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# **Inter-parliamentary relations in the EU: What drives national parliaments' participation in cooperation beyond the domestic arena?**

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In the EU democratic deficit debate inter-parliamentary cooperation has gained attention as it could link the two levels of representation, the European Parliament and the national parliaments. The aim of this paper is to explain motivation for inter-parliamentary cooperation on EU issues in cross-country comparison. What priorities does a national parliament set in the various channels available for inter-parliamentary cooperation?

In line with the demand to broaden the perspective, this paper assesses four country case studies in order to understand their approaches and priorities to inter-parliamentary cooperation. The theoretical part of the paper defines expectations derived from the institutional capacity of the parliament and the size of the member state. Empirically, it is based on interviews with parliamentarians and administrators from the four parliaments, and draws on expert surveys on Denmark, Germany, Poland, and Slovakia. The advantage of the study lies in its comparative perspective. It allows testing for commonalities and difference across member states of different size, length of EU membership, and geographical location.

The paper finds that resources are crucial to enable a broad scope of inter-parliamentary activities and that parliaments with strong scrutiny rights focus more on informal cooperation on the cross-level and trans-national dimensions. The findings on potential and challenges for inter-parliamentary cooperation are assessed in their implications for the democratic deficit of the EU.

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## **Introduction**

Inter-parliamentary cooperation is seen as a possible solution in the search for a better democratic order of the European Union. While a consensus has emerged that the parliamentary dimension in the EU political system needs to be strengthened, the dilemma remains that the European Parliament (EP) holding competences and resources to scrutinize EU legislation is still too distant from the citizens to act as sole legitimizing body. The national parliaments in the EU member states, on the other hand, are historically rooted and well established representative bodies, however, lack formal competence for direct influence on EU decisions. Inter-parliamentary cooperation could link the two levels of parliamentary representation and bridge the gap between formal capacity on the side of the EP and closer connection to the citizens' interests and communication in the national arena on the side of the national parliaments. Furthermore, the exchange at the transnational level can provide members of national parliaments (MPs) with valuable information about interests and perspectives of their colleagues in other EU member states. The knowledge about the positions of other member states would enhance MPs ability to assess the governments' win-set in EU negotiations allowing for better parliamentary scrutiny (see Benz 2011).

While closer inter-action between parliaments in the EU is desirable from a normative perspective, there are a number of practical constraints for cooperation as rivalries over current (and future) competences, the lack of resources or political will. Furthermore, the heterogeneity of interests and ideologies in an EU of 28 member states becomes especially relevant for parliamentary institutions who's defining characteristic it is to give voice to diverging points of views in a society. Considering the differences of each representative body, one crucial question is the overlap in interests in inter-parliamentary cooperation. A coherent approach across all parliaments would allow structures for effective coordination and exchange to develop much faster, than very diverse understandings.

Research on inter-parliamentary cooperation started out from a description of different forms of formal meetings (Bengtson, 2007; Costa and Latek 2007), and case studies on different policy fields such as Ruiz de Garibay (2013) and Mitsilegas (2007) on Justice and Home Affairs or Huff (2013), Wouters and Raube (2013) and Herranz-Surrallés (2014) on cooperation in Common Foreign and Security Policy. Recent publications have explained the motivation for cooperation and to analyse actual practice (see Crum and Fossum, 2013; Miklin, 2013). On the side of theory, Crum and Fossum (2009) have developed the idea of a 'multi-level parliamentary field' and argue for a more comprehensive analysis of parliamentary control. The multi-level parliamentary field is defined as the sum of the

institutions with representative functions which should be analysed in view of their inter-relations to understand the democratic legitimacy of the EU system. Thus, the concept draws attention to the structure of the relations among parliaments in the EU.

In line with the demand to broaden the perspective for the inter-relations of parliaments, this paper aims at explaining national parliaments' motivations for inter-parliamentary cooperation in the EU in order to understand current gaps and overlaps in the structure of inter-actions. In cross-country comparison the approaches to inter-parliamentary cooperation of a selected number of case studies (Sweden, Denmark, Germany and Slovakia) are analysed. The theoretical part of the paper defines expectations on different priorities in inter-parliamentary cooperation in the EU derived from the institutional capacity of the parliament and the legislative-executive relationship. The empirical analysis is based on 41 interviews which have been conducted in the framework of the OPAL project<sup>1</sup> complemented by information from expert reports on the respective parliaments and document analysis of their inter-parliamentary activities.

## **The structures of inter-parliamentary cooperation in the EU**

Inter-parliamentary cooperation in the European Union has a longstanding tradition and comprises a number of formal conferences with clearly defined structures, but has not evolved to the level of shared decision-making as in a fully-fledged parliamentary assembly. Thus, there is no direct formal impact on EU policy-making as these inter-parliamentary bodies lack any formal decision-making power.

In the literature two main functions of inter-parliamentary cooperation are identified with regard to policy influence: the exchange of information and best practice and the coordination of common positions in relation to EU legislation or subsidiarity control in the Early Warning Mechanism (EWM) (see Miklin, 2013; Knutelska, 2013, p. 38; Bengtson, 2007). Furthermore, formal inter-parliamentary cooperation has the important function to establish a network of EU representatives who hold similar responsibilities within their parliament and can profit in the long term from their personal contact.

Three main dividing lines structure inter-parliamentary cooperation in the EU: the institutional affiliation of M(E)Ps, their political ideology, and territoriality. In view of the institutional affiliation of parliamentarians, the difference between the EU level and the national level leads to different conceptions of a desired policy outcome and rivalry over

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<sup>1</sup> See [opal-europe.org](http://opal-europe.org) for information on the project. Special thanks go to the interviewers who have made their data available (Anna-Lena Högenauer for the Netherlands, Katjana Gattermann and Oliver Höing for Germany and Slovakia, and Alexander Strelkov for Sweden).

competences between the two parliamentary levels (Neunreither 2005, Costa and Latek, 2007, Westlake, 1995). However, institutional affiliation can also serve to indicate differences *among* national parliaments. Each parliament is located differently within the political system of its member state and has different rights and capabilities.

A second dimension for a closer alliances among MPs are their ideological convictions, as most obviously indicated by the membership in party families. Miklin and Crum (2011) show the relevance of the party channel in a survey of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), Miklin (2013) in a study on the Austrian Parliament and Wonka and Rittberger (2014) for the German Bundestag.

Finally, national background or regional interests are relevant for alliances among parliamentarians; most obviously for vertical cooperation across levels. Miklin and Crum (2011) have shown that the informal inter-actions between MEPs and MPs take place primarily along national lines. Of course, for MEPs the contact to the domestic party leadership is highly relevant for re-election since the candidacies for EP elections are decided at the national level. Also, shared interests, language, and cultural background should facilitate the cooperation here. In a similar vein, the transnational cooperation with neighbouring countries should be more effective, as MPs may share the same problems. The Benelux parliament has for example treated the pollution of the Meuse River in cooperation as it is relevant to all three states (Benelux Parliament, 2014).

While the interactions of parliamentarians through the party channel have been investigated a bit (see Miklin, 2013; Wonka and Rittberger, 2014), the cross-country differences structuring the field of interaction have yet not been covered to my knowledge. This paper aims at explaining national parliaments' priorities in inter-parliamentary cooperation along the other two dividing lines: the institutional capacity and the territorial dimension.<sup>2</sup> It will focus on the scope of influence available to a parliament indicated by the degree of independence from the executive. In cross-country analysis, the study will also account for territoriality in terms of the size of a member state and its regional ties. The size of a country should determine a parliament's ability and motivation to be in contact with other parliamentary actors.

In the following section I will define my expectations for national parliaments' priorities in inter-parliamentary cooperation in EU affairs before moving to the analysis of the country cases and priorities in inter-parliamentary cooperation of each parliament.

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<sup>2</sup> Data limitations do not allow covering the party political dimension.

## Member states' priorities in inter-parliamentary cooperation

While the amount of EU legislation and the complexity of the multi-level decision-making process confronts all parliaments or chambers with the same challenges, each parliament is equipped differently in terms of resources and its scope of influence in legal and de facto terms. Two factors are crucial to explain national parliaments approach to inter-parliamentary cooperation. On the one hand, I expect that the institutional capacity will determine its ability and motivation to be in contact with other parliamentary actors and, on the other, the size of the member state.

To structure the various forms of inter-parliamentary cooperation, I distinguish in terms of scope, formalization, and vertical or horizontal links. Formal forms of inter-parliamentary cooperation are guided by formal rules of procedure or by a set of concrete guidelines, while informal cooperation is defined as ad hoc basis without an institutionalized set of procedures. Furthermore, inter-parliamentary cooperation can be horizontal, between national parliaments only, or vertical, between the European Parliament and its domestic counterparts. However, many meetings as COSAC and other large inter-parliamentary conference gather parliaments from both levels and are opportunities for vertical and horizontal contacts. Finally, the scope of cooperation varies from bilateral exchange to regional cooperation among a restricted number of member states to pan-European structures. Table 1 allocates the most important means of inter-parliamentary cooperation depending on their territorial scope and degree of formalization.<sup>3</sup> Expectations on parliaments' approach to cooperation in the EU will be formulated in relation to the different modes defined in this table.

	Formal	Informal
Pan-European	COSAC ICMs / JCMs Other inter-parliamentary conferences	Party connections
Bilateral and regional cooperation	Regional parliamentary assemblies	Meetings Contact via phone and mail

Table 1: Forms of inter-parliamentary cooperation in the EU.

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed description of all formats of inter-parliamentary cooperation, their participants and functions, please see Heffler and Gattermann, forthcoming.

The capacity of a parliament can be indicated by the amount of resources available to parliament and degree of independence from the government which allows (or restricts) effective parliamentary control. In terms of resources, the number of MPs, parliamentary administrators and political group staff are important factors. The size of parliaments in the EU differs largely from 56 MPs in Cyprus to 650 in the House of Commons in the UK. Thus, if fewer MPs with less staff have to cover EU affairs, they will inevitably have to be more selective. This is probably even truer for the rather time consuming travelling necessary for formal inter-parliamentary cooperation. Thus, for parliaments with more restricted resources I expect a more selective approach and the use of fewer channels of inter-parliamentary cooperation.

If the parliament needs to be more selective, what will parliamentarians focus on? The scope of influence of a parliament can furthermore be defined by the degree of independence from the executive and its powers to exert control and influence in the legislative (and EU decision-making) process. On the one hand, I expect parliaments with strong formal rights which are used in practice to be less motivated to engage in inter-parliamentary cooperation or to focus on those channels which aim at better control of the executive. Thus, countries with strong mandating rights, as Denmark, should be less willing to spend resources on formal inter-parliamentary cooperation, but rather use a more focused approach on access to alternative sources of information. This could be the link to MEPs who have first-hand information on developments at the EU level and the network of national parliament representatives (NPR) who are informed early in the process on the position of other member states.

On the other hand, for parliaments with restricted means of influence on the government activities and positions in EU affairs, incentives should be higher to engage in other channels of influence as through the European Parliament or contact to the Commission. Formal inter-parliamentary cooperation could be a means to develop a strong network of personal contacts which would allow coordinating positions.

The size of member state defines the number of MEPs representing the country in the EP. For the countries selected as case studies in this paper, there is great variation ranging from 13 MEPs for Denmark and Slovakia up to 51 for Poland and 96 for Germany, the most populated member state. Research on inter-parliamentary cooperation has shown that vertical cooperation is often focused on national contacts (Miklin and Crum 2011, Miklin 2013?). However, for a small member state the limited number of MEPs implies that not all 20 standing committees of the EP can be covered by their national MEPs. Also, MEPs of the

respective member state will less frequently be in the position of rapporteur who is in an influential position for the specific policy proposal and a favoured contact for bilateral cooperation. Thus, for MPs with fewer MEPs representing their member state vertical cooperation along national lines will be less effective.

Whereas a number of institutional and procedural features of the EU were established to balance the differences between small and large member states, the size still determines the bargaining power in EU negotiations to a significant degree. This affects the parliamentary level as well. The more likely it is for the government to be outvoted (or having to compromise) in the Council, the less relevant will parliamentary control over this government be for the final output of the EU policy making process. Thus, for parliaments from small member states the use of diverse channels of influence, especially the EWS and influence on party allies in the voting behaviour in the EP should be of higher interest in order to balance the limited control over the Council decisions.<sup>4</sup> In addition, parliaments from smaller member states might be more inclined to join forces with allies who share their interests as through regional cooperation among a limited number of member states.

The expectations on national parliaments' priorities in inter-parliamentary cooperation were derived from the two lines of cleavages structuring the overall interaction among parliaments in the EU: institutional affiliation, here in light of the scope of parliamentary influence in the member state a parliamentarian belongs to, and territoriality, with the focus on the size of a member state. This list is far from complete, but aims at shedding some light on the difference across countries. The expectations on institutional affiliation and territoriality may very well interact and even contradict each other in their consequences. As in the case of a small member state, i.e. Denmark, with strong rights of parliamentary control over the executive. It will be attempted to disentangle the diverse motivations to engage in specific channels of inter-parliamentary cooperation based on the interview data as good as possible.

## **Data and method**

To find out whether the size of a member state and the power of the parliament have the expected influence on its priorities in inter-parliamentary cooperation this paper draws on interview data from four countries: Denmark, Germany, Poland and Slovakia. The countries were chosen to represent each case of possible variations in the two independent variables. Denmark is a small or medium sized member state with below six million inhabitants. The

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<sup>4</sup> With the extension of qualified majority voting in the Lisbon Treaty, the focus on control of the government has become questionable for all parliaments. However, it is argued here, that the motivation should be even higher for parliaments from countries which exert less influence in the Council.

Danish parliament, the Folketing, has been treated as the text book model of parliamentary scrutiny of EU affairs due to the mandating rights for the government's position in the Council. The German Bundestag is similarly famous for its strong position vis-a-vis the government (at least since the recent revisions of the formal control rights initiated by the German Constitutional Court). With over 80 inhabitants it is the largest EU member state and one of its founding members. On the other hand Poland and Slovakia represent two political systems of a large and a small member state where the de facto power of parliament is rather limited. The analysis is restricted to lower chambers in the two bicameral systems of Poland and Germany.

The interviews on which the analysis is based were conducted in the framework of the OPAL project in the time period between May 2012 and May 2013. Overall, this study can draw on 41 interviews. In each member state MPs from the government and opposition, in most cases with a specialization on EU issues were interviewed as well as a number of administrators engaged in EU affairs. For a complete list of interview partners (in anonymous form) please see Annex 1.<sup>5</sup> The interviews were semi-structured. Interview partners were asked for the form of participation of their legislature in inter-parliamentary cooperation in the EU, their personal experiences and their judgement on the relevance. The table 2 gives an overview of the number of interviews and the roles of the interview partners.

Country	Date and place of interview	Interview partners from government parties	Interview partners from opposition parties	Interview partners from administration	Total number of interviews
Denmark	Nov 2012 in Copenhagen	5	1	6	12
Germany ( <i>Bundestag</i> )	May 2013 in Berlin	4	5	3	12
Poland ( <i>Sejm</i> )	April 2013 in Warsaw	1	2	6	9
Slovakia	May 2013 in Bratislava	2	2	1	5
Total number of interviews					41

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

<sup>5</sup> Interviews were conducted with the assurance of the anonymity of the interviewee. References therefore follow the system of abbreviations for "country/chamber/political or administrative level/number", for example PLSEP01 for Poland, Senate, Political level, First interview.

## **Priorities for inter-parliamentary cooperation in the member states**

This section contains the results of the analysis of the interview data on the four case studies. Participation rates in Inter-parliamentary Committee Meetings (ICM) and Joint Committee Meetings (JCM) and background information is based on expert reports and document research. The focus lies on the description and analysis of the structure and priorities of each national parliament in inter-parliamentary cooperation. Certain forms of inter-parliamentary cooperation apply equally for all parliaments. In COSAC usually all member states are present, as in the EU Speakers conference. Currently all parliaments have national parliament representatives in Brussels.<sup>6</sup> Invitations to Inter-parliamentary or Joint Committee Meetings or Conference are sent to all 41 chambers equally. And all countries have a number of MEPs sitting in the European Parliament.<sup>7</sup> Other aspects of inter-parliamentary cooperation vary across countries, as for example the actual participation in the inter-parliamentary forums. The focus on of the analysis lies on the variations.

### ***The Danish Folketing***

The Danish parliament, the unicameral Folketing, has been treated as the textbook model for scrutiny of EU affairs. The strong mandating rights of the Folketing for the Danish position in Council negotiations allows parliament to be well informed by the government and to exercise significant influence on the Danish EU decision-making process (Christensen, forthcoming). The frequent minority governments in the Danish political system have led to an overall strong parliamentary influence in relation to the executive. Since Denmark is one of the smaller EU member states and the Folketing counts only 179 MPs, it does not come as a surprise that the resources in terms of staff are rather limited with slightly more than 700 persons.<sup>8</sup> The close cooperation with government ministries may compensate this limitation. Participation of Danish MPs in ICMs and JCMs has been rather low, as they were only present at one-fourth of the meetings that took place in the time from 2009 to 2012 (see Gattermann, 2013). Interview partners explain the low priority with the fact that the parliament is too small to send MPs to each ICM despite the lack of actual decision-making at those meetings. Rather the participation of Danish MPs is issue dependent (DKA01, DKA02, DKP06). It is mainly members from the EAC who travel to ICMs, inter-parliamentary conferences or bilateral visits to other national parliaments. Interview partners working for

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<sup>6</sup> However, at the time of interviews the Slovak parliament did not have a representative in the EP offices.

<sup>7</sup> There is variation in the structure which EU party groups or federations provide for the contact across levels, from regular monthly meetings to informal ad-hoc contacts. However, this affects MPs from different member states who belong to the respective party family equally and will not be part of this analysis.

<sup>8</sup> Information on the Budget of the Danish parliament is not available on the IPU website.

other sectoral committees indicated a lack of cooperation with other national parliaments (DKA04, DKP09, DKP10). COSAC is valued as a very well established platform for exchange which has allowed a network of personal contacts to grow which can be used in daily practice (DKA01).

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

The Danish parliament is member in the Nordic Council<sup>9</sup> and coordinates with other Nordic countries on EU issues to a certain degree. However, members of sectoral committees other than the EAC recalled that on certain issues the coordination did not even take place among this sub-group of EU member states (DKA04).

At the administrative level, the national parliament representative in the EP is the most important contact and source of information. He sends regular reports on the latest developments in Brussels. The NPR has good contacts to the committee clerks, primarily the EAC (DKA12). The contact to the NPR is prevailing over direct contact to other national parliaments at the administrative level (DKA02, DKA03, DKP10).

In sum, the Danish approach to inter-parliamentary cooperation is focused due to restriction of resources. Highest priority lies on the informal contacts. On the one side through MEPs which is very structured at parliamentary level through monthly meetings in the Folketing and on the other through the NPR's office which is more relevant than direct bilateral contacts to other national parliaments.

### ***The Slovak National Council***

With slightly more than five million inhabitants, Slovakia has a similar size of population as Denmark and also sends 13 MEPs to the EP. The national parliament, the National Council of the Slovak Republic, is composed of 150 members where currently a single-party majority of the SMER party governs. The National Council, as a unicameral parliament, holds strong formal rights of control over EU affairs modelled after the Danish case. Thus, the EAC may mandate the Slovak position in the Council of Ministers. However, the strong executive

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<sup>9</sup> The Nordic Council is the inter-parliamentary body of the Nordic region which was founded in 1952. It is composed of 87 members coming from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland. For further information see [www.norden.org](http://www.norden.org).

dominance and strict party discipline hinders an active use of these formal rights (Figulova, forthcoming). While information on the budget of the Slovak assembly is not available, there is only half as many staff as in the Folketing with less than 400 persons (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2014). Interviewees from government and opposition have stated that EU issues have a very low priority for the current majority in parliament (SKP02, SKP04).

COSAC is valued for the opportunity to exchange with other parliamentarians (SKP01, SKP02, SKP03). The formal agenda of the plenary meetings of COSAC are – as criticized in other member states – qualified as “talking shop” and without significant impact. However, the networking through informal exchange on the side of the meetings as well as the COSAC chairpersons meeting are regarded as important sources of information on the positions of other member states. COSAC is given higher priority than ICMs and JCMs (SKP01) which may explain the low participation in these meetings. As in the Danish case, only one-fourth of meetings are attended (see Gattermann, 2013).

Contacts to MEPs are generally seen as most useful source of information and important for coordination of common positions along party lines. Here, the contact is more frequently initiated from the side of MEPs whose aim is to follow a cohesive approach with their domestic party family. MEPs are allowed to attend and speak in committees in the National Council, but do not use this opportunity frequently. The contact to MEPs seems to depend on personal priorities: while some MPs are closely connected through mail and phone contact on a weekly basis, others are distant to the EP.

The Slovak Parliament did not have a representative in Brussels at the time of interviews (May 2013). She had been withdrawn due to budget restrictions and was only replaced recently. The lack of a permanent representative does not allow access to Monday Morning Meetings. All interviewees argued for the need to replace the position, especially in view of the upcoming Slovak presidency in 2016. MPs replace the information they used to receive through a NPR by contact to MEPs and the Slovak permanent representation (SKP02, SKA05).

Interesting in the Slovak country case is the strength of regional cooperation. There is a close link to the other three Visegrad countries (V4). The “first call” when something new is on the table goes to the colleagues in the Czech Republic (SKP02). The V4 coordinate positions prior to COSAC meetings and on other relevant items.

To sum it up, inter-parliamentary cooperation of the Slovak parliament suffers from the overall low priority of EU issues. Resources are restricted (also due to the low political priority – and neither allowed a frequent participation in ICMs and JCMs, nor to sustain the

position of a NPR in Brussels. In consequence only a limited number of channels for inter-parliamentary cooperation are used. However, regional cooperation with the V4 is of high relevance for the approach of the Slovak National Council to cooperation on EU issue.

### *The German Bundestag*

Germany is in terms of population the largest EU member state. The German parliament is considered to be one of the best equipped in terms of resources with a budget of almost 800 million PPP dollars and around 2.800 staff (see Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2014). For EU affairs, there is a large administrative body of the parliament and on the side of political groups. With 96 MEPs Germany is represented in all EP committees and party groups. The strengthening of parliamentary oversight through the rulings of the German Constitutional Court in the past years has put the parliament in a good position to control government activities in EU affairs (Höing, forthcoming).

Overall, interview partners from the German Bundestag formulated a sceptical view towards formalized structures of inter-parliamentary cooperation and described the connection via party contacts to the European Parliament as most important source for information and coordination (DBTP01, DBTP02, DBTP04, DBTP05, DBTP06, DBTP07, DBTP08). The data available on the attendance in Joint and Inter-Parliamentary Committee Meetings in Brussels show comparatively high participation from the side of German Bundestag's MPs. They were present at 29 number of ICM or JCMs from an overall number of 40 meetings in the time period from 2009 to 2012 (see Gattermann 2013). However, interview partners did not value this form of inter-parliamentary cooperation as a very relevant or effective channel. Thus, the high participation rate may rather be explained by the higher amount of resources available to parliament than the political priority.

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

For vertical the cooperation, the contact to MEPs which hold the rapporteurship on a certain proposed legislation is important. The rapporteurs from the European Parliament are often invited to committee meetings in the Bundestag or contacted in form of video conferences (DBTA09). However, most often, only if the rapporteurs are German. Here the Bundestag is in clear advantage to be able to use this source of first-hand information on the ongoing negotiation process, since the high number of German MEPs in the EP leads to more frequent

rapporteurs where the national ties play in favour of the Bundestag. This opportunity seems to make the formal channels of cooperation less interesting. The German interview partners were the most coherently critical ones towards formal IPC.

German MEPs have the right to attend and speak in meetings of the Bundestag's committees. While MEPs do not make intensive use of this right, one or two German MEPs are regularly in EAC meetings in the Bundestag to participate in the discussions (DBTA10, DBTP03?). Thus, there is regular exchange through this channel.

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

Germany is the only country to have located the office of the national parliamentary representative outside of the EP building and to have staff from the political groups located there as well. Each party group present in the Bundestag has one or several staff in Brussels. Furthermore, the parliamentary representative is supported by several administrators, each responsible for a number of policy areas. NPRs from most of the other member states do not have more than a secretary or intern for their support. The capacity to have an administrative unit instead of a single person in the liaison office in Brussels is clearly linked to the amount of resources available.<sup>10</sup> The higher number of staff of the parliamentary representation, and even more so the presence of staff from the national political groups, changes the logic of inter-action with the MPs of the Bundestag in comparison to other national parliaments. In general the contact of NPRs from all member states with the domestic parliament is concentrated on the administrative level. For the German case, this further differentiates further due to the party group offices in Brussels. The administrative unit of the Bundestag and the EAC secretariat are in frequent contact with the NPR. However, staffs from MPs are in touch with their party's representatives in Brussels, more than with the NPR (DBTA06, DBTP03). An assistant of an EAC member in the BT defined the party's office in Brussels as the most important channel to receive information on EU issues (DBTA06).

Overall, the German Bundestag profits from the high resources available which allow to cover formal inter-parliamentary meetings – despite a perceived lack of impact – and close informal contacts to the European Parliament. The political coordination on the vertical level is much facilitated by the party groups' offices in Brussels and the high number of German MEPs

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<sup>10</sup> Of course, the capacity must always be combined with the political will to invest the resources for a certain objective.

which cover all committees, most EP party groups and are frequently in the position of rapporteur.

### ***The Polish Sejm***

Poland is the largest of the member states which accessed the EU in the eastern enlargement in 2004. According to the data provided by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Polish Parliament has a bit more than fourth the budget available than the German Bundestag and approximately half the staff (with 1244 staff working for the parliamentary administration). The fairly high number of 51 Polish MEPs is, however, affiliated to only three of the seven EP party groups.<sup>11</sup> There are overall 460 MPs in the two chambers of the Polish parliament. The Sejm's EAC may issue opinions on the draft government position ex ante to Council meetings which should then 'constitute the basis of' the position of Poland (article 13 (1) of the Cooperation Act). However, the government may in practice deviate from the parliamentary opinion justifying its decision ex post (Barcz and Pudlo, forthcoming; Fuksiewicz, 2011).

A number of the Polish interview partners are dissatisfied with the current state of inter-parliamentary cooperation due to a lack of substantial and personal exchange. Overall, the relationship to the European Parliament is rather perceived in terms of rivalry than cooperation (PLSJP03, PLSJA04, PLSJP05). A member of the EAC depicts the EP in exaggeration as a "black hole" for documents, as no replies or reactions return from the EP. This demonstrates the level of frustration from side of some Polish parliamentarians (PLSJP05). MEPS are allowed to participate and speak in committee meetings of the Sejm. This opportunity is used from time to time. However, critical voices stated a lack of active contributions by MEPs to the committee debates (PLSJP05). The Sejm's participation in bilateral meetings of committees with the EP is also very low with only three meetings over the years 2008 to 2011 (see Sprungk 2013).

COSAC and ICMs/JCMs are recognized as relevant formal structures, however, the critique on their lack of influence is present here as well (PLSJP03, PLSJP04, PLSJP07). Furthermore, it is only members of the presidium of the EAC participate in COSAC meetings and do not report back to parliament (PLSJP03). The participation rate in Joint and Inter-parliamentary Committee meetings was rather high with 30 meetings of overall 40 covered from side of the Sejm (see Gattermann, 2013).

The national parliament representative of the Sejm stationed in Brussels is recognized as a very important link, especially in relation to the Early Warning Mechanism or general contact to the European Commission (PLSJA01, PLSJA02, PLSJA04, PLSJA06). The NPR serves to

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<sup>11</sup> With 23 in the EPP, 5 in S&D, 19 in the ECR and 4 without affiliation.

inform the Sejm's members on the positions of other national parliaments on certain EU legislation and is therefore a good source of information independent from the government (PSJA04). Contacts of the NPR take primarily place at the administrative level.

Bilateral contacts to other national parliaments, thus, cooperation on the horizontal dimension, is described to be rather low except among regional groups (PLSJA04, PLSJP07, PLSJP08). Here the “Weimarer Triangle”, the Baltic region and the V4 are relevant groups for regional cooperation.

In sum, the Polish Sejm is active in inter-parliamentary cooperation through its presence at the large conferences and pan-European inter-parliamentary meetings. The relatively high amount of resources of one of the larger parliaments in the EU would allow participating here despite a high political priority of IPC. The perception of a state of rivalry of the two levels of parliament seems to avoid more substantial exchange cross-level.<sup>12</sup> Yet, the less formalized meetings on bilateral level with either the EP committees or other national parliaments are not exercised frequently except for in regional structures.

In sum, the Polish Sejm is represented in the formal meetings of inter-parliamentary activities in the EU. However, the informal dimension of exchange seems to be exploited less than in other member states. The relation to the EP is predominantly termed in the light of rivalry over competences and seems to avoid a close exchange among Polish MPs and MEPs of the same nationality. Bilateral contacts to other national parliaments are only relevant within regional cooperation. Thus, despite fairly high resources the scope of inter-parliamentary cooperation is limited and focussed slightly more on formal means of cooperation.

## **Conclusions**

Inter-parliamentary cooperation is promoted as a way to alleviate the democratic deficit of the European Union. This paper set out to understand cross-national differences in national parliaments' priorities in inter-parliamentary cooperation in the EU. To build clear structures for effective exchange among parliaments coherent approaches from parliaments would be necessary. To answer the question on cross-country differences in inter-parliamentary cooperation the paper has analysed interview data from four countries which diverge in terms of size of the member state and parliamentary strength over EU issues: Denmark, Germany, Poland, and Slovakia. Expectations on parliaments' priorities were derived from their capacity in terms of resources and scope of influence as well as the size of the member state.

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<sup>12</sup> The nature of the interrelations of MPs and MEPs through the party channel were not explicitly asked for in the interviews in the Polish Sejm. Further investigations would be necessary to allow drawing conclusions on how important links among MEPs and MPs of the same party are for the Polish case.

As expected, the amount of resources has an impact on the breadth of inter-parliamentary contacts of a member state. Germany is in clear advantage with the number of MEPs in the European Parliament available for exchange along national lines and the ability to send MPs to a wide range of formal and informal meetings. Participation of Slovak MPs, on the other hand, is much more limited and, at the time of interviews, the lack of a NPR avoided access to exchange through this network. The Danish and Polish parliament range in between. Thus, resources have a clear influence on the scope of inter-parliamentary activities.

How does the strength of parliament within the domestic political system influence inter-parliamentary activities? The Danish Folketing, as expected for a parliament with strong oversight rights on EU issues, opts for informal contacts rather than participation in the large ICMs/JCMs. Also the contact to MEPs is much formalized with monthly meetings in the Folketing. The same is true for the German Bundestag. While resources allow participating in formal meetings as well, the informal link through party contacts and on the administrative level is judged as much more relevant. However, the Slovak parliament is very limited in its activities, both in the formal and informal dimension due to the overall low priority of EU affairs in parliament. For the Polish Sejm, equally the participation in formal meetings is covered, but a more political exchange through informal channels does not seem to be very relevant.

Size of the member state has the expected impact in the Slovak case, where strong regional ties are used for coordination of positions on EU issues. The Danish parliament is also member of a formal regional parliamentary assembly. However, here the relevance for coordination in EU affairs is more limited. On the other hand, size cannot explain why the Polish parliament also focuses on regional contacts more than pan-European contacts and the link to the EP. Germany on the other hand seems to be rather self-dependent and closely connected to the EP and other EU institutions.

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