
Relations between national parliaments and the European Parliament: opportunities and challenges (ARI)

*Daniel Ruiz de Garibay**

Theme: This paper provides an insight into how interparliamentary cooperation between national parliaments and the EP is evolving, what forms it is taking and what its main advantages and flaws are.

Summary: The Lisbon Treaty contains important provisions for a greater presence of national parliaments at the EU level and increasing possibilities for cooperation between them and the European Parliament (EP). If national parliaments want to make full use of the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty and to play an increasing role at the EU level they will need to develop effective sifting and scrutiny systems. In this context, parliamentary cooperation could be a cost-effective exercise reducing information gaps and providing an entry gate for national parliaments at the EU level. At the same time, due to its full-time focus on European politics and its position in the EU's political system, the EP has the capacity to act as a leader of this cooperation and to shape it according to its preferences. Based on recent developments this paper provides an insight into how interparliamentary cooperation between national parliaments and the EP is evolving, what forms it is taking and what its main advantages and flaws are.

Analysis: national parliaments have for long been considered the losers in the European integration process. Successive transfers of competences to the EU level have reduced the sovereignty of national parliaments and EU structures tend to favour executive action providing limited access to the EU for national parliaments. The Lisbon Treaty aimed to put an end to this situation and to offer a real possibility for a new role for national parliaments in the EU's political architecture. For the first time, the Lisbon Treaty makes reference to the contribution of national parliaments to the 'good functioning of the Union' (Treaty on European Union –TEU–, Art.12). The Treaty does not stop here. It provides for specific activities in which national parliaments will be involved. For instance, national parliaments will be involved in the 'evaluation mechanisms for the implementation' of Justice and Home Affairs policies (TFEU, Art.70); in the 'political monitoring of Europol' (TFEU, Art.88) and in the 'control' of Eurojust (TFEU, Art.85). national parliaments are also responsible to check that EU policies respect the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality (TFEU, Protocol 2).

National parliaments can arrange their new role in different ways but parliamentary cooperation seems to be the chosen option. This paper shows which have been the most successful initiatives in this regard and what the scope is for improvement.

* *Researcher, University of Reading.*

Why Interparliamentary Cooperation

How can cooperation be explained? The development of interparliamentary cooperation follows a pragmatic approach. The European Parliament (EP) sought in its cooperation with national parliaments a way to enhance its role in the legislative process, while the national parliaments saw cooperation as a way of enhancing their scrutiny over the EP (Westlake, 1995). Cooperation is thought of as an optimal solution in which national parliaments acquire access to the EU and the EP manages to control that access.

The EP may want to see itself as 'the parliament of the EU' but it cannot avoid the fact that the involvement of national parliaments in the EU has been at the top of the EU's institutional reform agenda. Calls for an enhanced role for national parliaments were prominent in the constitutional debate that took place during the Convention on the Future of Europe, which preceded the drafting of the Lisbon Treaty. During the Convention the debate was greatly influenced by the idea that the closer inclusion of national parliaments in the EU could solve part of the democratic deficit by bringing the EU closer to its citizens. As a result, the most important decisions of the Convention regarding national parliaments had the intention of increasing the role of the national parliaments in the EU. Faced with a situation in which the role of national parliaments at the EU level is increasing, to the point of being recognised in the Lisbon Treaty, the development of interparliamentary cooperation could be the best possible solution for providing a role for national parliaments at the EU level without jeopardising the position of the EP in the EU's political system.

From the point of view of the EP, a greater inclusion of national parliaments in the EU via cooperation may be more desirable than the establishment of new structures that might challenge its position. Moreover, new structures would make the EU's political system more cumbersome. This could affect the system's capacity to produce effective outcomes. The EP's legitimacy would suffer more from a reduction of the EU's capacity to satisfy citizens' preferences than that of national parliaments. This is not only because the EP is embodied in the EU's political system but also because, unlike the EP, national parliaments could always blame it on 'Brussels'. This double game strategy is not available for the EP.

What Forms does Interparliamentary Cooperation Take?

According to the guidelines for interparliamentary cooperation in the EU the main objectives of interparliamentary cooperation are:

- (1) To promote the exchange of information and best practices between the EU's national parliaments with a view to reinforcing parliamentary control, influence and scrutiny at all levels.
- (2) To ensure the effective exercise of parliamentary competences in EU matters in particular in the area of monitoring the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality.
- (3) To promote cooperation with parliaments from third countries.

Table 1 provides a typology of the different forms interparliamentary cooperation is currently taking.

Table 1. Typology of Interparliamentary Cooperation

Nature of interaction	Level of interaction	Actors	
		Individual	Collective
Formal	Individual	Party meetings where MEPs and MPs participate Meetings for MPs and MEPs organised by National representatives	Information exchanged via IPEX
	Committee	MEPs taking part in national parliament committees	COSAC Interparliamentary Committee meetings
	Institutional	Conference of the Speakers MEPs taking part in national parliamentary plenary sessions Information exchanged via Brussels representation offices	Joint Parliamentary Meetings Information exchanged via ECPRD
Informal	Individual	Informal meetings between MEPs/MPs Informal contacts with MPs from other parliaments Informal contacts between MEPs and national parliament representatives	
	Committee	Information sent out by committees of national parliaments to individual MEPs	Information sent out by committees of national parliaments to EP committees
	Institutional		Information exchanged via Brussels representation offices

Of all these initiatives, the most successful have been COSAC, IPEX and the Interparliamentary meetings, as well as the work of the representatives of the national parliaments in Brussels. The following sections consider the opportunities and challenges of each of them.

COSAC

COSAC, the Conference of European Affairs Committees, brings together representatives from national parliaments and the EP. Since its creation in May 1989, its biannual meetings have provided the most structured interparliamentary forums in the EU. It currently has a permanent Secretariat that produces biannual reports on issues related to the scrutiny of EU policies.

In its early years the effectiveness of COSAC was questioned but the potential importance of COSAC as an interparliamentary forum that could serve as a tool for parliamentary scrutiny has grown since its origins. In 2003, COSAC changed its rules of procedure in order to be able to adopt contributions voted under majority rule, giving COSAC the possibility of articulating views and formulating opinions. COSAC's potential regarding the scrutiny of specific policies has also increased. The Lisbon Treaty provides for COSAC to present to the Union's institutions its contributions on the legislative activities of the Union, notably in relation to the application of the principle of subsidiarity, the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice (AFSJ), and questions regarding fundamental rights (TEU Art.69). Also, Protocol No.1 of the Lisbon Treaty, which amends the provisions on COSAC, gives COSAC's role an official function with regard to the exchange of information and good practices between parliaments and extends that role to 'specialised committees'. The Protocol also provides for COSAC to 'organise interparliamentary conferences on specific topics' (TEU Art.10 Protocol No. 1). This opens the door for specific interparliamentary cooperation between sectoral committees.

The improvements to COSAC brought about by the Treaty of Lisbon are of significant importance. On the one hand, the exchange of information at the level of specialised committees helps to reduce the lack of expertise, which has been one of the major problems of interparliamentary cooperation. On the other hand, the possibility of making direct contributions to the European institutions is also a significant improvement because in this way the discussions that would take place in COSAC can end up being something concrete, such as an opinion that can be sent to the Commission or the Council.

COSAC and in particular its biannual reports have been a vehicle for the exchange of information and best practices among parliaments regarding the procedures of EU parliamentary scrutiny. Since 2004 the COSAC Secretariat sends a questionnaire to every chamber of the EU for the compilation of the report. The rate of responses to these questionnaires is high, especially in the most recent years. Almost every chamber responds to the questionnaires. Another thing is the quality of the responses or the relevance of the information provided. This varies from parliament to parliament. In some cases questions are answered in a mechanical way without providing relevant information, but these are mostly exceptions rather than the general rule. In essence COSAC's biannual reports are a way of sharing best practices amongst the EU's parliaments. Most committed parliaments usually provide examples and references to reports from their European Affairs Committees. This shows an interest if not in sharing information contained in the reports at least in disseminating the work of the parliament. It may be only a form of publicity. But in many cases parliaments refer to relevant work they have done or to scrutiny practices adopted because they consider such practices can improve scrutiny in other parliaments. For instance, the Senate of the Netherlands mentioned how MEPs are allowed to take part in the debate on the state of the EU held once a year in the House of Representatives and how MEPs are also allowed to take part in committee meetings dealing with the preparation of Council meetings (COSAC, 2007c). Another example of this type of good-practice sharing is the speech given by Lord Grenfell in 2007 at the COSAC Chair-Persons Meeting held in Lisbon, where he explained the way the House of Lords scrutinises EU expenditure (COSAC, 2007c). Also, in 2009, all the parliaments explained in the COSAC biannual report how they scrutinise JHA agencies' activities. Although this may not amount to much, the sharing of this information is already a form of cooperation. And it is probably a way to share practices that can foster a common and systematic form of EU scrutiny in different national parliaments.

However, even though formally the Treaty seems to provide COSAC with the necessary tools to become an important forum for scrutiny, not every parliament sympathises with this option. Moreover, some national parliaments, including the EP, do not seem to be convinced of the reasons why COSAC should stop being a forum for the mere exchange of best practices to become an active forum for the scrutiny of EU policies. Given the reluctance of some parliaments regarding COSAC, the meetings of sectoral committees are another experience with great potential. Especially given the current tendency to focus interparliamentary cooperation on specific areas. In these meetings homologous specialised committees meet to discuss a particular policy area.

Interparliamentary Meetings

Originally, meetings between the EP and national parliaments had two different formats: Joint Committee Meetings and Joint Parliamentary Meetings. However, a new form of meeting is emerging, the so-called Interparliamentary Committee Meetings with national parliaments. Both the Joint Committee Meeting and Interparliamentary Committee meetings with national parliaments are meetings between sectoral committees of the EP

and committees of the national parliaments. The difference between these two types of meetings is that Joint Committee Meetings are organised by the EP and the parliament of the country holding the EU Presidency whereas Interparliamentary Committee Meetings are proposed on the initiative of the individual parliamentary committees of the EP which invite national colleagues from their corresponding committees. These meetings are a continuation of existing practice and they mainly cover the policy areas where the EU has legislative powers using the co-decision procedure. This difference is mainly procedural but makes the process of organising meetings easier compared to the one required for joint meetings (personal interview with Josep María Ribot, EP Administrator, October 2010).

The analysis of the main activities in the field of interparliamentary relations between parliaments in the EU shows an increasing number of activities and an increasing volume of human resources involved in them. As shown in Table 2 the number of interparliamentary activities rose from 276 in 2008 to 419 in 2009. Between 2008 and 2009 a total of 52 committees of national parliaments visited the EP and a total of 41 Joint and Interparliamentary Committee Meetings between national parliaments and the EP took place.

Table 2. Main activities in the field of interparliamentary relations between the national parliaments and the EP.

	2008	2009
Meetings of the President of the EP with national parliaments' speakers	9	22
Joint Parliamentary Meetings	4	2
Joint Committee Meetings	3	1
Inter-Parliamentary Committee meetings	7	6
Inter-parliamentary Committee meetings in the national parliaments	6	12
Visits to the EP by national parliaments	39	13
Visits to the EP by officials from national parliaments	208	363
Total	2284	2428

Source: European Parliament Directorate for relations with national parliaments DG for the Presidency.

The analysis also shows that interparliamentary cooperation seems to be preferred only for those policy areas of shared competencies between national parliaments and the EP, and in particular economic issues and issues related to the AFSJ such as justice, migration and police cooperation. As shown in Table 3, the Committees of the European Parliaments that have organised the highest number of meetings with national parliaments are the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFCO), the Committee on Development (DEVE), the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs (ECON) and the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE). These are the committees dealing with policies that are not fully in the hands of the EU.

Table 3. Breakdown by committees: Interparliamentary and Joint Meetings 2006-2009.

	Joint Committee Meetings (JCMs)				Inter-Parliamentary Committee Meetings (ICMs)				Total
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2006	2007	2008	2009	
AFCO									0
AFET					1	1	2		4
AGRI			1						1
BUDG					1	1	1		3
CONT	1					1			2
CULT		1	1						2
DEVE	1		1			1		1	4
DROI							1		1
ECON	1	1					1	1	4
EMPL									0
ENVI									0
FEMM							1	1	2
INTA									0
IMCO								1	1
ITRE	1								1
JURI						1	1		2
LIBE		1		1	1		1		4
REGI								1	1
PECH									0
PETI									0
SEDE									0
TRAN		1							1
Total	4	4	3	1	3	5	8	5	33

Source: European Parliament Directorate for relations with national parliaments DG for the Presidency.

Parliamentary cooperation requires resources and that might not have immediate benefits for national parliaments. However, the participation of national parliaments in interparliamentary cooperation does not seem to be reduced to a pure logic of maximisation of resources. As Tables 4 and 5 show, in 2008 a total of 39 committees incorporating almost 300 national parliamentarians from 15 member states undertook working visits to the EP, while in 2009 the total figure was 13 committees incorporating almost 93 national parliamentarians from seven member states.

Table 4. Visits by national parliaments to the European Parliament Committees (2008)

National parliament	Committee Visits	Committee Members
Czech Republic	2	20
Estonia	9	62
Ireland	2	8
Finland	2	21
France	2	30
Germany	2	18
Greece	1	12
Latvia	1	3
Lithuania	1	4
Netherlands	9	60
Poland	2	22
UK	6	35
Total	39	295

Source: European Parliament Directorate for relations with national parliaments DG for the Presidency.

Table 5. Participation in Interparliamentary Committee Meetings in 2009.

	Chambers	National Parliaments	Candidate countries	MPs (Member States)	MEPs	Other MPs*	Total MPs & MEPs
1. Total Inter-parliamentary Committee Meetings (all formats) & Joint Committee Meetings (JCMs) 2006-2009	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
LIBE (JCM) "Progress in the area of Freedom, Security and Justice", 19-20 January 2009	27	21	2	50	24	3	77
REGI (ICM) "The future of cohesion policy after 2013", 11 February 2009	23	18	0	33	44	0	77
ECON (ICM) "European Economy - What next?", 11-12th February 2009	33	27	0	55	76	0	131
DEVE (ICM) "Migration and Policy Coherence for Development", 12th February 2009	27	21	2	50	5	70	125
IMCO (ICM) "EU consumer law, its transposition and implementation", 2nd April 2009	21	18	0	24	10	0	34
<i>Total</i>	n/a	n/a	n/a	212	159	73	444

Source: European Parliament Directorate for relations with national parliaments DG for the Presidency.

So far we have identified four trends: (1) for the number of meetings to increase; (2) for the number of meetings jointly organised to decrease; (2) for the cooperation to be focused on a parliamentary level; and (4) for cooperation to occur only in some policy areas. It is difficult to establish if parliamentary cooperation will continue to increase speedily, but in 2008 a total of 769 MPs and MEPs took part in these meetings, while in the first four months of 2009 a total of 444 had done so: more than half of the previous year's total in only a third of the time. This tendency is clearer in the case of the LIBE Committee. A total of 224 MPs and MEPs took part in Interparliamentary Committee Meetings in this committee during the first five months of 2009 and a total of 18 in 2008. This seems to suggest that it is true that the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty has boosted the interest in interparliamentary cooperation initiatives. For instance, as shown in Tables 5 and 6, only seven national parliaments attended the Round Table organised by the LIBE Committee in 2008 while 21 out of 27 national chambers took part in the Joint Committee Meeting on the Progress in the Area of Freedom Security and Justice in 2009.

Table 6. Participation in Interparliamentary Committee Meetings in 2009

	Chambers*	National Parliaments	Candidate countries	MPs (Member States)	MEPs	Other MPs**	Total MPs & MEPs
ECON Annual debate with Economics Committees of National Parliaments, 22-23 January	23	19	0	59	111	0	170
FEMM (ICM) "Gender mainstreaming in parliamentary work", 6th March	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
LIBE (ICM) "Framework Decision on Combating Crime", 6th April	12	n/a	0	22	60	0	82
BUDG Annual Meeting with National Parliaments (ICM), 25th June	18	14	0	19	n/a	0	19
AFET 10th Joint Meeting (ICM) Committees on Foreign Affairs and Defence, 25th June	n/a	n/a	0	34	n/a	0	34
DROI Meeting with National Parliaments on Human Rights (ICM), 25th June	23	n/a	n/a	46	n/a	n/a	46
DEVE (JCM) "European Union and Development Cooperation", 26th June	28	21	1	48	19	1	68
LIBE (ICM) Roundtable on "The integrated management of the European Unions Borders", 30th June	7	7	0	9	9	0	18
AGRI (JCM) "The future of the European agriculture and its role in the world", 3-4th November	31	21	2	75	47	3	125
AFET 11th Joint Meeting (ICM) of Chairpersons of Foreign Affairs and Defence committees, 5th November	18	17	0	25	16	0	41
JURI / LIBE Forum (ICM) "Judicial cooperation in civil matters", 2nd December	14	12	1	16	90	2	108
CULT (JCM) "Education and Culture", 8th December	15	13	1	20	37	1	58
<i>Total</i>	189	124	5	373	389	7	769

Source: European Parliament Directorate for relations with national parliaments DG for the Presidency.

Overall, the high level of participation of national parliaments in these initiatives shows that at least national parliaments are interested in attending meetings where there could be opportunities for the exchange of information. Therefore these initiatives have a lot of potential, especially in areas of shared competences.

Representatives of National Parliaments in Brussels

Interaction between parliaments is not confined to participation in interparliamentary forums. Most national parliaments have opened representation offices within the premises of the EP, where they have at least one representative.¹ These offices facilitate both the

¹ Neither the Maltese nor the Slovakian parliaments have a representation office. For years the Spanish Cortes did not have a representation office but after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty it decided to open one.

flow of information and the establishment of contacts. A recent COSAC report mentions 'networking, exchange of early information and coordination with other representatives' (COSAC, 2009a) as one of the increasingly important functions of these representation offices. A regular meeting between national representatives takes place every week. This is the so-called MMM (Monday Morning Meeting). Regular meetings with EP officials in charge of relations with national parliaments also take place.

The existence of these meetings is not an indicator of cooperation but it seems that the spirit among delegates helps the frequent exchange of information that may be relevant for other parliaments (personal interview with Ed Lock, Representative of the House of Lords in Brussels, January 2010). Therefore the opening of representative offices of national parliaments at the premises of the EP has been one of the most successful initiatives to promote interparliamentary cooperation. Information sharing in this context depends on informal contacts, but formal means for the exchange of information has been developed as well. Conscious of the importance of information sharing the Conference of European Union Speakers proposed measures to promote cooperation and the exchange of information between institutions and parliaments in the Union. To this end a system of information-sharing through the Interparliamentary EU Information Exchange Network (IPEX) was created in 2004.

IPEX

IPEX is 'a platform for the electronic exchange of EU-related information between parliaments in the Union' allowing national parliaments to publish any relevant documents on a pan-European website. The IPEX website contains a database for the exchange of information about the parliamentary scrutiny of EU affairs including aspects of subsidiarity. Parliaments can upload the scrutiny carried out on every proposal from the European Commission and assign various statuses and values to the documents. In this way it is possible for a country to follow the development of specific issues and also to keep track of the standpoint of the parliaments of other countries.

The analysis of the use of IPEX shows that it has been used to share information regarding specific legislation. For instance, 45% of the national chambers of the EU shared via IPEX the report of the scrutiny they did on the council decision on Europol. Some parliaments have expressed concerns regarding the extent to which IPEX is the right tool for quick information exchange and some others regarded it as useful. However, personal interviews have confirmed that the use of IPEX remains confined to specialist parliamentarian officials. Moreover, the extent to which the information shared has any effect on the scrutiny of other parliaments is not clear.

Perhaps the best example of how IPEX can be effectively used is the case of national representatives. 'When a national parliament's representative in Brussels finds something important on IPEX, this is communicated to their colleagues who then report to their national capital for specialists there to be aware' (personal interview with Ed Lock, Representative of the House of Lords in Brussels, January 2010).

Addressing the EU's Legitimacy Problem

The inclusion of national parliaments in the EU's political system has been part of a strategy designed to address the EU's legitimacy problems. This inclusion can take different forms but there are three that deserve further consideration. First of all, national parliaments can choose not to develop any form of parliamentary cooperation but will miss all the positive outcomes of cooperation. Secondly, they can choose to create new interparliamentary structures in which they can include or not the European Parliament. And third, they can choose a loose form of parliamentary cooperation vis-à-vis the EP in already established interparliamentary forums or even informally. The disadvantage of the second option against the third is that it requires the political will to reform EU institutions and it is difficult to argue for a further complication of the EU's institutional design. Also, considering the little rewards that MPs gain from time spent in EU scrutiny and that the MPs' main objective when choosing to take part in cooperation is not to improve parliamentary control, then a loose form of cooperation has been the preferred option. To date this cooperation has centred on six different initiatives: (1) relations between representatives of national parliaments in Brussels; (2) Interparliamentary Committee Meetings; (3) personal relations between MPs and MEPs of the same political line; (4) COSAC meetings; (5) the Conference of Presidents; and (6) the information exchanged via IPEX.

Looking at the agenda of the Conference of Speakers one can gain an idea of the importance attached to relations between parliaments. Given the formal character of these meetings we cannot expect technicalities of cooperation to be discussed at them. However, the meetings do provide a general guideline of what type of cooperation is desired. Another indicator of the importance paid to cooperation between parliaments is the increasing number of interparliamentary meetings and other forums and the increasing number of resources devoted to them. However, two main problems have been identified. One the one hand, the legal basis for parliamentary control to take place in such forums are mainly informal. Secondly, MPs attending these meetings vary frequently and this makes it difficult to develop a work dynamic. Some national parliaments are trying to solve this problem by making sure that the same MPs always attend such meetings. This is, for instance, the intention of the Italian Senate (personal interview with Beatrice Gianani, Representative of the Italian Senate, October 2010).

Although the effect of Interparliamentary Meetings might be limited, according to participants they provide a useful opportunity to 'share information and to debate' (personal interview with Agustín Díaz de Mera, MEP, LIBE Committee, November 2010). However, the effect of these meetings on parliamentary control is rather limited (personal interview with Josep María Ribot, EP Administrator, October 2010). For those critical of the usefulness of Interparliamentary Committee Meetings, real parliamentary cooperation is carried out informally, in many cases through contacts along party lines. In the words of the Head of the Secretariat of the LIBE Committee the real interparliamentary cooperation in the area LIBE works on is done by MEPs when they go 'to their national parliaments' (personal interview with Emilio De Capitani, Head of Unit LIBE Committee Secretariat, October 2010). Sophia In 't Veld, MEP, gave an example of how this works:

'What we do is we try to tackle the same subject at the same time both at the EP and in the national parliament. For example, if I table a parliamentary question on a particular topic then I ask my colleagues in the national parliament to put in the same question or a similar question at the same moment'.

'Or when the national parliament has to debate about a European topic, I will provide input. And the same when we are having a debate. I ask them for input on the national situation. We also do that with parliaments from other member states, not only my own national parliament' (personal interview with Sophia In 't Veld, MEP, Vice-Chair LIBE Committee, October 2010).

Cooperation along party lines is increasingly important, and most people see the added value of working with party colleagues. However, there are good reasons to have formal cooperation structures as well. As Lord Bowness puts it, 'you cannot guarantee that members of your own party are the chairmen or rapporteurs of a relevant committee' (personal interview with Lord Bowness, House of Lords European Affairs Committee, October 2010). Despite the criticism, the cooperation established via these meetings has the advantage of being tailored to the needs of every single policy area, which gives specialists the possibility of working together towards specific goals.

Relationships between representatives of national parliaments in Brussels are perhaps one of the most successful modes of cooperation. Apart from their regular meetings or the exchange of information via IPEX there are frequent informal meetings. The informal nature of these meetings and the spirit prevailing among participants promotes the exchange of relevant information. National representatives have their offices in the floor at the EP building and 'it is common to simply go to the office of another representative in order to ask something needed' (personal interview with Ed Lock, Representative of the House of Lords in Brussels, January 2010). So far these meetings have not served the purpose of coordinating any scrutiny activity. But it can be observed, however, that groups of parliaments tend to work together towards some objectives and this work is coordinated by their representatives. For instance, the Danish parliament has managed to obtain the support of other parliaments to put forward a suggestion to the Commission in order to come forward with a proposal for an interinstitutional agreement to arrange the relations between the European Parliament and the national parliaments regarding the parliamentary control of Europol. The success of this suggestion may be unlikely but the fact that parliaments have coordinate their views is already a sign of cooperation. And it tells of the important role played by their representatives in Brussels.

Regarding the sharing of information COSAC, the Conference of European Affairs Committees, has also played a key role. national parliaments have shared their scrutiny best practices via the biannual reports compiled by the COSAC Secretariat in preparation of the meetings. This has been a very useful tool for parliaments to be informed about the practice in other countries. For this reason, COSAC has potential as an institution that could influence the way parliamentary scrutiny is done but it has not managed to establish coordinated scrutiny strategies. It needs to be mentioned, however, that for COSAC it is very difficult to do anything more than sharing best practices. As autonomous bodies, parliaments do not generally tolerate any involvement in their own business. However, some parliaments have asked the COSAC Secretariat to 'monitor the implementation of Art.12 of the Lisbon Treaty' which mentions explicitly the involvement of national parliaments at the EU level.

Conclusion: This ARI has shown that interparliamentary activities have increased since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty. However, the extent to which these activities serve the purpose of parliamentary control seems to be rather limited. It is possible that most of the cooperation regarding scrutiny happens in informal meetings between representatives of national parliaments but more research will be needed in order to

confirm this. Further, interparliamentary cooperation seems to be reduced to the exchange of best practices among national parliaments. For this purpose, COSAC and in particular its biannual reports seem to be the preferred option. In the view of those interviewed for this research, 'real scrutiny' takes place at 'home'. Therefore, it can be said that cooperation has provided opportunities for the sharing of best practices regarding scrutiny but it not has been oriented to produce scrutiny itself. However, this research has found several examples of scrutiny-oriented parliamentary cooperation, which takes place along political lines by MEPs attending meetings at national parliaments, or by the coordination of scrutiny mechanisms such as the coordination of parliamentary questions on the same issues both at the EP and at the national parliament. In all the cases studied, MEPs seem to be the leaders in this type of cooperation. This confirms the idea that due to its full-time focus on European politics and its position in the EU's political system, the EP has the capacity to act as a leader of for parliamentary cooperation. And that it is able to shape it according to its preferences.

Daniel Ruiz de Garibay
Researcher, University of Reading

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