

The inter-parliamentary alliance: how national parliaments empowered the European Parliament

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Abstract

National parliaments (NPs) have been generally considered the ‘victims’ of European integration—at least until the 1990s. In this article, I argue instead that NPs played an active and decisive role in shaping European institutions since the 1960s. In particular, NPs were the key actors driving the empowerment of the European Parliament (EP). When national governments decided to transfer some of their powers to the European level, many NPs threatened to oppose those reforms unless governments agreed to increase the EP’s powers. These NPs considered the EP’s empowerment to be effective compensation for their own lost powers. Two case studies were selected to illustrate this argument: the first transfer of budgetary powers to the EP (1970) and the first transfer of legislative powers through the Single European Act (1986). In both cases, the EP’s empowerment was made possible by an inter-parliamentary alliance between the EP and NPs.

Keywords: EP empowerment, European Parliament, National parliaments

Introduction

For a long time, national parliaments (NPs) have been described as the ‘losers’ or the ‘victims’ of European integration because they were weakened by the transfer of their competences to the European Union (EU) (Maurer and Wessels 2001; Auel and Benz 2005; O’Brennan and Raunio 2007; Neuhold et al. 2015). According to this view, NPs only started to ‘fight back’ in the 1990s, by adopting stronger procedures that helped them oversee governments’ EU policies (O’Brennan and Raunio 2007: 9; Winzen 2013; Auel et al. 2015). More recently, the Treaty of Lisbon was often called the ‘treaty of parliaments’ since it strengthened their role through the introduction of the Early Warning System (Auel and Neuhold 2016).

On the other hand, recent studies have used the concept of the ‘multi-level parliamentary field’ to provide a more complex assessment of the role of NPs, taking into account not only parliaments’ formal powers but also the interactions, cooperation and conflicts between parliaments at the national and European levels (Crum and Fossum 2009; Benz 2017). Since European integration has been accompanied by regular empowerment of the European Parliament (EP), and since national parties are present in both NPs and the EP, some authors have suggested that a stronger EP could compensate for the weakening of NPs (Crum and Fossum 2009: 263; Winzen et al. 2015: 77). However, the emergence of the ‘multi-level parliamentary field’ is generally presented as a relatively recent development, triggered by empowerment of the EP and the establishment of inter-parliamentary cooperation. According to Neunreither (2005) relations between NPs and the EP started to develop in the 1990s.

This article will argue instead that the role of NPs at the EU level is a much older and more profound phenomenon. As early as the 1960s, NPs played a decisive role in the progressive empowerment of the EP. When national governments were about to transfer some

of their budgetary or legislative powers to the European level, many NPs threatened to oppose those reforms unless governments agreed to increase the EP's powers. Indeed, many NPs considered EP empowerment to be effective compensation for their own lost powers. Two case studies were selected to illustrate this argument: the first transfer of budgetary powers to the EP (1970) and the first transfer of legislative powers through the Single European Act (SEA, 1986). In both cases, EP empowerment was made possible by an inter-parliamentary alliance between the EP and NPs. Even before the 1990s, NPs were not the 'victims' of European integration but successfully used their national powers to impose the parliamentarisation of the EU regime.

The origins of the EP's powers

Existing research has identified two factors that have promoted the empowerment of the EP: supranational activism and intergovernmental beliefs.

First, many authors focus on the role of MEPs themselves and highlight inter-institutional 'battles' (Priestley 2008) through which they have managed to increase their own powers (Héritier 2017). In the 1980s, directly elected MEPs strategically used their new budgetary powers and managed to expand their influence through regular budget fights with the Council (Costa 2001: 143-160). In the 1990s, the EP was able to increase its role in the legislative process and in the appointment of the Commission by interpreting the Maastricht Treaty to its advantage and by imposing its interpretation on the Council (Hix 2002b). In particular, MEPs used the threat of blocking or slowing legislation to win institutional concessions from the Council (Farrell and Héritier 2003; 2007; Moury 2007).

The problem with this approach is that it can provide only marginal explanations of EP empowerment (Rittberger 2012: 28). Supranational activism can merely explain why, once they were given certain powers, MEPs managed to capitalise on those powers. It cannot

explain why national governments gave those powers to the EP in the first place at a time when, by definition, MEPs had only limited institutional leverage over the Council.

This problem has pushed some authors to focus on national political elites. König (2008) argues that when the Council has a strategic informational advantage over the EP, co-decision can strengthen governments' position vis-à-vis the Commission. However, many authors claim that from a rationalist perspective, EP empowerment is an 'anomaly', since it tends to limit governments' leeway (Costa and Magnette 2003: 49; Benedetto and Hix 2007: 128). The main answer to this puzzle relies on constructivism. EP empowerment is explained by national political elites' federalist ideology (Moravcsik 1998: 311; Wagner, 2002) or by their legitimating beliefs (Costa and Magnette 2003; Rittberger 2005). According to Rittberger (2005), every time a legitimacy deficit was created by delegation or pooling of sovereignty, national political elites sought to address it according to their legitimating beliefs. EP empowerment is thus explained by the efforts of governments adhering to a federal state-belief.

The constructivist approach actually introduces a new question. Why would some governments believe in the necessity of empowering the EP, which directly weakens the powers of the Council and thus their own powers? Constructivists argue that governments are willing to limit their own powers because they are persuaded by normative pressure (Schimmelfennig et al. 2006; Knudsen 2012a) or by general constitutional principles (Roederer-Rynning and Schimmelfennig 2012; Rosén 2016). However, according to Charles Tilly (1985: 171), legitimacy 'depends rather little on abstract principle'; instead, 'legitimacy is the probability that other authorities will act to confirm the decisions of a given authority'. According to this definition, a legitimacy deficit exists only if European decisions are effectively challenged by other authorities. This leads to the question of which authorities had an interest in and the power to effectively challenge governments' decisions and thus force

them to acknowledge the existence of a legitimacy deficit. Whereas in nation-states democratisation generally arose in response to popular protests, the parliamentarisation of the EU was rather an elitist process (Schimmelfennig 2010: 218), in particular before the 1990s, in a time of ‘permissive consensus’.

This article argues that NPs and national parties constitute the missing link between governments and the EP. When certain NP powers are transferred to the European level, the parties represented in those parliaments risk losing their ability to oversee and influence their government’s European policy. However, this loss of parliamentary power at the national level can be compensated at the European level by the empowerment of the EP, in which national parties are also represented. Therefore, when national parties can no longer oversee and influence their government’s European policy in NPs, they can have a direct interest in transferring this role to the EP. Moreover, national parties also have the leverage to impose EP empowerment via their presence in NPs. Since they exercise parliamentary oversight over their governments, NPs can constrain these governments to support EP empowerment. In particular, NPs have the ability to influence treaty negotiations (König and Slapin 2004) and make their approval of any new transfer of powers to the European level conditional on EP empowerment (Eriksen and Fossum 2012: 334). In sum, national parties can have both an interest in (via their presence in the EP) and the power (via their presence in NPs) to push in favour of EP empowerment. It should be noted that this argument only intends to explain why those governments that supported the EP did so. It cannot directly explain the specific negotiation outcomes, which depend on the relative bargaining power of those governments.

The inter-parliamentary model complements both the supranational and the intergovernmental models reviewed above (Figure 1):

1. Whereas supranationalism highlights EP's activism, this model argues that when the EP asked for its first important formal powers, it was heard by governments only insofar as its demands were supported by NPs.
2. Whereas constructivist intergovernmentalism sees national political elites' beliefs as the source of EP empowerment, the inter-parliamentary model argues more specifically that NPs constituted the key actors promoting EP empowerment. Rittberger used NPs' debates, but only as a way to 'assess the legitimating beliefs of parties in government' (2005: 54). This approach neglects the conflict of interest between governments and NPs in a context in which integration risks strengthening the former at the expense of the latter (Follesdal and Hix 2006: 535). Instead of treating 'parties in government' as monoliths, the inter-parliamentary approach precisely highlights this institutional tension, which sometimes caused ministers and MPs from the same party to oppose each other. According to the inter-parliamentary model, governments' default position was to defend the powers of the Council. When they supported EP empowerment, it was not necessarily because they were sincerely convinced it was a legitimate solution; rather, they were compelled to do so by political and institutional pressure from their respective NPs. This tension between governments and parliamentarians has been noted by Schimmelfennig (2010, p. 226). However, whereas constructivists argue that governments were persuaded to empower the EP through the rhetorical action of blaming and shaming (Rittberger and Schimmelfennig 2006; Schimmelfennig 2010), the inter-parliamentary model implies that governments were constrained by NPs' formal powers, in particular to ratify new treaties.

More generally, the inter-parliamentary model implies that governments are not the only national institutional actors that are able to shape the EU political regime. We already know that national courts and regulatory authorities are able to respond to European integration by defending their own influence and authority with regard to European matters in

cooperation with supranational institutions. This has led national courts to engage in the enforcement of EU law in cooperation with the European Court of Justice (ECJ) (Alter 2001) and national regulatory authorities to form transgovernmental networks in cooperation with the European Commission (Eberlein and Newman 2008). Similarly, the inter-parliamentary model suggests that national parties and parliaments can respond to the transfer of their powers by promoting parliamentary powers at the European level, in association with the EP. The general approach underlying these models is that the European political regime is the product of the transposition of national regime actors' influence at the supranational level.

The inter-parliamentary alliance

The inter-parliamentary model does not suggest that all NPs and national parties always supported EP empowerment. The inter-parliamentary alliance does not form in the following situations:

1. The NP is not about to lose power because its competence remains national. In this case, it has no reason to look for compensation at the EU level and thus no reason to support EP empowerment.
2. The NP is too weak to constrain its government's negotiating position in favour of EP empowerment. Formally, all NPs do not enjoy the same level of 'parliamentary strength' (Auel et al. 2015). Politically, some governments are more vulnerable to parliamentary pressure than others (e.g., a divided coalition government versus a disciplined single party government). A weak NP accepts the Council's domination at the European level, just as it accepts executive domination at the national level.
3. A national party has policy preferences that generally clash with those of the EP. Since the EP adopts its decisions by majority, not unanimity, all national parties will not see their policy preferences equally reflected by the EP's votes. National parties whose preferences

are often in conflict with those of the EP cannot use it as a channel of influence. These marginal parties will not see EP empowerment as proper compensation for their loss of power at the national level and will not have an interest in joining the inter-parliamentary alliance.

The third point implies that for some national parties a loss in their NP can be compensated by a gain in the EP. Indeed, national parties are key actors in the NPs-EP connection.

Before 1979 and the direct election of the EP, MEPs were simultaneously MPs in a national chamber and often had significant experience in national politics (Knudsen 2012b). This dual mandate allowed them to develop multi-level strategies. MEPs could use their national position to influence the Council of Ministers and, conversely, could inform and advise their national colleagues on European affairs (Van Schendelen 1979). Therefore, because the EP was an emanation of NPs, its empowerment could allow NPs to indirectly influence the policies that they could no longer directly influence.

After 1979, the end of the systematic dual mandate and the increasing specialisation of MEPs' careers (Beauvallet and Michon 2012) weakened the personal connection between NPs and the EP. However, a political connection persisted through national parties, which acted as multi-level organisations. Indeed, national parties still control candidate selection to EP elections, which allows those parties to direct their MEPs' votes on important issues (Faas 2003). Although transnational party groups monitor MEPs' behaviour in day-to-day politics, MEPs attach greater importance to representing the views of their national party (Rasmussen 2008). Raunio (2000) and Miklin and Crum (2011) observe substantial contacts between MEPs and their national party executives. Finally, MEPs' votes primarily reflect their national party affiliation. Hix (2002a) shows that voting in the EP is driven by national party preferences, not by individual preferences or by transnational party groups. Corbett et al.

(2005: 104) highlight that voting discipline is primarily imposed by national parties. Similarly, Hix et al. (2009: 827–8) show that when they clash, national parties' preferences tend to prevail over transnational groups' positions, particularly in close votes.

Recent studies have demonstrated that national parties tend to use their presence in both their NP and the EP to develop multi-level strategies. Proksch and Slapin (2011) suggest that national opposition parties can use their MEPs to reduce their informational deficit in European affairs vis-à-vis their governments. Finke and Dannwolf (2013) argue that opposition parties that are weak in their NP but strong in the EP forward information to their MEPs to influence EU policies at the European level, whereas opposition parties that are weak in the EP but strong in their NP attempt to influence their government's position at the national level. Finally, Wonka and Rittberger (2014) show that German MPs have important contacts with MEPs from their own party, particularly when those MPs are in the opposition. Those studies tend to corroborate that national parties are multi-level organisations that are able to use their MEPs to compensate for the weakness of their national MPs. This supports the idea that national parties can have an interest in EP empowerment in matters that NPs can no longer directly control.

Winzen et al. observe that national MPs and MEPs 'come from the same countries and parties', which 'opens up the possibility of compensating for domestic losses of parliamentary authority with European gains' (2015: 77). However, their study focuses on only one side of 'the interdependent process of parliamentarisation in the EU's multi-level system'—how EP empowerment affects NPs. They argue that when NPs regard the EP as a competitor, EP empowerment encourages them to demand additional powers to oversee EU policies at the national level. In contrast, when the EP is considered an ally, NPs do not demand reforms in reaction to EP empowerment. In this article, I will explore the other side of the interdependent

relationship between NP powers and EP powers by examining how NPs pushed in favour of EP empowerment to compensate for their own power losses.

The case studies

I will focus on two case studies of EP empowerment: the 1970 budgetary treaty and the 1986 SEA. These episodes occurred before the 1990s, the period in which current research identifies the beginning of NPs' involvement in EU affairs and EP-NPs interactions. I will show that these phenomena are actually far older.

I have also selected these cases because they correspond, respectively, to the first budgetary and the first legislative powers granted to the EP. In subsequent treaties, the EP was regularly empowered but could use its existing powers as leverage vis-à-vis the Council. The first instances of empowerment are thus *prima facie* more puzzling. In addition, starting in the 1990s, EP empowerment was increasingly less debated and became 'a matter of habit' (Goetze and Rittberger 2010). Therefore, the first instances present the advantage of providing debates in which arguments were more explicitly stated and pressure more clearly exerted.

I have relied on the archives of European institutions and French diplomatic archives to analyse negotiations and on parliamentary debates to document NPs' pressure on their governments.

The 1970 budgetary treaty

The question of the EP's first budgetary powers was linked to the funding of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). On 22 April 1970, the Council agreed to replace national contributions with the Community's own resources to fund the CAP, as provided by a 1962 regulation. In parallel, a new treaty was signed that granted budgetary powers to the EP. The

underlying logic was that since those funds would no longer be transited through national budgets, the parliamentary oversight that could no longer be performed by NPs had to be performed by the EP. During the negotiations, the Netherlands and Germany were the most favourable to EP empowerment, while France was the most reluctant.

The first to demand budgetary powers for the EP were MEPs themselves. On 27 June 1963, based on a report by German CDU member Hans Furler, they adopted a resolution stating that budgetary powers should be granted to the EP when the Community had its own resources.¹ At this stage, a French diplomat noted that the EP had ‘no competence to discuss its own competence’ and that no government appeared to be genuinely willing to empower the EP.² However, the EP’s demands were soon backed by several NPs. According to Article 201 of the Treaty of Rome, the establishment of the Community’s own resources had to be approved by NPs, which gave them excellent leverage (Niblock 1971). Resolutions were adopted in particular by the Dutch and German parliaments. As noted by the French ambassador in Bonn, ‘Our [German] interlocutors report that the Federal government – as those in The Hague, Brussels and Rome – is subjected to very strong pressure from MPs in the Bundestag’.³

After the European Commission tabled its plan for EP empowerment, the Dutch Second Chamber’s foreign affairs budgetary committee adopted a resolution on 9 June 1965 supporting the Commission’s plan as amended by the EP.⁴ During the debate, Foreign Minister Luns declared that if unanimity were unreachable in the Council, he would consider himself free to re-evaluate his position. However, the committee forced the Minister to declare that he would support the Commission’s plan as long as the Commission would defend it (Newhouse 1967: 94–5). This episode reflected differences in preferences: on one hand, the Dutch government’s priority was the development of the CAP; on the other hand, a majority of MPs attached more importance to EP empowerment (Harryvan 2006: 131–2).

Within the Dutch Cabinet, the strongest advocates of EP empowerment were Labour ministers (Harryvan 2006: 134). This situation could be explained by the fact that Labour leader Anne Vondeling and Catholic leader Joseph Luns had been in competition for the position of Foreign Minister. By accusing Luns of not defending the parliament's position sufficiently, the Labour party was continuing this intra-cabinet rivalry.⁵ This rivalry also explains why the Dutch Cabinet could not afford to resist parliamentary pressure and adopted a very radical position in favour of the EP. As French Foreign Minister Maurice Couve de Murville put it, the Dutch government had 'its hands tied by its parliament' (Peyrefitte 2002: 885).

In Germany, diplomats insisted on the necessity of responding to German MPs' demands.⁶ Indeed, on 30 June 1965, the Bundestag unanimously adopted a resolution stating that the Commission's proposals on EP empowerment were still insufficient and calling on the German government to support EP amendments.⁷ Here, also, the political context encouraged the government to hear MPs' demands. General elections were scheduled for September 1965. Foreign Minister Gerhard Schröder was not ordinarily a defender of supranational institutions, and the EP's powers were not his priority (Oppelland 2001: 233–4). However, many CDU/CSU politicians wanted Schröder to be removed from his post after the elections. By responding to his MPs' demands, Schröder essentially intended to ensure that he could rely on the support of his party (Oppelland 2001: 237). In the Council meeting on the same day, he invoked the Bundestag's resolution. He added that his government would soon hold a coalition meeting (between the CDU/CSU and FDP) and that it could not afford to go against its MPs' wishes (Newhouse 1967: 117). The rigid positions of the Netherlands and Germany largely contributed to the failure of the negotiations with France, which led to the Empty Chair Crisis. Couve de Murville accused governments 'submitted to all sorts of political and parliamentary pressures' of being responsible for the crisis.⁸

Negotiations resumed in the Council after The Hague Summit in December 1969. As in 1965, the Dutch and German governments were the most active defenders of EP empowerment not so much because they genuinely believed that it was the right thing to do but because they felt constrained by their respective NPs. In a private meeting in January 1970, Willy Brandt, the new German SPD Chancellor, told newly elected French Gaullist President Pompidou that he did not attach much value to the EP: 'I sometimes wonder if the path taken by the Treaty of Rome was reasonable. I would have preferred some kind of Senate than a parliament based on the model of national parliaments' (Gerbet 2001: 358). German diplomats explained to their French counterparts that German Foreign Minister Walter Scheel was willing to move towards the French position but that he had to avoid 'overly strong criticism from the Bundestag'.⁹

The Dutch government was equally constrained. On 10 September 1969, the Second Chamber adopted a resolution tabled by all the major parties of both the majority and the opposition, which called on the government to agree to the creation of the Community's own resources only if the strengthening of the EP was satisfactory (European Parliament 1970: 211). During the negotiations, the Dutch State Secretary for Foreign Affairs Hans de Koster explained to the French ambassador in The Hague that his government had to 'demonstrate its fighting spirit to its parliament'.¹⁰

Concomitantly, the EP was aware that its main leverage came from NPs' support. During the negotiations, the EP adopted a resolution on 3 February 1970 that threatened the Council with not recommending ratification to NPs (European Parliament 1970: 156). After the treaty was signed, the EP attempted to impose its own interpretation of the text, according to which it had the power to reject the budget en bloc. On 13 May 1970, MEPs adopted a resolution calling on NPs to support this interpretation during their ratification debates (European Parliament 1970: 190). The EP's interpretation was eventually endorsed by the

Benelux parliaments, and resolutions supporting further EP empowerment were adopted in the German and Italian parliaments (European Parliament 1971: 179, 158, 46, 49, 81, 126).

The only government that opposed EP empowerment was France. Frears (1975: 140–1) noticed that the French parliament was the only one to view with ‘indifference’ the transfer of its powers to the European level, which he explained primarily by the general weakening of parliamentary powers under the Fifth Republic. Indeed, the 1958 Constitution was established by de Gaulle in reaction to the ‘Assembly regime’ of the previous republics, and it strictly limited the role of the parliament, in particular in overseeing the government. This logic was eventually transposed to the European level (Haroche 2017). When the question of EP powers was raised, the French government justified its reluctance by referring to the risk of creating an ‘Assembly government’ at the European level.¹¹ During the Empty Chair crisis, Socialist opposition MP André Raust commented, ‘We understand very well why the current French regime does not want a European parliamentary system, since, domestically, it only gives a consultative role to the French Parliament’.¹² During the ratification debate of the 1970 budgetary treaty, Gaullists MPs referred to their fear of an ‘Assembly regime’ to explain their lukewarm position towards EP powers.¹³ Jacques Vendroux feared that EP empowerment could eventually lead to a ‘power of Assembly’ that would be ‘totally incompatible with the principles that inspired the Fifth Republic’. MEP Michel Habib-Deloncle remarked that MPs in other member states did not have the same opinion and were ‘especially demanding in terms of oversight of governments’. In sum, French MPs did not have the power and the legitimacy to constrain their government. Having already accepted the weakening of their own powers in favour of the executive at the national level, they were ready to accept the domination of the Council at the European level.

The Single European Act

In the case of the SEA signed in February 1986, the main objective was the completion of the single market. To facilitate the implementation of this programme, governments decided to extend the use of qualified majority voting in the Council. Under the unanimity rule, NPs could indirectly oversee European legislation through the oversight of their government at the national level. However, with majority voting, governments could be outvoted in the Council, and parliamentary oversight at the national level could become powerless. The SEA sought to compensate for this weakening of NPs by empowering the EP. Under the new ‘cooperation’ procedure, EP amendments that were supported by the Commission could be adopted by the Council by a qualified majority but could be rejected or amended only by unanimity. During the negotiations, Italy was the most favourable to EP empowerment, and Denmark and the UK were the most sceptical.

The EP actively promoted its own empowerment but was aware that it needed NPs’ support to be able to influence governments. On 14 February 1984, the EP adopted a draft treaty that was largely inspired by Italian and German MEPs (Schmuck 1987: 194). Article 38 provided a co-decision procedure that required a law to be approved by both the Council and the EP. The EP invited NPs to ratify the draft treaty and sent delegations to seek support (Corbett 1998: 174). Resolutions were adopted by the Italian,¹⁴ Belgian,¹⁵ Dutch and German parliaments that supported the draft treaty (Corbett 1998: 190; 225).

Similar to the Netherlands in 1965, the political context in Italy in 1985 encouraged the government to consider MPs’ demands. There was a rivalry between Socialist Prime Minister Bettino Craxi and Christian democrat Foreign Minister Giulio Andreotti regarding who was more proactively supporting the project advocated by the Italian parliament. In accordance with the resolutions voted by the Italian parliament, the Italian government defended a procedure of full legislative co-decision between the EP and the Council.¹⁶

Andreotti was the staunchest defender of the EP's demands during the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC). However, his personal view regarding the legitimacy of the EP was not as enthusiastic as it seemed. In 1991, he told French President Mitterrand in a private meeting: 'Why did we create a European Parliament? Because we were demagogic! The evolution is not yet that federalist' (Védrine 1996: 469). The French ambassador in Rome interpreted Andreotti's hard-line approach during the 1985 IGC as an effort to strengthen his position domestically, particularly vis-à-vis Craxi, and eventually to become Prime Minister again.¹⁷

Indeed, by embracing the cause of the EP's powers, Andreotti was actually responding to the Italian parliament's continuous pressure. On 16 October 1985, the Senate's Foreign Affairs Committee called on the government to adopt the EP's draft treaty as the basis of its position in the IGC and to defend EP empowerment and its participation in drawing up and approving the future treaty.¹⁸ A few days later, Andreotti underlined that a lack of approval by the EP could prevent ratification by the Italian parliament.¹⁹ The Italian parliament even encouraged the government to radicalise its position. While the IGC was arriving at a compromise on the principle of the new cooperation procedure, the Italian Chamber's Foreign Affairs Committee unanimously adopted a resolution on 29 November 1985.²⁰ The motion reaffirmed its support for a full co-decision between the EP and the Council and called on the government to reject any text that did not conform to the proposals of the EP. It also asked the government to condition its approval of any final document on that of the EP in order to ensure effective EP empowerment. The Italian government strictly complied with these requirements, and when the Luxembourg European Council endorsed the presidency's compromise on 2-3 December 1985, Andreotti conditioned his approval on the assent of the EP.

After the end of the negotiation, it became clear that the Italian parliament's position constituted a genuine constraint for the Italian government. In a speech to the Chamber,

Andreotti declared that although Italy maintained its reserve, he thought that the final compromise should eventually be accepted. The French ambassador in Rome interpreted this statement as an effort to 'cool MPs' maximalist ardour'.²¹ On 10 January 1986, Andreotti told other member states' ambassadors that it would be foolish to consult the Italian parliament before the EP gave its opinion because the treaty was at risk of being rejected. He also observed that it would be less risky to consult with each Italian chamber in a plenary session rather than the parliamentary committees because these committees were more competent and motivated and, thus, more likely to cause difficulties.²² Indeed, after the government received approval from the EP and the Senate and thought that the Chamber's approval would be a mere formality, a surprise resolution was adopted by the Chamber's Foreign Affairs Committee, asking for a new review of the EP's power before 1988 and calling on the government to delay its signing of the SEA after the Danish reserve was lifted.²³ These episodes demonstrate that the Italian parliament was the driving actor behind the Italian government's hard-line position.

The EP by itself had no power to influence the IGC but obtained leverage through NPs' support. During the negotiation, it demanded a greater role in the process and called for collaboration between the EP and NPs such that they could 'mutually strengthen their democratic action'.²⁴ When, at the request of the Italian parliament, the Italian government conditioned its approval on the assent of the EP, it offered the EP an opportunity to influence the IGC. On 11 December, the EP adopted a resolution that thanked the Italian government for allowing the IGC to consider the EP's demands.²⁵ Eventually, Ministers of Foreign Affairs met again on 16 December 1985 and agreed on additional concessions (Corbett 1998: 246). The EP was thus able to influence the IGC only through the reserve of the Italian government that was responding to pressures from the Italian parliament.

In Denmark and the UK, in contrast to the situation in Italy and Germany, opposition to EP empowerment came from MPs, and the governments had to downplay the significance of the cooperation procedure. Whereas constructivist studies establish a clear divide between 'legitimizing beliefs' and 'interests' (Jachtenfuchs et al. 1998; Rittberger 2005), we will see that beliefs often reflected national parties' political interests, in particular the expected implications of the cooperation procedure for their future influence over European policies.

In Denmark, Conservative Poul Schlüter's minority government received from the powerful Market Relations Committee of the Folketinget very strict instructions refusing any institutional reform.²⁶ At the end of the negotiations, the leader of the Eurosceptic wing of the Social-Democratic opposition, Ivar Nørgaard, managed to rally a majority of his party against the treaty. His key argument was that the cooperation procedure would allow integrationist member states such as Italy and Benelux countries to ally with the EP and to prevent unanimity from being reached in the Council to block pro-integration EP amendments.²⁷ This argument was clearly based on the expectation that EP amendments would support policy options that would clash with his national party's preferences. The SEA was rejected by the Folketinget and could only be ratified after a referendum was held.

In the UK, both Conservative and Labour MPs generally disagreed with the principle of EP empowerment.²⁸ During the ratification debate, many MPs interpreted the cooperation procedure as a net loss of power for the government and, thus, for Westminster.²⁹ This position was largely based on the expected preferences of the EP. Conservative Teddy Taylor warned that EP amendments would involve expanding 'harmonisation and expenditure'.³⁰ Conservative Jonathan Aitken described the cooperation procedure as a 'Trojan horse which will inflict many a painful defeat on Britain's national interests'.³¹ He also observed that Italy rarely disagreed with the EP, which would make unanimous rejection of EP amendments by the Council 'most unlikely'. Both Taylor and Aitken also opposed giving the EP the power of

assent regarding membership because they feared that it could oppose Turkey's accession.³² Conservatives' perceived inability to have their key policy preferences reflected in EP votes was a key factor in their hostility towards EP empowerment.

Conclusion

Far from being the 'victims' of European integration before the 1990s, NPs played a central role in the shaping of EU institutions. During the negotiations of the 1970 budgetary treaty and the 1986 SEA, although governments were generally not sincerely convinced that EP empowerment was a legitimate solution, some NPs made clear that their approval of new transfers of budgetary or legislative competences to the European level was conditional on new powers for the EP. Governments marked by intra-coalition rivalry (the Dutch government in 1965, the Italian government in 1985) were particularly vulnerable to this parliamentary pressure. Moreover, the EP was only able to influence intergovernmental negotiations because NPs provided it with leverage vis-à-vis governments. More than supranational activism or intergovernmental beliefs, EP empowerment can be explained by an inter-parliamentary alliance between NPs and the EP.

We also observed that a number of NPs showed hostility towards EP empowerment. This illustrates the fact that the inter-parliamentary alliance is not a viable option for all NPs and national parties. When an NP is institutionally and politically too weak vis-à-vis its government (France in the 1960s-1970s), it accepts the Council's domination at the European level just as it accepted executive domination at the national level. Similarly, when MPs think that their policy preferences clash with those of the EP (Denmark and the UK in the 1980s), they do not see EP empowerment as a compensation for their own lost powers at the national level but as a threat. In this case, they more likely prefer alternative solutions, such as stronger oversight over their government at the national level (Winzen et al. 2015).

Further research is needed to assess whether this inter-parliamentary alliance remains a major driving force behind more recent instances of EP empowerment. Although NPs and the EP are sometimes in competition with each other (Herranz-Surrallés 2014; Cooper 2016), new EP powers validated by the Lisbon Treaty have their origins in the Convention on the future of Europe, where NPs' representatives constituted the majority of participants.

From a theoretical point of view, the inter-parliamentary model used in this article refocuses the explanation of EP empowerment from beliefs and abstract principles to power relations and interests. It illustrates a broader approach of the EU regime as a product of not only negotiations among member states but also competition among institutional actors in each national regime. Alter (2001) showed that competition among national courts was a key driving force in the establishment of the supremacy of EU law and the ECJ; similarly, we have seen that the balance of power between national governments and NPs was a key driving force in EP empowerment. It encourages us to reinterpret the EU regime as an extension of national regimes' power relations rather than as a *sui generis* supranational arena.

Notes

- ¹ Historical Archives of the EU (HAEU), CM2 1965, 1001.
- ² French Diplomatic Archives (DA), Note de la sous-direction d'Europe occidentale, 27 juillet 1963, *Coopération économique*, vol. 1124.
- ³ DA, Télégramme de Margerie, 1^{er} juillet 1964, *Coopération économique*, vol. 1124.
- ⁴ HAEU, Motion du parlement néerlandais du 9 juin 1965, CM2 1965, 1012.
- ⁵ DA, Télégramme de Ledoux, 19 août 1965, *Coopération économique*, vol. 1112.
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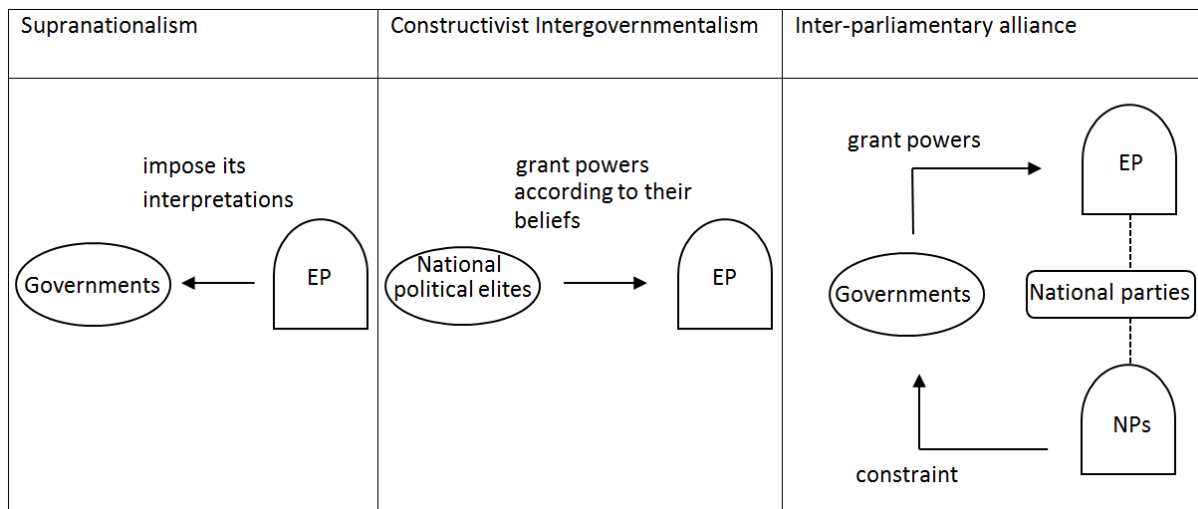


Figure 1. Explanations of EP empowerment.