Abstract

The rise of national parliaments in the EU has been manifested in two significant changes. First, national executives have been subject to parliamentary scrutiny and parliaments have improved their capacities to cope with information asymmetry in European affairs. Second, national parliaments have engaged in transnational relations, either in bilateral contacts to other national parliaments and to the EP or in multilateral conferences or networks.

These two dimensions of multilevel parliamentary democracy in the EU have ambiguous consequences. When holding their executive to account, national parliaments can tie the hands of those representatives negotiating at the European level. Accordingly, governments may be compelled to emphasize national interests in European policy-making, agreements on a joint decision often end with ineffective compromises due to inflexible negotiation positions or may even fail, and cohesion of national governments can be obstructed by increasing competition among member states. In contrast, inter-parliamentary relations constitute a kind of European public space. Although a European demos does not exist, cohesion can be reinforced by communication among representatives of the European demos. Moreover, members of national parliaments may be able to consider the preferences or concerns of other member states, thus avoiding the trap of tying hands of governments.

However, the crisis of the EU has affected both executive-parliamentary relations and inter-parliamentary communication. The shifts in power relations following from these changes vary between member states. In some of them, national parliaments became stronger in fiscal policy, while in others, they can only ratify agreements among executives. Moreover, the crisis revealed the fragility of inter-parliamentary relations, lacking any institutional fundament and stability. Therefore, it is not unlikely that the rise of national parliaments undermines the cohesion among member state governments. The paper discusses these effects of the crisis and the implication for European integration.
1. Introduction

In European studies, the European Parliament and national parliaments have been analyzed as sources of legitimacy, as legislative institutions or as actors in policy-making. Their role in the process of European integration has been underestimated so far. For a long time, European integration has been said to come at the expense of national parliaments. Even as the powers of the European Parliament (EP) have been expanded to a significant degree, national parliaments have been regarded to be the losers during the integration process, similar to regional parliaments in federal states, which have seen inroads into their capacities to act effectively as intergovernmental relations have evolved. It was not until the mid-1990s that national parliaments have attracted attention in European politics.

Research on the EP and national parliaments has expanded since those days (Heftler et al. 2015; Winzen 2010). While scholars viewed the EP has a driving force of European integration, studies focused on the internal structures and policy-making of the parliament or its interaction with the Commission and the Council. In a similar vein, research on the role of national parliaments in the EU centred on their power to scrutinize their governments (Winzen 2012), processes of institutional adjustment to their new function in the EU ("Europeanization of national parliaments" (Auel and Benz 2005), or the "politicization" of Europe in debates of national parliaments (Wendler 2016). Based on research results, scholars acknowledged the relevance of parliaments for solving the democratic deficit of the EU. Leaving aside differentiations in various analyses, many publications pointed to an increasing parliamentarisation of European politics.

Meanwhile, this rather optimistic view on the rise of the EP and national parliaments has been replaced by a more critical diagnosis. Accordingly, the economic crisis of the EU has turned into a political crisis. In this context, the intergovernmental modes of policy-making have been blamed for a lack of parliamentary scrutiny and accountability of executives. Although there is some truth in this argument, it requires differentiating the analyses in the same way as previous studies have suggested. Scholars should be careful to engage in the choir of populist politicians when complaining about elitist dominance, executive federalism or "post-democracy". Empirical analyses do not confirm these assumptions. Rather they demonstrate that parliaments still engage in European politics. The problem is that the way they do this can contribute to the political crisis of the EU, which reinforces disintegration rather than integration.

For this reason, I suggest including parliaments as significant but so far underestimated collective actors in integration research. To a certain extent, I follow the concepts of "multilevel parliamentary field" (Crum and Fossum 2009) or "multilevel parliamentary democracy" (Maurer 2009). Both draw attention to the emerging patterns and dynamics of relations among parliaments evolving in response to the delegation of powers to European institutions and the extension of executive multilevel governance. By considering parliaments interacting across levels and territories, they at least implicitly cover parliaments contributing to European integration. Yet still the literature adopting this approach mainly focuses on how representative democracy can work or is working in the EU, which is considered as a system of multilevel governance and as a multinational political society. In contrast, I consider
parliaments as actors affecting the integration process by influencing preferences and constraining discretionary power of executives and by constituting linked arenas of public deliberation. They can fulfil this function by participating in two types of political spheres relevant for shaping institutions (Schmidt 2010: 3) or – in the EU context– arenas of a multilevel system: Politics of coordination is about determining collective actions, i.e. concerns decisions on European policies and delegation of power. In politics of communication, parliaments shape preferences of policy-makers or citizens and legitimize or justify political decisions.

By including parliaments in integration theory, the following analysis does not intend to evaluate democratic quality of the integration process or the current trends of differential integration or disintegration. My perspective is an empirical one. However, it has consequences for understanding integration and its crisis. Usually, this concept is defined as a process in which governments delegate powers to a supranational institution or polity or extend the number of member states. This definition implies that a theory needs to explain causes and driving forces of a deepening and widening of the European Union. Scholars have rarely taken into account the possibility of disintegration, and most explanations deal with integration (with the exception of postfunctionalist theory elaborated by Hooghe and Marks (2009). Only recently, scholars have begun to study disintegration – assuming that this is what we are observing (Eppler and Scheller 2013). In my understanding, integration always includes the possibility of disintegration, and we should define the concept in a way to include this possibility. In a multilevel system, it not only means inclusion and interdependence, but also balancing powers and legitimizing this balance, which is always contested. Therefore, integration and disintegration are interconnected processes in a dynamic multilevel system. They refer to

- the evolution of a multilevel political system
- its vertical (interdependent powers) and horizontal (inclusion of members) dimensions
- the balancing powers between levels (stability of integration)
- the legitimization of the balance of power (acceptance of integration)

As institutions legitimizing the balance of power but also as actors influencing change in this respect, parliaments are decisive, both regarding the politics of coordination (affecting the balance of power) and the politics of communication (influencing the acceptance of integration). A historical review of European integration presumably would prove that the different executive-parliament and inter-parliamentary relations (Benz 2013) had significantly affected the integration process, and that this process had changed the multilevel system of parliaments in the EU, too. This paper focuses on the recent developments. It aims at explaining the role of parliaments during the Euro crisis. In this context, the power of parliaments in the politics of coordination and communication has changed significantly, with consequences for European integration and democracy in the EU.
2. Two functions of multilevel parliamentary politics

Before analysing changes during the Euro crisis, the two functions of parliaments related to politics of coordination and communication need to be explained. The first type of politics is dominated by executives who interact either in processes of European legislation or in intergovernmental negotiations. The second type aims at processing information, forming opinions and justifying decisions. For this function, parliaments and relations among parliaments are decisive.

a) Parliaments and politics of coordination

In politics of coordination, the EP is directly involved whenever legislative decisions are passed according to the Community method. The Parliament incrementally has gained powers in EU politics either due to Treaty amendments or inter-institutional agreements with the Commission and the Council. According to the Lisbon Treaty, co-decision is now the standard procedure for enacting legislation, and the EP now participates on an equal footing with the Council of Ministers in many policy fields. Unlike the joint-decision system in German federalism, European legislation is hardly affected by the confrontation of party politics in the EP and intergovernmental politics in the Council. Agenda defined by the Commission are transformed into decisions, negotiated informally between representatives of both institutions. Under pressure, the fast track procedure allows to circumvent potential veto players.

The participation of national parliaments turns out as more problematic. For a long time regarded as losers of the integration process, then as late-comers (Maurer and Wessels 2001), they have extended their powers or have found effective ways to scrutinize the executive in European affairs and to hold their own national representative in the Council accountable. All member states introduced rules endorsing their parliament’s right to obtain comprehensive information on European issues from their governments as early as possible, and meanwhile are informed directly by the Commission when it initiates a legislative act. Parliaments installed special Committees for European Affairs, determined to cope with the information asymmetry in relation to the executive. Quite a number of national parliaments explicitly confirmed their veto power over their governments in European policies and put in place controls on the national representative in the form of binding mandates. Others systematically scrutinize European documents and the behaviour of their national representative in the Council. Their effective influence may vary between member states (Kiiver 2006; O’Brennan and Raunio 2007; Raunio 2009; Winzen, 2012), but no government can ignore the voice of its national parliament when negotiating at the European level.

In general, national parliaments are in a position to prevent their government from agreeing to a Council decision. This power is based on the principles of parliamentary democracy and accountability of executives to their parliament. While they have the formal right of ratification only when Treaties are amended, contested legislative decisions are generally subject to the provision of parliamentary assent. A representative of government in the Council should avoid acting against the will of majority in parliament, if he or she does not want to risk wasting its power.
In practices, however, this de facto veto power of national parliaments is hardly applicable. According to rules of parliamentary systems, parliaments can “tie the hands” of their government in negotiations in the Council, if they decide on a binding mandate. But such an intervention from outside risks to undermine the influence of the national government concerned. Moreover, it can cause the European legislation to run into the joint decision trap (Scharpf 1988), if secondary law is blocked and Treaty amendments are prevented by parliamentary veto as well.

Thus, with the growing power of national parliaments, coordinative politics in the EU turned into a two level game (Putnam 1988). In this game, parliaments are confronted with a wicked problem. In order to avoid the risk to block European legislation or to prevent their national representative from influencing Council decisions, parliaments tend to support their government in European affairs. Yet if they just leave it to the government to define the national position, European policy-making and legislation would continue to be dominated by executives. Circumventing this dilemma requires that parliamentary and executive actors apply their power in a strategic way (Benz 2004). As gate keepers between the two levels, executives are in a position to find the appropriate strategy. Parliaments, on the other hand, are in a less comfortable position, as long as they do not turn to politics of communication.

b) Parliaments and politics of communication

In politics of communication, parliaments fulfil their function as public forum. At the national level, they "politicize" European policies by making them a matter of debate between parties. The increasing intensity of plenary debates in parliament seems to contribute to democratic legitimacy (Wendler 2016) and to counteract a trend towards "executive federalism" which scholars saw on the rise after the Euro crisis (Habermas 2010: 48-80). However, national public debates are no guarantee for a European public space to emerge. Although they contribute to inform the citizens on European politics and policy-making, they can reinforce national interests against the EU and support disintegration.

Theories of European democracy make the case for a different politics of communication. Aside from intra-parliamentary discourses, they demand inter-parliamentary communication in view of the multinational character of the European citizenry. Due to this societal condition, representative democracy in the EU is based on a particular structure of dual representation (Kielsmansegg 2003). Legitimacy produced by the directly elected EP is complemented by legitimacy of governments responsible to their national parliaments. The need for this duality is hardly disputed. Yet it has consequences that often are not sufficiently explicated. Whereas – at least according to the “representative claim” (Saward, 2010) of the Parliament – the representation of the European demos in the EP conforms to the standard model of democracy, the representation of multiple national demoi by their governments requires particular structures enabling the representation of collectives in accordance with the general prerequisites of democratic representation.

In national representative democracies, institutions should guide rulers to exert their power in a way which can be accepted by affected citizens as legitimate. This is the case if citizens apply their power in elections not with the purpose of pursuing their individual interests, but
in order to induce governments to work for the public interest. To get a sense of what the public interest can be, governments have to anticipate reactions of voters (Friedrich 1937: 16). Accordingly, voters have to consider not only their individual interests but also the interests of their fellow citizens. This is the reason why democracy cannot be reduced to voting procedures aggregating preferences but not expressing the public interest. Democracy requires public discussion in parliaments and in society. Therefore, the vertical relation between representatives and represented must be embedded in horizontal relations between those who are represented. In national democracies, this horizontal relationship is based on the mutual trust (Offe 1998: 104-5) and understanding among citizens in a national community which is supported by structures of communication. Intermediary organisations like parties or associations and the media constitute this horizontal structure of representative democracy.

In the multilevel system of the EU, neither parties or associations nor the media create European-wide horizontal structures of communication. Due to the weak social integration of European citizens, they lack the bonds of mutual trust guaranteeing that their fellow citizens consider their interests when participating in political decisions. For this reason, EU democracy necessarily combines the direct representation of individual citizens in the EP with the indirect representation of citizens via their national parliaments ("compound representation"; Benz 2006; Brzinsky, Lancaster and Tuschhoff 1999). However, if the latter would only serve as agents fighting for particular national public interests, decisions in the Council could only be justified if they conform to all national interest. The more the redistributive consequences of European integration come to the fore, the less likely is this unanimous agreement of European decisions. Yet if we cannot take it for granted that redistributive effects of policies are justified by some kind of solidarity among European citizens, majority decisions cannot be accepted as legitimate. Moreover, if national parliaments only stand for national interests, they tend to reject decisions of the Council deviating from their expectations. This may not only cause a problem of decision-making, but also of legitimacy.

In fact, national parliaments act as representatives of national communities of citizens, but by themselves, they are represented by their governments at the European level. Certainly, governments participating in European decision-making are accountable to their parliament, and this should be taken into account by their partners in negotiations. On the other hand, when scrutinizing their government, national parliaments conform to the normative requirements of democratic representation only if they consider national interests in the light of interests of other member states and with a concern for a common European public interest. That these “double-barreled conditions” (Savage and Weale 2009: 75) are fulfilled can only be supposed if not only governments, but also parliaments develop horizontal structures that constitute an essential element in every form of democratic representation. For this very reason, inter-parliamentary relations are an important element of European democracy, not as a structure of decision-making or coordination, but as structure of communication among national demoi.

Interparliamentary communication has not remained an issue of democratic theory only. During the last two decades, it gained relevance in practice. Members of national parliaments have realised that instead of tying the hands of their representatives in European negotiations,
they better use their power to scrutinise in a strategic way based on information regarding different negotiation positions of other member state governments. For this purpose, they extended their engagement in interparliamentary relations (Bengtson 2007; Fasone 2011). The Conference of Community and European Affairs Committees of Parliaments of the European Union (COSAC) gained in importance for an exchange of opinions. Following a recommendation, issued by the speakers of EU parliaments in their 2000 meeting, the EU established the ‘Interparliamentary EU Information Exchange’ (IPEX), an electronic platform used for disseminating information.

The Treaty on the European Union endorses interparliamentary relations by making them part of the Union’s institutional framework (article 12, section f TEU). The Treaty particularly contributes to the evolution of interparliamentary relations by the subsidiarity control mechanism (Cooper 2012; Maurer 2009). National parliaments now check whether an initiative for legislation conforms to the principle of subsidiarity and issue their opinion to the Commission in case of dispute. To make its statement effective, a parliament has to obtain support from other parliaments.

Yet the subsidiarity control procedure reveals the limits of politics of interparliamentary communication. Although chambers of national legislatures have issued a ‘reasoned opinion’ on subsidiarity in a number of cases, they have not found appropriate procedures in order to exchange their views or to come to an agreement. The weakness of these ties became apparent during the Euro crisis, which not only divided member state governments but also parliaments.

3. Executive crisis management and the rise of populist parties

The term Euro crisis refers to economic developments. Following the 2008 crisis in the fiscal market, which affected the banking sector and led to a recession, European states ran into the sovereign debt crisis, partly because they stimulated the economy by Keynesian deficit spending and partly because they faced a dramatic rise in interest rates. These economic challenges do not characterize the political dimensions of the crisis the EU is facing. In fact, we observed a series of interconnected economic, societal and political developments. Together they have caused serious problems for the Union and its member states, which provoked policies and reforms responding to particular critical situations and which amount to a widespread perception in the public that something is awry with European integration. However, neither do we know the outcome of these developments nor can we clearly determine whether they lead to disintegration or more integration of the EU or to a different kind of dynamics of multilevel governance.

To characterize the political dimension of the crisis, three aspects must be highlighted:

First, the EU is confronted with intense redistributive conflicts among member states. Regardless of how we estimate the economic developments and the measures that had been taken or need to be taken to cope with the economic and social problems, it is obvious, that states are affected in different ways. European economy is out of balance, with Germany being in a relatively comfortable position, while southern European states are still suffering
from stagnation, high unemployment, limited fiscal capacities and an unstable economy. Hence whatever is decided in the EU as measures to confront economic problems, governments pursue different interests. Moreover, the outcome of decisions usually affects member states in different ways, regardless of whether regulations are intensified or whether fiscal measures are taken. Therefore, the EU can no longer be considered a regulative state generating a common good for member states, and its decisions can no longer be justified as generally conforming to output-legitimacy. European politics has to deal with redistributive conflicts and thus decisions that are favourable for some states, regions of societal groups or interests and disadvantageous for others. However, the institutions of the EU require joint decisions of governments and parliaments, and they make redistributive decisions extremely difficult.

Second, while European institutions are not adjusted to redistributive policy-making, policies of crisis management to a considerable extent fall under the jurisdiction of member states. The ECB, responsible for monetary policy of the Euro-zone, became the leading institution in economic policy. Yet the EU has limited powers in fiscal policies. Neither can it raise taxes nor can it significantly change public expenditures. For this reasons, crisis management became an intergovernmental process. European regulation concerned budget policy of member states, but remained focused on setting debt rules. Therefore, besides the ECB, member state governments gained power during the Euro crisis.

More than supranational legislation according to the Community method, intergovernmental policy-making corresponds to the model of joint-decision-making. Negotiating executives are accountable to their parliaments. They need to take into account the expectations expressed by competing parties, expectations which do not necessarily converge with those expressed in other member states. For this reason, executives avoid agreements causing visible burdens for their government or citizens. Under these conditions, making redistributing policies turns out as extremely difficult.

Third, due to the redistributive effects of the economic crisis and political crisis management, European integration not only was politicized, the public debate also changed political structuring in member states. Euro-scepticism gained ground in national societies and Euro critics organized in parties or supported nationalist parties. These parties exploited the democratic deficit of intergovernmental policy-making and the technocratic regime of the ECB to promote their demands for a renationalization of powers. In public debates, the EU has been denounced as an opaque system not accessible to citizens, it has been blamed for supporting an elitist politics and the crisis management has been considered as favouring the rich and burdening the majority of the people. Confronted with these challenges in national society and party systems, responsible policy-makers in the EU try to avoid agreements which go at the cost of their constituency. As a result, redistributive decisions in the EU have become even more difficult than they are due to institutional constraints. For this reason, the political crisis of the Union endures.
4. Renationalization and decline of interparliamentary relations

a) Politics of coordination: differentiated empowerment of national parliaments

In the Euro-critical discourses, one argument stands out to characterize European policymaking or governance described as undemocratic. Regardless of the general political position, populist politicians, media and many political scientists assume a decline of parliaments. Some refer to the old debate about the presumed bureaucratic nature of European governance; others point to the market pressure on governments, which – according to this reasoning – enforces technocratic politics; according to a third analysis, parliaments are excluded from intergovernmental politics. While there is certainly some truth in all these arguments, they miss the real problem and therefore come to inappropriate conclusions.

The third argument seems the most plausible one, but it cannot be supported by empirical evidence. Arguably, the EP lost ground during the crisis management since many important decisions resulted from intergovernmental negotiations. In contrast, national parliaments had to be included in decision-making since many intergovernmental policies concerned their power over the budget. Governments could not agree to participate in fiscal funds (EFSF; ESM) without explicit agreement of their national parliaments, they cannot implement the rules for fiscal policy provided by the reformed Stability and Growth Pact without the consent of their parliament, and they cannot implement expenditure cuts without the parliament deciding on the budget. Therefore, the latter had a say in European fiscal policies.

Certainly, the formal competences of parliaments are not identical with their effective power (Raunio 2005; Winzen 2012). Comparative research has distinguished between policy-making and policy-influencing parliaments (Norton, 1996), with the latter being dependent on policy-proposals of the executive while the former being able to modify a government bill. In fiscal policy, economic constraints are more relevant. The pressure of the market, emphasized by the second argument in the Euro-sceptic discourse, could not be ignored by parliaments, in particular those in the highly indebted countries like Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal. Moreover, this market pressure coincided with political pressure to implement strict austerity policy exerted from governments representing states with strong economies, in particular Germany.

The political pressure from Germany was to a certain extent due to the participation of the German Bundestag. In general, parties in parliament were willing to support European crisis management, but they also wanted to maintain control of their budget. Supported by the Federal Constitutional Court, they maintained and even extended their veto-rights in fiscal policy made at the European level. In several decisions, the Bundestag agreed to intergovernmental pacts or decisions, though after intense debates (Wimmel 2012). Therefore, the threatening joint decision-trap was avoided. However, it was avoided because the members of German government negotiated with their partners in intergovernmental politics with tied hands. They anticipated the position of their parties in parliament, and therefore realized the constraints of their discretion.

As a consequence, the crisis management of European governments in fact strengthened national parliaments, but not all of them could profit from this empowerment (Auel and
Hoeing, 2014; Maatsch 2015). Some like the German Bundestag became highly influential, while others, in particular those in the crisis states (with the Greek parliament being the extreme case) could not use their competences under the external pressure. This pressure was partly caused by the markets, but it also can be traced back to intergovernmental negotiations and European policies which national parliaments supported, if not requested in those member states where citizens expected to be burdened by the costs of crisis management. Hence, the fundamental problem of European democracy is the inequality in democratic representation caused by the differentiated empowerment of national parliaments (seemingly coinciding with member-state economic position) and the limited role of the EU in this context (Fasone 2014; Fossum 2014; Majone 2014).

b) Decline of inter-parliamentary communication

Regarding politics of coordination, this imbalance of democratic representation prevented European governance from running into the joint decision trap. Under the condition of tied hands or the veto power of national parliaments, executives would not have been able to solve redistributive conflicts without a de facto hegemonic structure. Whether German government used its position as a benevolent hegemon or exploited it for its own interests must not be clarified in this context. Regardless of the assessment of the policy it advanced, it could claim to be legitimized by its parliament when it adopted the leadership in intergovernmental negotiations.

Those governments subject to a hegemon cannot claim democratic legitimacy if they act against the will of their parliament or their citizens. This is in particular the case if elections end with a change in government and the new government cannot fulfil its promise or the expectation of voters to change policy. From a national and a European perspective, this situation expresses a severe democratic deficit. It can lead to political instability and thus deepen the political crisis of European integration.

This divide of the European democracy finds expression in two further developments, caused by the differentiated empowerment or disempowering of national parliaments. One is the rise of anti-European, nationalist parties or attitudes in member states, the other, linked to this, is the decline of interparliamentary communication.

Nationalist parties emerged in a process of restructuring political societies in Europe (Kriesi et al. 2006). While for a long time the socio-economic left-right cleavage predominated national party systems in Europe, the conflict about territorial politics now has generated another cleavage. While the left-right cleavage turned into a conflict about government versus markets, the second conflict concerns which level should be responsible for policy-making. Both cleavages overlap since European powers are mostly identified with free market economy weakening the welfare state. During the Euro crisis, this overlap strengthened right-wing populist parties who argued both against European integration and blamed the Eurozone and the deregulated market for threatening the economic security of middle classes.

However, not only right-wing parties have contributed to a renationalization of politics. Intergovernmental policy-making dealing with redistributive issues had similar effects. In this
context, renationalization does not mean a shift in power from the European to the national level. In fact, we observe an "authority migration" in the other direction, as is exemplified by the power of the EU to supervise national budgeting. It is not the allocation of power but the style of politics and policy-making that has changed. In redistributive policies negotiated among governments, executives and national parliaments exploit the opportunities of the two-level game in order to improve their positions. Executives tend to tie their hands to the positions of their majority in parliament, when this allows them to gain strategic advantage in intergovernmental negotiations. Parties in parliament reinforce their pressure on their government thus demonstrating to the national electorate that they defend their interests. In redistributive policies, this is a rational strategy of bargaining for its own advantages. However, it neither guarantees a successful agreement nor does this behaviour conform to the requirements of representative democracy.

One significant consequence of this kind of intergovernmentalism is a decline of interparliamentary communication. While both the European Commission and the EP made efforts to maintain the dialog, and while still conferences are organized including national parliaments, the willingness of parliaments to communicate has suffered. At least communication became selective. When the German and French governments intensified their cooperation to fight the Euro crisis in fall 2011, the German Bundestag and the French Assemblée Nationale established a working group to discuss the Treaty changes proposed by the heads of their governments, which certainly affected all parliaments of the participating member states. Apart from scrutinizing their governments, this interparliamentary cooperation also influenced intergovernmental negotiations. It was due to the intervention of the French-German working group that a proposal for continuous meetings of budget committees of national parliaments was not written down in the Fiscal Stability Treaty and a weaker conference format was established. When heads of European governments negotiated with the Greek government on the conditions for further assistance to meet the budget problems and the German minister of finance adopted a pivotal position, only the Left Party in the German parliament maintained relations with Greek members of parliament. Overall the communication was one-sided and indirect. The decisive debate in the German parliament ending with the support for the final agreement was transmitted via TV to the Greek parliament. The other way around, no corresponding communication took place. The weak ties of interparliamentary relations broke down during the crisis.

The relations between the German and the Greek parliament may represent an extreme instance due to the political conflicts, which arose after the election of a left-wing majority and government in Greece. However, just when European policy-making became politicized and national parliaments had a say as representatives of national citizens, the horizontal structure of European democracy established by national parliaments became weaker. Redistributive conflicts, predominating intergovernmental negotiations and the rise of nationalist parties apparently caused a vicious cycle of an increasing divide in parliamentary democracy. This divide is expressed in the different effective power of parliaments and the erosion of interparliamentary relations. Both developments mutually reinforced each other: Strong parliaments apparently do not expect to profit from cooperation with weak parliaments. In order to cope with their limited resources, they concentrate their relations on
"important" partners. In consequence, weak parliaments lose the support they might gain from interparliamentary relations, a support which to a certain extent could have compensated the decline of their effective power in European affairs. Both processes amount to a serious democratic deficit. By simply complaining about a de-parliamentarisation, scholars misunderstand the causes and effects of recent changes brought on by the political crisis of the EU.

5. Is there a way out of the vicious cycle?

Apparently, multilevel parliamentary democracy has changed significantly during the crisis. Strong ties of national parliaments with their governments have become stronger, at least in some member states. In contrast, weak ties established by the emerging interparliamentary communication, did not intensify. Rather they lost their strength resting in the creation of a horizontal structure of public communication in multilevel representation. As I demonstrated in the previous section, a combination of different causes brought about this weakening of horizontal ties. Therefore, an amendment of the damage to a democratic Europe is extremely difficult.

In light of these developments, it cannot be expected that a better institutional framework for interparliamentary relations would help to intensify communication on a short term. The Hansard Society recently suggested to reconstitute the "Assises" (Fox 2012). However, it is uncertain that this conference of national parliaments intensifies robust horizontal relations, if parliaments do not meet with a clear agenda or a mission. A standing committee of national parliaments in the EU may ensure continuity of communication, but it does not guarantee that its communications constitute a public space. This model poses a dilemma: Without a selective agenda, it risks to become overloaded with tasks, but if its powers are limited, it might remain ineffective in decisive policies. The lose structure of interparliamentary relations that has emerged before the crisis had the advantage of being mobilized for salient issues. Yet this strategy failed precisely when most salient issues had to be dealt with. The expectation that the mechanism of subsidiarity control would generate an interparliamentary discourse (Cooper 2006) has been disappointed by reality. Moreover, this process can only be used in cases the EU applies its powers, whereas intergovernmental politics is not affected by the mechanism.

Neither the lose structures nor the establishment of new institutions appear as promising way out of the mentioned vicious cycle. Interparliamentary communication can only constitute a public space and the horizontal structure of representative democracy, if it is focused on salient issues on the one hand, and if its existence does not depend on specific issues. These requirements raise a problem which seems to resemble the squaring of the circle. A feasible solution might be to make the political crisis of the EU an issue of European constitutional policy, with the consequence that the Commission should call a Convention according to article 48 section 3 TEU which should address the democratic deficit of European politics. Moreover, European parties might provide venues for members of parliaments from different levels and member states to meet. Finally, the COSAC could be transformed into an association of national parliaments determined to organize regular interparliamentary
dialogues. However, more relevant is a common understanding of the causes and consequences of the political crisis of the EU in the first place and an appropriate concept of representative democracy adjusted to the conditions of a multinational multilevel polity.

References


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