

# National parliaments in the aftermath of the Lisbon Treaty : adaptation to the 'New Opportunity Structure'

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# Valorization addendum

The insights of this thesis do not only contribute to academic research on European integration but are of high relevance for practitioners and society at large.

In the first place, the research helps practitioners identify and raise awareness about the challenges of parliamentary scrutiny of EU affairs.

## ***1. Implications of the research for Members of Parliament and administrative staff***

The research points us into the direction that it is very often it is the lack of interest in European affairs amongst MPs that constitutes the main challenge in improving effectiveness of the scrutiny process. Input from MPs is essential for assessing EU proposals; otherwise a parliament's response to EU initiatives can remain a formality. MPs from different ideological groups and from both strong and weak parliaments require more education and training in EU issues in order to fully grasp the interconnection between EU and domestic politics. Members of parliament do not only need technical knowledge about the EU in order make a contribution to the scrutiny process but must be in command of a foreign language. This seems to be problematic for a rather large number of MPs in Central and Eastern Europe. Obviously, offering language courses may be impractical due to financial reasons but hiring assistants with advanced language skills or establishing an extended corps of translators may help overcome this problem.

Secondly, the results of the thesis allow practitioners to consider different approaches to providing administrative support to the scrutiny process. Although parliamentary administrators are crucial for filtering incoming EU documentation, parliamentary chambers often do not have enough resources to conduct the analysis of EU proposals independently of domestic executives. This does not necessarily constitute a problem, yet this practice may raise concerns of the wider public about independence or bias of parliament's judgments. Better training, intensive networking with NGOs and academia, establishment of dedicated analytical units, - all these measures can help national parliaments be less dependent on governments for the assessment of EU proposals. This observation is especially relevant in light of the economic crisis, as parliaments are faced with a challenge of legitimizing harsh economic measures which may not be fully or adequately understood. Obviously, national parliaments do not need to provide alternatives to domestic or EU policy solutions just for the sake of presenting a different opinion. However, parliaments should have the ability to discuss technical and complex issues on equal terms with national governments as at the very end this helps ensure the adequacy of the decisions taken.

Thirdly, practitioners can find the dissertation useful as it provides information on 'best practices' of organizing parliamentary scrutiny of EU affairs. Academic analysis provides additional arguments for considering the applicability of specific 'best practic-

es' in domestic contexts. For example, the practice established in the Swedish Riksdag, namely regular formalized contacts between the EAC and other sectoral committees could be used as a role model for parliaments in the Czech Republic and Romania, where such contacts have traditionally been much more ad hoc. The thesis provides additional supportive arguments for domestic parliamentary actors which lobby for more regular cooperation between EACs and sectoral committees. Moreover, the thesis highlights the benefits of a regular dialogue between MPs and members of the European Parliament. So far, such contacts remain rather ad hoc but the thesis shows the benefits of such a dialogue not only for networking but also for policy coordination and lobbying at the EU level. This academic assessment can serve as an additional argument for practitioners to synchronize MP-MEP activities and enhance collaboration with the European Parliament.

## ***2. Implications of the research for stakeholders and citizens***

Stakeholders at both domestic and EU levels will find the research results important for the set-up and conduct of their lobbying activities. Although at this moment national parliaments do not seem to be the focus of domestic or EU stakeholders aiming at promoting specific policy solutions in the domain of EU affairs, in the recent future this may well change due to more intensive inter-parliamentary dialogue and greater cooperation between domestic legislatures and the European Parliament. The two 'yellow cards' passed within the framework of the Early Warning System and an increasing number of sectoral policy dialogues between national parliaments and the EP mean that inter-parliamentary cooperation is likely to play an ever greater role in the EU political system. This offers new opportunities for various stakeholders to promote their policy preferences and develop new strategies of lobbying or interest representation.

Moreover, the research is of immediate interest not only for MPs and parliamentary staff, it addresses a highly salient topic which has direct impact upon all EU citizens. Parliaments are essential for representative democracy, one of the key founding values of the EU, and help ensure accountability of the decisions taken by politicians and their focus on the public good. However, accountability of decisions taken within the EU political system can be achieved only if parliamentary debates address the content of EU proposals and formal scrutiny rules are fully implemented in practice. The thesis shows that both of these conditions are often not met. Consequently, there is a greater risk that the decisions reached within the EU do not fully reflect voters' positions. In other words, the thesis highlights that the application of parliamentary scrutiny procedures in a number of EU member-states may not be fully in line with the principles of representative democracy.

This has a number of important implications for the citizens. On the one hand, they may stop considering national parliaments as an adequate arena for representing their attitudes towards the EU. On the other hand, citizens can increasingly rely on NGOs, social movements and other non-parliamentarian forms of political organization to ex-

press their views towards the EU. Although these new forms of political activity can help distinct actors achieve their political goals, there may not be a specific arena where these sectoral interests can be reconciled as parliaments play an increasingly weaker role in steering public debates on EU topics.

This dialogue between politicians and citizens cannot be reduced to the abovementioned suggestions for practitioners, as they relate primarily to the set-up, support and conduct of the parliamentary scrutiny process. One requires an overhaul of relationship between MPs and voters in the domain of EU affairs, what cannot be addressed just by changing institutional design. Better communication between MPs and their electorates, reference to the EU in constituency service, educational programmes, - these can be the measures to help sustain parliaments as centers of national public debates on EU topics.

The practical relevance of research on national parliaments and European integration is clearly demonstrated by the event organized by the Observatory of Parliaments after the Lisbon Treaty (OPAL) at the Europe House in London in March 2014. The event was attended by a large number of prominent British MPs, members of the European Parliament as well as staffers from several national parliaments. This clearly shows that this type of research is considered relevant and important by political actors.

The results of the research have also been presented at a number of conferences and academic events: THESEUS doctoral seminar (Paris, 2012), OPAL conferences (Maastricht 2012; Berlin 2013), UACES student forum 13<sup>th</sup> annual research conference (Brussels, 2012), 4<sup>th</sup> ECPR Graduate student conference (Bremen, 2012), UACES 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual conference (Passau, 2012), 6<sup>th</sup> SGEU Pan-European conference on EU politics (Tampere, 2012). These events have been used not only to present and disseminate the results of the thesis in the academic audience but also to obtain feedback from practitioners, as, for example, delegates from the EP and the Czech Parliament were present at several of the abovementioned events.