Silent Servants or Mighty Masters?
The Role of Parliamentary Committee Secretariats in EU Affairs

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Abstract
This paper aims to analyse the role of parliamentary committee secretariats in the emerging multi-level system of European Union (EU) scrutiny. It argues that the organisational capabilities of these bureaucratic actors, including their resources and logics of action as well as network ambitions across the EU, influence how parliaments scrutinise EU proposals. The paper compares parliamentary committee secretariats in the German Bundestag and the Swedish Riksdag and shows their different support patterns for EU scrutiny. In Germany, the committee secretariats execute rather separately the handling of EU documents as predefined by a central EU section inside the Bundestag administration, which, in turn, is strongly guided by the parliamentary parties. In contrast, the committee secretariats in Sweden redefine the handling of EU documents by collaborating with each other and without the parliamentary parties. As a result, German parliamentary committees get a rather centralized and partisan support in EU scrutiny whereas Swedish parliamentary committees receive a rather decentralized and neutral support.
1 Introduction

Since the 1990s, the scholarly debate on the Europeanization of parliaments is interested in whether, and if so, how national parliaments in the member states manage to maintain their legislative rights when facing the shift of more and more competencies towards Brussels (Raunio 1999). In the early times of this literature, the rather dominant deparlamentarization thesis in the literature stated that European integration can be seen as one cause for the declining relevance of national parliaments. The subsequent constitutional and political developments undermined the power of the legislative whereas national executives have been identified as the winners of the integration process as a zero-sum-game (Moravcsik 1994). Yet, national parliaments responded by strengthening their formal scrutiny structures, putting a reparlamentarization thesis forward in the debate whereby national parliaments start to fight back (Raunio/Hix 2000). Former 'losers' (Maurer/Wessels 2001) became 'gatekeeper' (Raunio 2011) of the integration process and hold their governments accountable even in European policies. As a consequence, conceptual and empirical research focused so far on newly established institutional structures, i.e. the European affairs committees (EACs), and the formal scrutiny rights of national parliaments for EU affairs, including the participation of specialized committees in these EU scrutiny schemes (Raunio 2005, Karlas 2012).

But 'formal rules do not suffice' (Hegeland/Neuhold 2002: 12), the pure formal privilege to receive all EU documents does not imply a proper scrutiny. Instead, it is plausible to assume that the filter- and priority-systems in place to differentiate between important and unimportant EU documents is equally if not more important to assess the EU scrutiny and the reparlamentarization. In addition, the current literature reduces the standing committees' participation in EU scrutiny basically to whether committees other than the EAC are involved regularly, occasionally, or not at all (Karlas 2012: 1101). However, the decentralization of the EU scrutiny, i.e. the involvement of specialized committees in day-to-day Europeanization, may not be provided by formal rules but relying on intra-parliamentary and committees' opportunity structures and resources.

One of these resources of assemblies and single MPs, namely the parliamentary support staff, has not found much scholarly attention in the debate on EU scrutiny so far. This is surprising, as the increase of support staff is a seemingly common response to information asymmetries between legislatives and executives (Campbell/Laporte 1981; Ryle 1981; Jann 1983; Webb Hammond 1985; Mair 1994: 9; Schnapp 2004). Yet, the capacity of these support staffs to reduce information asymmetries and to channel information differs, not just
in EU-issues: The personal assistants of Members of Parliament (MPs) conduct a wide range of tasks but are primarily focused on the partisan and constituency duties of individual MPs. They are thus less able to compensate for the general information deficiency of parliaments vis-à-vis the EU level. Likewise, the staffs of parliamentary parties, designated to support the collective party-political role of parliamentarians, vary in their ability to keep track of the information in EU-affairs; those assisting the governing parliamentary parties having a general advantage over those working for the parliamentary parties in opposition by their more direct contacts towards the member state bureaucracy. Finally, the parliamentary administrations can be regarded as particularly relevant for their legislative assistance, also and especially in EU issues.

This paper focuses on a particular type of parliamentary staffs, namely the secretariats of parliamentary committees. Compared to other elements of parliamentary administrations (e.g. Quaritsch 1976; Backhaus/Maul 1990; von Winter 2006), we know very little on committee secretariats (e.g. Neunreither 2006; Winzen 2011). This paper seeks to fill this gap and asks whether and how their organisational resources as well as their key logics of action influence the work, decision-making, and scrutiny in parliamentary committees in European affairs. We argue that the committee secretariats' capability to support EU scrutiny is influenced by their organisational capabilities, also strongly driven by national administrative traditions, and their networking ambitions in the emerging networks of national parliaments in the EU. Empirically, the paper follows a most similar systems design and compares the secretariats of parliamentary committees in the German Bundestag and the Swedish Riksdag, which are both regarded as 'working parliaments' with powerful committee structures corresponding to the portfolio allocation. In addition, Germany and Sweden have by far the most personnel in committee secretariats in Western Europe (Harfst/Schnapp 2003: 23). More importantly, both countries reorganized their parliaments' administration of European affairs recently and are rated as strong scrutinizers in EU affairs (Raunio 2005; Karlas 2012). Our findings are based upon document analyses and 21 semi-structured expert interviews with committee secretariat staff members, MPs, and ministry officials that have been conducted between March 2010 and April 2012 in both countries1.

The paper is structured as follows: The next section describes the emergence and functions of German and the Swedish parliamentary committee secretariats. The third section examines the capabilities of parliamentary committees in EU affairs. The fourth section

1 Interviews are carried out in a research project under the direction of Sabine Kropp at the German Research Institute for Public Administration Speyer.
analyses how secretariats and other elements of parliamentary administrations may support these parliamentary committees in EU scrutiny. The final section compares and discusses our findings, concluding that parliamentary committee secretariats are relevant for understanding the strength and scope of EU scrutiny by national parliamentary committees, albeit their support patterns may differ.

2 The emergence of German and Swedish parliamentary committee secretariats

The formal regulation of parliamentary committee secretariats differs in Germany and Sweden, even though their tasks and functions are rather similar. The emergence of the German parliamentary committee secretariats dates back to the Economic Council (Wirtschaftsrat) and the Parliamentary Council (Parlamentarischer Rat), which were serviced by a small support staff for their committees (Schneider/Zeh 1988: 842). Following these experiences, the first German Bundestag had secretaries for only a few committees with particularly heavy workloads, while other secretary staff served two or more committees simultaneously. Already a decade later, each parliamentary committee was supported by at least one secretary, an office clerk and two typists (Schramm 1966). In total, the German parliamentary committee secretariats have over 100 staff members (see Harfst/Schnapp 2003: 23), which is less than 10% of all the civil servants in the Bundestag administration.

When the Rules of Procedures of the German Bundestag were stipulated in 1951, no provisions were laid down concerning the role or number of these committee secretariats. Yet an internal Letter of Direction by the then President of the Bundestag Ehlers in June 1951 described the distinct duties of committee secretariat officials and stipulated that they perform a dual function, i.e. supporting the President of the Bundestag as bureaucratic subordinates in the parliamentary administration and simultaneously assisting their respective committee chairman (printed in Schramm 1966).

Over time, the mandate of committee secretariats in the German Bundestag consolidated without further formalisation, eventually coming to incorporate the following tasks (Jekewitz 1969: 516-7; Blischke 1981; von Oertzen 2005: 226-30): To assist the committee chairman in the preparation and conduct of committee meetings; to present proposals for the agenda, for the appointment of rapporteurs, and for the selection of experts in formal hearings; and to formulate committee decisions and opinions that were given no final form during a session. They have to put the necessary materials together, must inform the committee members about the consultation results in other committees involved, and create the committee’s official printed submissions and oral and written reports to the plenary. In cases without verbatim
transcripts, they make short reports about the substance of the committee deliberations and the conduct of the negotiations and ensure their correct inclusion in the formal minutes. For expert hearings they provide a list of qualified participants, coordinate the questions, and send the charges to the stakeholders, informants and experts.

The Swedish Riksdag Act specifies that parliamentary committees shall be ‘assisted by secretariats which form part of the Riksdag Administration’ (Riksdag Act 9/2). The instructions for Riksdag’s Administration (Act 2011:745) inform on the main tasks of the parliamentary administration, including to assist committee meetings, to deal with the parliament’s international contacts, and to ensure the resources and services needed by the chamber, the committees and other parliamentary organs at hand. Regarding EU affairs, the only task stipulated by law is to inform about the Riksdag’s work and questions linked to the EU (Act 2011:745). A survey of the secretariats carried out by the Riksdag administration revealed that they mainly engage in preparing committee meetings and hearings, i.e. assisting members in drafting their reports with proposals for decisions, supporting MPs with their follow–up motions and evaluation of decisions, choosing and inviting experts for hearings, but also preparing information on key issues and, less frequently, submitting proposals on further important questions (Riksdagsstyrelsen 2005: 76). In addition, a report on the ‘Riksdag in the light of the 21st century’ mandates that the heads of the secretariats to play a central role in planning the committees’ daily work: 'If necessary', they shall advise the committee by gathering information on certain policies, e.g. through summary reports written by the secretariat, study visits, or expert hearings (Riksdagsstyrelsen 2000: 20).

3 The legislative perspective:

German and Swedish parliamentary committees and EU affairs

To perform the scrutiny of their national government and to position themselves towards EU legislation, national parliaments and their committees need assistance as well. Over time, the German and the Swedish assembly have strengthened their legislative assistance. Regarding EU-affairs and the prioritization of documents, these developments differed especially in the last years.

The German EU Committee has cross-sectoral obligations and is allowed to deliver opinions on the behalf of the whole Bundestag. It is responsible for the treatment of European affairs since 1994. Especially the encouragement of the German Constitutional Court has provided incentives for the Bundestag to further strengthen its involvement (Beichelt 2012). Just recently, in July 2013, the Act on the Cooperation Between the Federal Government and
Bundestag in EU Affairs (EUZBBG) was renewed, stipulating that 'the Bundestag shall participate in the decision-making processes', 'shall have the right to state its position' and shall be notified by the German government 'as early as possible' (Section 1 § 1 EUZBBG). The standing committees shall be part of the deliberations and can forward their recommendation for decision to the plenary for a decision that has to be taken into account by the Federal Government. Yet, the Bundestag website informing on the involvement of committees in scrutiny states: 'In the majority of cases, the consultation procedure ends with a mere acknowledgement, rarely with a substantive recommendation to the Parliament' (Bundestag 2013a).

In Sweden, parliamentary committees are organized along the sectoral competencies of the ministries as well, with the European Affairs Committee having cross-sectoral responsibilities. Already prior EU accession, the Swedish government got the instruction that it shall keep the Riksdag continuously informed and consult bodies appointed by the Riksdag concerning developments within the framework of European Union cooperation' (Chapter 10 § 10 Instrument of Government). The EAC is entitled to be that body (Prop. 1994/95:19; Bet. 1994/95: KU22) and to give a politically binding mandate to the Government prior Council meetings (Bet. 2008/2009: KU10; Aylott 2005: 180). Over time, the power relation between the EAC and specialized committees changed considerably. In 2006, due to their largely passive behaviour in EU affairs (Larsson/Bäck 2008: 163) and a rising need for expertise in mandating negotiations (Hegeland 2011), the standing committees' involvement got stipulated. The Riksdag Act (Chapter 10 § 4) states that the committees shall not just 'monitor activities at the European Union within the subject areas' and to comment on White Books and Green Books, but deliberate with the government on these issues. Between 2006 and 2010, Ministers and State Secretaries consulted the standing committees more than 250 times on 140 issues (Riksdagsförvaltningen 2010a: 14). In addition, the information rights of the committees have been strengthened.

4 The bureaucratic perspective:

German and Swedish parliamentary committee secretariats and EU affairs

4.1 The structural and procedural capabilities in administering EU affairs

Since 2005, the Bundestag strengthened the support of the EU committee and EU affairs. Next to the EU Committee secretariat, consisting of one head and five members, including three higher civil servants trained as lawyers (Gerlof 2006), a special section for EU affairs
(PA1) was created as a part of the subdivision PA, which traditionally hosts all committee secretariats. Its task was to increase the Bundestag's 'EU-ability' and to decrease its information and control deficits (Calliess/Beichelt 2013: 26).

In June 2007, the Bundestag introduced a new so-called 'prioritization procedure', one year later also formalized into its rules of procedure, in order to cope with the continuous increase of EU documents. The new procedure aims to focus parliamentary consideration towards important EU initiatives and to facilitate and streamline the transfer procedure of EU documents. It states that only EU documents of a particular document type are, in general, eligible for consideration in the parliamentary committees and should give priority (§ 93 para 3 GOBT). More importantly, the decision on which of these particular EU documents is submitted to which parliamentary committee(s) is delegated to the aforementioned section on EU affairs (PA1) inside the Bundestag administration, which takes these decisions only after an explicit guidance by the parliamentary parties. Put differently: Since 2007, only those EU-related documents are transmitted and considered by parliamentary committees which gained previously the interest of at least one parliamentary party, issuing its request by the prioritization procedure that is managed by the Bundestag administration. Overall, this change in procedure led to a significant concentration of the parliamentary consultation processes, reducing the number of EU documents that are eventually passed to the parliamentary committees (Bundestag 2010: chap. 10.8).

As a 'bureaucratic consequence', PA1 was extended in 2007 by opening a Bundestag office in Brussels as a direct link towards the EU institutions, facilitating the information and knowledge transfer and supporting the crucial role of PA1 in the prioritization process, thus enhancing its capabilities to anticipate the relevant and prioritized EU initiatives. These anticipation objectives covered also a partisan perspective, i.e. the Brussels office was also regarded as a mean to enhance the contacts to the German parliamentary groups in the EP, as exemplified by its composition of staff members directly selected by the parliamentary parties (expert interviews DEPA1, DESC2).

Recently, in 2013, the former section PA1 was extended into a subdivision of the parliamentary administration, called PE. The new subdivision entails six sections. One of them is the secretariat of the EU Committee, which is therefore no longer part of the subdivision PA containing all secretariats of specialized committees. However, its influence on the selection and prioritization of important proposals from the EU institutions is supposed to maintain (Bundestag 2013b: 37). Primarily, this is executed by the new section PE3 for
'analysis, counselling and prioritization' that transmits the EU documents (ibid.). PE3 is assisted by another unit, PE4, which is the Bundestag Liaison Office, now operating as a separate section. The office is connected and assisted by the German Permanent Representation (Section 11 § 2 EUZGGB). To sum up, the Bundestag enhanced the status of EU affairs inside its administration from a single section – the EU Committee secretariat – into a subdivision within less than a decade. Today, members of the parliamentary administration are largely responsible for the prioritization of EU documents in conjunction with the parliamentary parties. In contrast, the EU Committee secretariat is largely excluded from these tasks. The centralization makes PE the crucial actor in EU affairs within the Bundestag administration (expert interviews DEPA3, DEEC4) – in conjunction with the staff members from the parliamentary parties, thus also weakening the previously existing stronger separation of different support actors in EU affairs, most notably the Bundestag administration from the parliamentary party staffers. In the future, parliamentary committee secretariats expect that the growing interactions between the aforementioned actors may interfere into their core functions and mandates, in a sense diminishing their administrative and executing role further (expert interviews DEPA3, DEPA7).

In Sweden, every committee secretariat consists of one head secretary and several rapporteurs and assistants. The biggest secretariats are composed of ten staff members, servicing the constitution committee and the budget committee, while the smallest committee secretariats consist of about five officials and support the committees on defence, on cultural affairs, and on the labour market (Riksdagsstyrelsen 2005: 45). In total, approx. 120 staff members work at the Swedish parliamentary committee secretariats, which is one-fifth of all officials in the Riksdag administration (ibid.). The secretariat of the committee on European Affairs has medium size with about seven staff members (Riksdagsförvaltningen 2010b: 38). Besides, it is possible for a committee secretariat to 'borrow' rapporteurs from other committee secretariats as well as from other units in the parliamentary administration when they are needed for special working groups or in the event of exceptionally high workloads (Riksdagsstyrelsen 2005: 45). However, there is no further direct support staff within parliamentary bureaucracy for EU issues for the committees. Furthermore, and in contrast to their German counterparts, Swedish MPs do not have distinct scientific assistants or other personnel paid by the parliament. Even the parliamentary groups do not have many resources for supporting staff. Thus, in contrast to Germany, the handling of EU-related documents is totally up to the committee secretariats. However, the chamber secretariat is the internal and external contact point for EU affairs. It gets all documents from the government and decides
to which committee the issue belongs. As there is no universal code of conduct, the subsequent information processing differs between the committee secretariats in the Riksdag. The EAC secretariat has a clear labour division along the policy lines in the Council, with about two to four policies per rapporteur (expert interview SECS1). Also in the specialized committees, the standard model is that the rapporteurs themselves go through all the documents. This can be done by either a single person responsible just for EU issues or several rapporteurs with shared competencies like in the EAC. Less often do all rapporteurs get all documents or a certain rotation of the EU-burden is organized by the head of the secretariat (expert interview SESC2).

Usually, all documents are announced in the following committee meeting by a list. But scanning the documents, the prioritization procedures differ as well between the committee secretariats. One way is that the rapporteurs decide whether or not to prioritize a proposal on their own, just backed up by the secretariats head. If so, they reprocess the documents, i.e. to break the text down into a much simpler, short Swedish text in order to make it easier for the MPs to understand its content (expert interview SESC2). Normally, these summaries do not exceed one page. Nevertheless, highly technical and complicated issues considered to be especially interesting for the committee members can cause a longer and deep-going kind of report by the rapporteurs (Riksdagsförvaltningen 2010a: 34). Sometimes, the rapporteurs explain the issues under the committee meetings. Another way which rather is tread by secretariats in less Europeanized policy fields with less EU-related documents is to simply forward all texts without any editing (expert interview SESC2). The aim of both procedures is to broadly inform the MPs on all issues (deemed to be interesting) and to give them the chance to ask for more information by or even deliberation with the government.

In general, rapporteurs from the EAC secretariat have the permission to attend at all EU-related meetings of the specialized committees and vice versa (expert interview SECS1). After deliberations with the government on EU issues, the heads of the specialized committees report to the EAC secretariat what happened in order to help to prepare the EAC subsequent meeting and the formal mandating process (expert interview SECS1). But again, there are policy differences. Due to the different EU-related workload, not all standing committees have developed a standard procedure for EU affairs so far. As an example for a very sophisticated and professional committee in EU affairs, the committee on environment and agriculture has been named. Nevertheless, a certain duplication of work has been detected (expert interviews SECS1, SEMP4): The increased involvement of the standing committees
forces the government to first deliberate with these MPs – facilitated by the secretariat. Due to the formal responsibility, the government gets the final binding mandate by the EAC afterwards. Even if the mandate by the EAC usually is not different from the deliberation result from the standing committee meeting, ministers, MPs and committee secretariats have to meet twice. The better the communication between the committee secretariats, the less time-consuming is the second meeting (expert interview SESC1).

In comparison, the structural and procedural capabilities of supporting German and Swedish MPs in their EU scrutiny differ. Within the Bundestag administration the treatment of EU-related documents is strongly centralized. It is exclusively the Liaison Office in Brussels and the newly established unit PE3 for analysis, counselling and prioritization submitting the number of EU documents. The committee secretariats, both of the EAC and the specialized committees, are not involved in this crucial task. The centralization has led to a considerable concentration of the discussion of EU-issues in the committees. More importantly, this was also facilitated by the participation of staff members from the parliamentary parties involved in prioritizing EU documents and thus performing tasks that had been previously conducted by the parliamentary administration – but also politicizing these decisions to a varying degree. On the contrary, in the Swedish Riksdag we witness a strongly decentralized way to handle EU proposals. All documents are forwarded to the formally responsible committee secretariats that have to decide how to proceed on their own. This generates at least two difficulties. First, the missing code of conduct leads to different standards which implicates uncertainty for both the rapporteurs and the MPs. Second, the decision on which EU document is considered to be politically relevant is almost exclusively imposed on bureaucratic actors.

4.2 The workload in administering EU affairs in Germany and Sweden

We assess the number of documents considered by parliamentary committees and regard them as a proxy for the workload of the committees' secretariats. A comparative analysis reveals several important similarities and differences across Germany and Sweden and their EU and specialized committees (see table 1). First, the total number of EU documents is rather similar in both countries (approx. 3,900).2 However, the number of EU documents that have been send to the Swedish specialized committees increased by approx. 50% compared to the

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2 This similarity is very likely to change when comparing the current legislative periods, i.e. in Germany the number of EU documents decreased to approx. 1,800 due to the constant application of the prioritization procedure throughout the whole 17th legislative period (DIP 2013).
previous legislative period (Riksdagsförvaltningen 2010a: 31). In contrast, the number of EU documents submitted to German parliamentary committees is rather stable.

Second, the workload in EU-related issues is distributed across the specialized parliamentary committees in both countries, signifying their strong involvement in EU scrutiny (Riksdagsförvaltningen 2010a: 56–7). A closer analysis of these sectoral differences shows that the committees with the highest and the lowest EU workload are rather similar across both countries, i.e. the EU Committee considers the highest number of EU-related documents and the Cultural Affairs and Defence Committee respectively the lowest number of documents. The second highest workload differ, i.e. the Industry and Trade Committee in Germany versus the Agriculture and Environment Committee in Sweden. However, if we combine the numbers of EU documents in the German Agriculture Committee and the German Environment Committee, to compare it to the Swedish committee, the added number of EU documents is as well the second highest as their Swedish counterparts.

Table 1 Workload of parliamentary committees in Germany and Sweden

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Committee on…</th>
<th>EU documents</th>
<th>governmental documents/bills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>European Affairs</td>
<td>1,211</td>
<td>3,861</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry and Trade</td>
<td>1,044</td>
<td>686</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>704</td>
<td>1,005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>498</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>479</td>
<td>1,297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>465</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxation/Finance</td>
<td>436</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil/Home Affairs</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport/Communications</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Insurance</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour Market</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development Aid</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Welfare</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural affairs</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defence</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constitution</td>
<td>553</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,931</td>
<td>3,861</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The two committees with the highest workload per country are bold; the two with the lowest workload per country are italic. EU documents may be submitted to more than one parliamentary committee.

Source: Riksdagsförvaltningen 2010a: 19, 23, 31; Bundestag 2010: chap. 10.2; DIP 2013.
Lastly, the analysis reveals that the workload of parliamentary committee secretariats differs slightly between documents related to EU affairs and governmental initiatives, especially with regard to those committees with a higher workload. Whereas the Justice Committees and the Committees of Finance and/or Budget experience the highest workload measured as the number of governmental initiatives to consider, the Defence Committees are among those committees with the lowest workload in that regard. Put together, the Defence Committees face in EU affairs and in domestic initiatives the lowest workload assessed as the number of considered official documents. Those committee secretariats experiencing the highest workload in handling EU documents, i.e. the Industry and Trade Committee in Germany and the Foreign Affairs Committee in Sweden, are also rather strongly occupied with governmental initiatives (i.e. N = 61 and N = 57 respectively; these numbers are higher than the average per committee (approx. 40 in Germany and approx. 52 in Sweden)).

Due to the introduction of the prioritisation procedure in the German Bundestag, the workload decreased also during the analysed period of time, i.e. between the first and the second half of the 16th legislative period, by approx. 16% per committee (on average). However, a closer comparison shows that only the workload of the Defence Committee increased (marginally). All other committees diminished their workload rather equally (standard deviation: 10%). From those committees, the two committees with the highest and the lowest workload maintain the same before and after the introduction of the prioritisation procedure. Yet, the committees differed in their accomplished workload reduction due to the new procedure. The lowest workload reduction was experienced by the Committee on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid (-2%) and by the EU Committee (-4%), whereas the Committee on Education and Research (-38%) as well as the Committee on Finance (-31%) had the strongest workload reduction. Lastly, the two committees with the highest share of the overall reduction of EU documents before and after the introduction of the prioritisation procedure were the Committee on Industry and Trade (18%) as well as the Committee on Education (13%), whereas the aforementioned Committee on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid (1%) as well as the Committee for Labour and Social Affairs (2%) had the lowest share of the overall workload reduction. These findings suggest that the introduction of the prioritisation procedure had relevant effects on the workload across and within parliamentary committees in the German Bundestag. They also show that the overall trend during the whole period is valid, i.e. the parliamentary committees with the highest and lowest EU-related workload did not change due to the introduction of the prioritisation procedure. More importantly, the workload
analysis during the first and the second half of the 16th legislative period reveals that the EU Committee did not reduce its workload, to the contrary.

4.3 The network ambitions of parliamentary administrations in the EU

In the course of the developing scrutiny rights, national parliaments in the EU member states managed to get in touch, exchange experiences, and simply to learn from each other (Buzogány 2013). Over the years, several forums came into existence that facilitated inter-parliamentary exchange. Already in 1989, the Conference of Community and European Affairs Committees of Parliaments of the EU (COSAC) was founded. At this forum, members of the EACs of the national parliaments meet twice a year, exchange information, and discuss ongoing scrutiny issues. Furthermore, almost all parliaments have their own representative in Brussels. They meet regularly and inform each other on the political developments in the member states (Riksdagsförvaltningen 2010a: 43). Since the treaty of Lisbon came into effect, one major issue is the information exchange on subsidiarity matters and the possibilities for cooperation in these issues. Linked to that, but without the need to meet personally, the Interparliamentary EU Information Exchange (IPEX) enables the national parliaments to electronically stay in contact on issues under scrutiny. The parliamentary administrations in Germany and Sweden are both using these opportunities for inter-parliamentary European policy making, but differ in their ambition to position themselves within the network.

The German Bundestag administration perceived already rather early the relevance of this new forum for exchanging information and engaged rather actively in suggesting its own document storage and exchange system as a blueprint for IPEX (expert interviews DEPA1, DEPA5). Furthermore, the ambition to become one of the key hubs in the emerging network of national parliamentary administrations in the EU is signified by the fact that the German representative in the IPEX board took over the role as chair from the beginning, thus gaining some leverage in guiding where the newly established platform may develop (expert interview DEPA3).

In Sweden, the term interparliamentary cooperation is somewhat automatically understood synonymously with Nordic cooperation (expert interviews SECS1, SEMP5). All Swedish parliamentary activities in EU affairs are at least coordinated with the Danish and mostly Finnish counterparts. Beyond that, the Swedish ambitions for gaining a crucial role in the emerging networks of parliamentary administrations are comparatively moderate. The Swedish committee secretariats, who are responsible for updating the Swedish IPEX-page, upload information on all subsidiarity issues and their planning in a calendar, on involved
committees, on documents delivered by the government and even on committee responses (expert interview SECS1; Riksdagsförvaltningen 2010a: 39). This sharing of information is motivated by the respective policy content at hand and less with the ambition to network: Interestingly, the IPEX system is almost not used by the committee secretariats in order to get information on how other member states' committees position themselves in a certain question (Riksdagsförvaltningen 2010a: 39). This is due to the fact that many gaps remain, i.e. that many assemblies do not share their information in the same way, or that the system is still too slow and technically problematic (ibid.). Again, if information from other countries is needed, the committee secretariats at first contact their northern neighbors, and second, if still needed, other parliamentary administrations.

5 Conclusion

This paper examined the role of parliamentary committee secretariats in the emerging multi-level order of EU scrutiny. Its comparative case studies on the German and the Swedish parliamentary committee secretariats reveal that the organizational capabilities of such secretariats, including their resources and key logic of action as well as their network ambitions across the EU, influence how parliaments scrutinize EU proposals. The committee secretariats in the German Bundestag execute rather separately the handling of EU documents as predefined by a central EU section inside the recently expanded subdivision on EU affairs within the Bundestag administration, which is strongly guided by the parliamentary parties. In contrast, the committee secretariats in Sweden predefine the handling of EU documents by collaborating with each other, without the parliamentary parties. As a result, German parliamentary committees get a rather centralized and partisan support in EU scrutiny whereas Swedish parliamentary committees receive a rather decentralized and neutral support.

These crucial differences in the support patterns in EU affairs in Germany and Sweden are explained with the countries' administrative tradition whereby the German Rechtsstaat cause a strong emphasis on formal responsibilities weakening the collaboration among committee secretariats and simultaneously facilitating the expansion of extra support staff inside the Bundestag administration. Furthermore, the additional support resources of German MPs, most notably the staff supporting the parliamentary parties, add to the comparatively easy increase of resources for employing the prioritization procedure – but also to the possible infiltration of partisan motives into the prioritization decisions. In contrast, the consensual Scandinavian administrative tradition account for the strong mutual collaboration among the secretariats of the standing committees as well as between the secretariats of the EAC and the
standing committees. In addition, the different ambitions in Germany and Sweden regarding the emerging multi-level networks of parliamentary administrations suggest that the centralized support pattern in the German Bundestag is reinforced by rather bureaucratic motives of bureau-shaping and the strong willingness to play a crucial role in these networks across Europe.

More importantly, it is very likely that these different support patterns also shape the way how national parliaments scrutinise EU affairs and held their national governments accountable. Further research into their specific activities handling the EU-related documents is necessary to assess in more detail whether a centralized and partisan support pattern as in Germany leads to different EU scrutiny activities than a decentralized and rather neutral support pattern as in Sweden. Preliminary findings from our qualitative case studies suggest, however, that the increasingly partisan support pattern in the German Bundestag leads e.g. to a stronger ‘functional melange’ of actors supporting German MPs that acted more separated before, i.e. the support staff of parliamentary parties and the staff of the Bundestag administration interact more frequently in EU affairs, also at the expense of the committee secretariats involved in EU affairs.
References


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