parliaments



Source: ESPOL-EPRG MEP survey (2020)

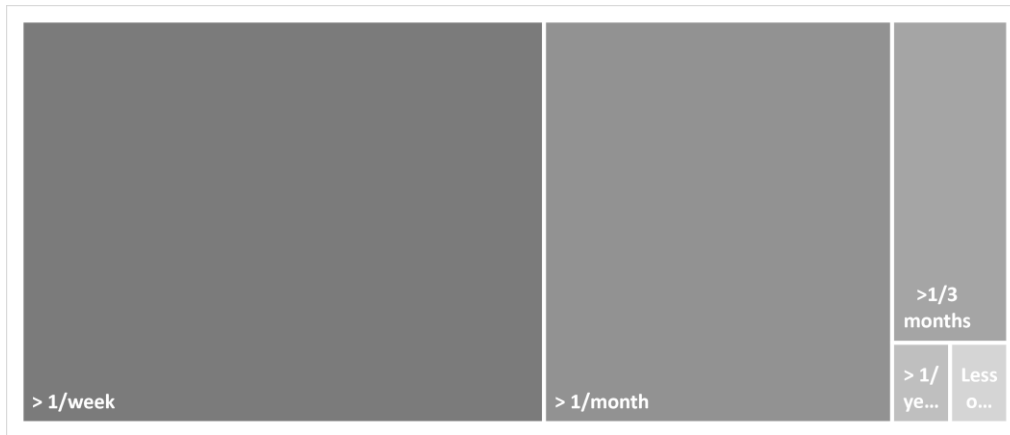
Figure 5.5: Main type of contacts



Source: ESPOL-EPRG MEP survey (2020)

Further, as can be read from Figure 5.5, only very few MEPs consider interparliamentary cooperation bodies as the main arena of contacts they have with national parliament(arian)s. Instead, contacts in party meetings as well as one-on-one informal contacts make up the bulk of this relation as described by MEPs. Less than ten per cent of our respondents view interparliamentary cooperation as the most important type of contacts they hold. This does not mean, however, that interparliamentary cooperation bodies are not relevant, but simply that they do not represent a favoured way in which MEPs get in touch with their national counterparts.

Figure 5.6: Frequency of contacts



Source: ESPOL-EPRG MEP survey (2020)

Nevertheless, indeed, contacts appear to be very frequent between MEPs and national MPs, as displayed in Figure 5.6. More than half of the respondents (45; 52.94 %) reported weekly contacts, and over a third (30 respondents; 35.29 %) monthly ones. An additional eight MEPs (9.41 %) declared having contacts at least every three months, while only one each established contacts only (at least) once a year or even less. As a reminder, however, 28 respondents had previously reported ‘inexistent contacts’ and were thus filtered out of this question.

Figure 5.7: Persons of contact

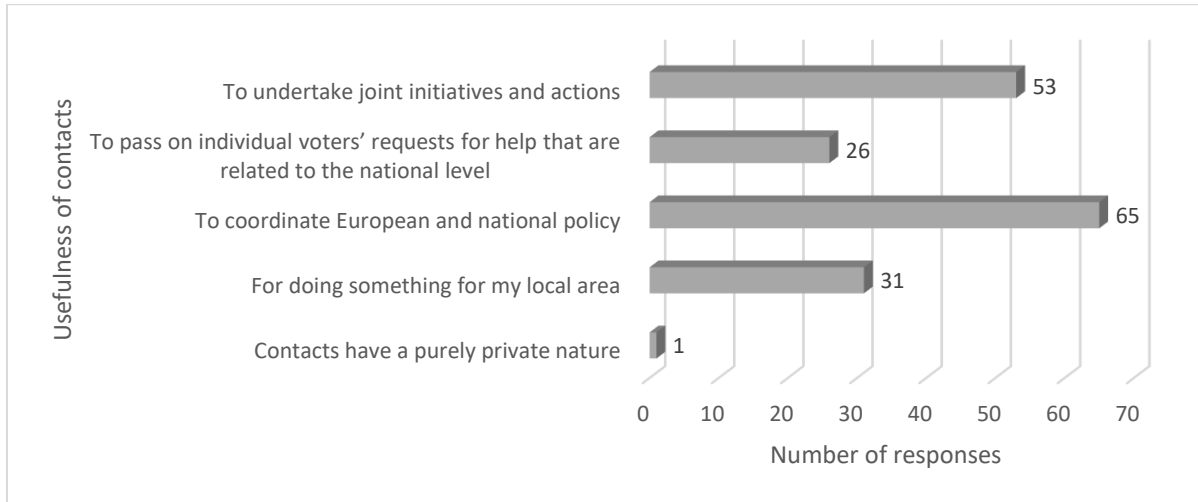


Source: ESPOL-EPRG MEP survey (2020)

In a next question whose results are displayed in Figure 5.7, we asked once again those MEPs who reported contacts with national parliamentarians with whom exactly they have been in contact. Note that their answers can thus be multiple as they might be in contact with several types of MPs. Most MEPs first and foremost report contacts with MPs that belong both to their own member states and own national party. This is the case for 75 out of 85 respondents to this question – amounting to 88.2 % of them. Besides, a short majority of MEPs retained for this question (*i.e.* having reported contacts) further declared contacts with national MPs from their own MS but different parties (43; 50.6 %). In other words, although there are 27 member states, MEPs are mostly in contact with their counterparts from the country they have been elected in, raising important issues in terms of representation. Quite worryingly – in particular

in terms of politicization – more contacts with MPs from other parties in one’s MS are reported than of their own party family in other MS. All in all only 10 out of 85 MEPs reported being in contacts with MPs that are neither of their member states nor of their party.

Figure 5.8: Political uses of MEPs-MPs contacts



Source: ESPOL-EPRG MEP survey (2020)

Finally, we asked MEPs to evaluate the usefulness of these relations with national MPs (see: Figure 5.8). Once again, answers were not mutually exclusive and MEPs could select several types of political uses of their contacts with national MPs. Only the purely private nature of contacts was mutually exclusive from other answers, an option that only one MEP chose. All in all, allowing for coordination actions collected most responses (65 out of 85; 76.5 %), while a majority of MEPs also reported usages in terms of joint initiatives and actions (53 out of 85; 62.4 %).

#### 5.4 Conclusion: opposition parties in inter-parliamentary conferences between representativeness and effectiveness

What assessment can be made of the representativeness and effectiveness of inter-parliamentary cooperation? Our initial hypothesis was that there was a positive relationship between representativeness and effectiveness: it is precisely the representativeness of the opposition parties in the decision-making process in a broad, European sense, that we expected to be an added value to inter-parliamentary cooperation in terms of democratic deliberation and accountability. While participation in these meetings may be helpful for the exchange of information and the sharing of best practices for members of the governmental parties, the participation of members of the opposition parties undoubtedly contributes, in principle, to ensure that also minority views are heard and made known supranationally in the field of economic governance. The participation of the oppositions, in this sense, is central: and indeed, it has been correctly ensured by all parliaments here considered (including the EP), at least in the case of inter-parliamentary conferences on stability, economic coordination and governance in the EU.

Representatives of Eurosceptic parties, even when in opposition, were also frequently included in the national delegation: this has been the case not only for the German delegations where



there were members of AfD, but also for the Italian delegation, where there were members both of the Lega Nord and the 5 Star Movement before 2018. Furthermore, these are parties that participated in inter-parliamentary conferences both as opposition parties and, then, as majority parties. Therefore, to conclude on the outcome of the quantitative analysis, it appears that the representativeness of the parliamentary delegations and, consequently of inter-parliamentary conference, seems assured.

However, the assessment on the effectiveness, drawing on the qualitative analysis is far less encouraging. The ability of inter-parliamentary conference to channel to national oppositions' points of view, to foster an inclusive process of deliberation (even if not binding) and to echo the domestic discontent on the governments' positions on EU affairs is ultimately impaired by the very limited participation of opposition members in the debate. They hardly take the floor and engage in inter-parliamentary discussion. Accordingly, evidence from the EP shows that MEPs have frequent contacts with their national counterparts and are positively inclined toward inter-parliamentary cooperation. Yet, cooperation between the two levels follows overwhelmingly a national logic rather than a partisan one.

Finally, it should be noted that the presidency summaries of inter-parliamentary conference still refer to national delegations and not to the positions of European political families or parties (although political groups meetings are sometimes included in the program of inter-parliamentary conferences). This denotes an attitude turned more towards the position of the single national parliament as a whole – also because often the members of the opposition, as noted, do not speak –, than towards the variety of position supported by MPs from different Member States reunited under the same European political family and party. Furthermore, in the same documents, more emphasis is given to the initial speeches than to the positions in the debate between parliamentarians. Reading these documents, one gets often the impression of an academic seminar rather than an inter-parliamentary meeting.

The participation of the parliamentarians of the opposition parties, and in particular of the Eurosceptical ones, thus can be said to contribute to make inter-parliamentary conference in question a 'window of democracy' (Pernice, 2013). For this reason, it seems desirable to create incentives and put the members of the opposition in a position to intervene; in short, to stimulate their active participation. This could be an avenue for further research.

For all these reasons, the initial hypothesis of the research, that of the positive correlation between representativeness and effectiveness, is partially dismissed looking at the case study of inter-parliamentary conference on stability, economic coordination and governance in the EU: if, in fact, the former can be considered assured, the latter does not seem to be so. Improving the scarce effectiveness of inter-parliamentary conferences thus appears to depend to a large extent on the strengthening of their purely political dimension – that is, from a politicization of their debates –, which inevitably passes through the confrontation between majority and opposition views to enhance democratic deliberation. The risk otherwise is to impair also representativeness, which remains purely nominal if opposition parties are not willing or are not in a condition to participate effectively in the debates.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Supplementary material for Section 3

#### 3.1 List of questions in the MEP survey used in Section 3

Q. 3.1. When thinking about your work as an MEP, how important are the following aspects of your work? Choose one response per line.

	1 (Of little importance)	2	3	4	5 (Of great importance)
Working on legislation (1)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parliamentary oversight (2)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Articulation of important societal needs and interests (3)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developing common strategies for EU policies (4)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mediation between different interests in society (5)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Representation of individual interests of individual citizens (6)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other aspect(s) of your work. Please specify: (7)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q. 3.4. How often do you receive recommendations on which way to vote from the following parties or groups? Choose one box per line.

	1 (Never)	2	3	4	5 (On almost every vote)
Your national party leadership (1)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Your European political group leadership (2)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Your national party delegation of MEPs (3)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Your European Parliament committee leadership (4)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The European Commission (5)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Your national government (6)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interest groups (7)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Voters in your constituency (8)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Q. 3.5. To what extent do you agree with the following statements? Please select one answer from each dropdown menu [Agree strongly – Agree – Neither agree nor disagree – Disagree – Disagree strongly].**

- Members of a European political group should not speak openly about discussions within the European political group (1)
- If the opinions of the European political group appear in conflict with one's own opinions, it is correct to vote with the European political group (2)
- If a member of parliament is under pressure from constituents, it is correct that s/he votes against the expressed will of the European political group (3)
- The leader of a European political group should, as far as possible, ensure the unity of that European political group. In doing so, the use of far reaching means, such as the denial of particular parliamentary posts (e.g. seats on committees), is legitimate. (4)

**Q. 3.6. After the 2019 European election, which committee did you most want to sit on?**

- Foreign Affairs (1)
- Development (2)
- International Trade (3)
- Budgets (4)
- Budgetary Control (5)
- Economic and Monetary Affairs (6)
- Employment and Social Affairs (7)
- Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (8)
- Industry, Research and Energy (9)
- Internal Market and Consumer Protection (10)
- Transport and Tourism (11)
- Regional Development (12)
- Agriculture and Rural Development (13)
- Fisheries (14)
- Culture and Education (15)
- Legal Affairs (16)
- Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (17)
- Constitutional Affairs (18)
- Women's Rights and Gender Equality (19)
- Petitions (20)

**Q. 4.1. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the powers of the European Parliament? Please select one answer from each dropdown menu [Agree strongly – Agree – Neither agree nor disagree – Disagree – Disagree strongly].**

- The European Parliament should have the right to initiate legislation (1)
- The European Parliament should have equal power with the Council in all areas of EU legislation (2)
- The European Parliament should be able to remove individual Commissioners from office(3)
- The European Parliament should be allowed to hold all its plenary sessions in Brussels (4)

**Q. 4.7. How do you view the following EU-level instruments or innovations?**

	Very favourably	Quite favourably	Neither favourably nor unfavourably	Rather unfavourably	Very unfavourably
The trilogues (the practice of informal negotiations between the European Parliament, the Commission and the Council on legislative proposals) (1)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The early agreements (the adoption of legislative proposals at early stages of the ordinary legislative procedure) (2)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) (3)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The nomination of Spitzenkandidaten (candidates for the Commission Presidency) by Political parties at European level (4)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q. 4.8. In your opinion, how democratic are the following instruments or innovations?

	Very democratic	Quite democratic	Neither democratic nor undemocratic	Rather undemocratic	Very undemocratic
The trilogues (the practice of informal negotiations between the European Parliament, the Commission and the Council on legislative proposals) (1)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Early agreements (the adoption of legislative proposals at early stages of the ordinary legislative procedure) (2)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) (3)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The nomination of Spitzenkandidaten (candidates for the Commission Presidency) by Political parties at European level (4)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q. 4.9. In your opinion, how efficient are the following instruments or innovations?

	Very efficient	Quite efficient	Neither efficient nor inefficient	Rather inefficient	Very inefficient



<p>The trilogues (the practice of informal negotiations between the European Parliament, the Commission and the Council on legislative proposals) (1)</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>The Early agreements (the adoption of legislative proposals at early stages of the ordinary legislative procedure) (2)</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>The European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) (3)</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>The nomination of Spitzenkandidaten (candidates for the Commission Presidency) by Political parties at European level (4)</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Q. 4.10. To which extent do you agree with the following statement? 'Minutes or reports of the trilogues should be made publicly available'**

- Fully agree (1)
- Somewhat agree (2)
- Somewhat disagree (3)
- Fully disagree (4)
- No opinion (5)

**Q. 5.12. Imagine disputes between the EU and member state authorities over different issues. In your view, who should ideally have the final say in disputes over...**

- Migration (1)
- The environment (2)
- Social security (3)
- The rule of law (4)

- Democratic principles (5)

Answer options: The European Commission – The European Parliament – The European Court of Justice – Member states' authorities.

## Appendix 2: Supplementary material for Section 4

### 4.1 List of MEPs asking questions to the ECB (EP7)

Name of MEP	Number of questions
Andreas Mølzer	3
Andreas Pitsillides	1
Auke Zijlstra	7
Claudio Morganti	2
Crescenzo Rivellini	1
Crescenzo Rivellini	2
Cristiana Muscardini	1
David Campbell Bannerman	1
Diogo Feio	3
Francesco Enrico Speroni	1
Francisco Sosa Wagner	6
Giommaria Uggias	1
Ioannis A. Tsoukalas	2
Jim Higgins	2
Liem Hoang Ngoc	2
Lorenzo Fontana	1
Marco Scurria	1
Marine Le Pen	1
Mario Borghezio	11
Mário David	1
Martina Anderson	3
Miguel Portas	1
Nessa Childers	2
Nick Griffin	1
Niki Tzavela	4
Nikolaos Chountis	1
Nikolaos Chountis	10
Nikolaos Salavrakos	2
Nuno Melo	26
Nuno Teixeira	3
Oreste Rossi	1
Paulo Rangel	1
Peter van Dalen	1
Ramon Tremosa i Balcells	4
Rareş-Lucian Niculescu	1
Raúl Romeva i Rueda	1
Roberts Zīle	1
Rodi Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou	6
Sven Giegold	10
<b>Total général</b>	<b>129</b>

#### 4.2 List of MEPs asking questions to the ECB (EP8)

Name of MEP	Number of questions
Alfred Sant	3
Ana Gomes	4
Andrea Cozzolino	1
Angelo Ciocca	6
Auke Zijlstra	2
Benedek Jávor	1
Bernard Monot	6
Bernd Kölmel	1
Bernd Lucke	4
Brian Hayes	15
Charles Goerens	1
Cora van Nieuwenhuizen	1
Costas Mavrides	1
Csaba Molnár	5
David Coburn	3
David Martin	1
Dennis de Jong	1
Dimitrios Papadimoulis	26
Dominique Bilde	1
Eleonora Evi	1
Eleonora Forenza	1
Elisa Ferreira	1
Enrique Calvet Chambon	5
Ernest Urtasun	5
Eva Kaili	9
Fabio De Masi	42
Georgios Epitideios	1
Gerolf Annemans	2
Gianluca Buonanno	6
Hans-Olaf Henkel	1
Hugues Bayet	2
Isabella Adinolfi	4
Janusz Korwin-Mikke	1
Joachim Starbatty	7
Jonás Fernández	35
José Manuel Fernandes	7
Kostadinka Kuneva	5
Kostas Chrysogonos	19
Laura Agea	1
Laura Ferrara	1
Luigi Morgano	1
Luke Ming Flanagan	19
Lynn Boylan	1
Mara Bizzotto	4
Marco Valli	16

Marco Zanni	24
Marina Albiol Guzmán	1
Mario Borghezio	13
Markus Ferber	3
Matt Carthy	17
Miguel Urbán Crespo	3
Miguel Viegas	19
Nessa Childers	1
Nicola Caputo	7
Nikolaos Chountis	14
Notis Marias	11
Nuno Melo	15
Paloma López Bermejo	14
Patrizia Toia	1
Paul Tang	3
Pervenche Berès	1
Piernicola Pedicini	1
Ramon Tremosa i Balcells	2
Reinhard Bütikofer	1
Richard Sulík	5
Romana Tomc	1
Rosa D'Amato	1
Sander Loones	1
Sophia in 't Veld	3
Sophie Montel	1
Sotirios Zarianopoulos	1
Steeve Briois	2
Stelios Kouloglou	4
Sven Giegold	19
Sylvie Goulard	4
Udo Bullmann	1
Ulrike Trebesius	3
Werner Langen	2
<b>Total général</b>	<b>479</b>

## Appendix 3: Supplementary material for Section 5

### *List of questions in the MEP survey used in Section 5*

NB: the MEP survey methodology is described in Section 3.

**Q. 4.2. Which of the following would best describe your relation with National Parliaments?**

- Cooperative (1)
- Conflictual (2)
- Non-existent (3)
- Don't know (4)

**Q. 4.3. Since you became an MEP, what is the main type of contacts you have with members of the national Parliament of your country?**

- Contacts in party meetings (1)
- Contacts in official meetings, such as interparliamentary cooperation bodies (2)
- Contacts in official meetings in the national parliament of your country (3)
- Informal contacts, by direct (one on one) interaction (4)
- Informal contacts during public events (5)
- Other. Please specify: (6) \_\_\_\_\_

**Q. 4.4. Since you became an MEP, how frequently do you have contacts with members of the national Parliament of your country?**

- At least once a week (1)
- At least once a month (2)
- At least every three months (3)
- At least once a year (4)
- Less often (5)
- No contact (6)

**Q. 4.5. With whom did you have contacts in national Parliaments? Check all that apply.**

- Members of national parliaments of my country, and of my own party (1)
- Members of national parliaments of my country, and of other party(ies) (2)
- Members of national parliaments of other EU member states, and of my party family (3)
- Members of national parliaments of other EU member states, and of other party(ies) (4)

**Q. 4.6. For each of the contacts you mentioned, have the contacts you listed been politically helpful?**

- No, contacts have a purely private nature (1) [exclusive answer]
- Yes, for doing something for my local area (2)
- Yes, to coordinate European and national policy (3)
- Yes, to pass on individual voters' requests for help that are related to the national level (4)
- Yes, to undertake joint initiatives and actions (5)

RECONNECT, led by the Leuven Centre for Global Governance Studies, brings together 18 academic partners from 14 countries.



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