The European Parliamentary Research Service:  
An In-House Think Tank to Strengthen an Institution  
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WORK IN PROGRESS

1. Introduction

The subsequent Treaty reforms have significantly increased the powers of the European Parliament. With the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, the former co-decision procedure officially became the “ordinary legislative procedure”, bringing the Parliament on an equal footing with the Council of Ministers in the overall majority of policy fields, including agriculture and fisheries, security and justice, and cohesion policy. Furthermore, the European Parliament needs to give consent for nearly all international agreements and it has the power to scrutinize delegated acts for the new policy areas where the ordinary legislative procedure applies. Consequently, these new competences had a major impact on the workload and functioning of a number of parliamentary committees.1

Not only have the competences increased, also the environment in which the Parliament operates has changed during the last decades and has made policy-making significantly more complex. The development of a multilevel governance system has created deep entanglement of politics at regional, national and supranational level. At the same time, there is an increasing involvement of non-governmental actors – such as civil society, socio-economic actors and business interests – in the decision-making process. As the power of the European Parliament has increased, the institution has become the subject of increasing interest representation by these actors. Consequently, the flow of information to the Parliament has seriously amplified. The Members of Parliament have to operate in what Neunreiter has described as a “competitive market for information”:2 they are confronted with a large number of sources of information, often contradicting and biased.

Following the concept of “bounded rationality”, we can state that the MEPs are confronted with cognitive limitations and severe time pressures in their legislative work and are therefore assisted by services that provide policy analysis and policy support. In this paper will be analysed how the European Parliament has built up its capacity to provide legislative support to its Members. More specifically, the policy analysis capacity at the three administrative levels will be examined: the personal assistants of the Members, the political groups and the parliamentary administration or “Secretariat”. We will analyse both the capacity-building of the Parliament over time as well as how the resources are distributed between the different administrative levels. The principal argument is that the way the European Parliament

1 Cabinet of the Secretary-General of the European Parliament, 100 Steps forward: the European Parliament and the upgrading of European democracy since the Lisbon Treaty, Brussel, 2014, pp. 101-102; In particular the Committees on Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI), on Fisheries (PECH), on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE), on Regional Development (REGI), and on International Trade (INTA)
organizes its policy support indicates a certain vision on the organization and functioning of the institution and its role and position in the European decision-making system.

The European Parliament is an interesting case because it has characteristics the two primary types of assemblies: a legislature in a separation-of-powers system – like the US Congress – and a parliament in a fused-power system, like most EU member states. The different branches of the EU political system are more independent from each other than in the national parliamentary systems, although the European Commission is not directly elected by the European citizens. Moreover, since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty the European Parliament elects the president of the European Commission, a characteristic of fused-power systems. Additionally, the choice of the president of the European Commission is linked to the outcome of the European elections. Although there is no stable majority in the Parliament that supports the European Commission and its legislative proposals, voting patterns show recurrent parliamentary majorities for legislative proposals. Furthermore, a large part of the Members of European Parliament began their career at the national level and were socialized in the logic of a fused-power system.

In this paper, we will analyse if and how the capacity-building in the European Parliament responds to two different visions on the European Parliament: a logic that follows the separation-of-power system or a logic that corresponds to a fused-power system. We will examine whether more emphasis is put on the cleavage between the different EU institutions as a separation-of-powers logic would imply, or on the cleavage and competition between the political groups in the European Parliament, as is the case in fused-power systems. First, a quantitative assessment will be made of the funds that are attributed to policy support in the different administrative levels. The level of resources gives an indication on the importance that is attached to that specific service. This analysis will be based on the annual accounts and financial reports of the European Parliament. Second, a qualitative assessment of the set-up and functions of the parliamentary policy support will be made on the basis of interviews of administrators in the parliamentary administration and the analysis of internal documents. Third, we will dedicate specific attention to the creation of the European Parliamentary Research Service.

2. State of the Art

Although research on the European Parliament has significantly increased in the last decades, studies on its parliamentary administration only developed in the last ten to fifteen years, partly building on research on the staff of the US Congress. Furthermore, most authors have focused on the general secretariat of the parliament – and more specifically on the committee secretariats; the personal assistants and the advisors in the political groups have received less academic attention.

Neunreiter explored the relations between Members of Parliament and the different administrative services from the perspective of accountability. He focused his analysis on the central administration and examined how certain tasks were delegated to administrators. He pointed at the dilemma in the work of the officials working in the committee secretariats:

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although they are part of the non-partisan administration of the Parliament, a lot of their work is an amalgam of technical-administrative and political functions. Neuhold and Radulova also pointed out that committee staff not only provides scientific and technical input, but also advice on political issues. Moreover, they show that officials of the committee secretariats are often actively involved in the drafting of (legislative) reports.

Marshall explained how the involvement of the officials of the secretariat can be used by external actors to influence policy-making in the EP. Since these administrators are no experts on all policy issues, they also get information from interest representatives or European Commission officials. However, from that perspective, the secretariat officials can be used for “indirect lobbying”, impeding the fact that they should act as a source of independent policy advice for the Members dealing with policy dossier. Winzen acknowledged the important functions the committee secretariats have and their close involvement in the decision-making process. However, he also stressed that the administrators are limited in their work by their position in the parliamentary hierarchy. In other words, the discretion of the administrators of the secretariat is as extensive as the MEPs of the committee want it to be.

Dobbels and Neuhold identified a number of factors that encourage Members to delegate tasks to administrators of the secretariat and give them more discretion for political work, based on four case studies in the field of fisheries and immigration policy. First, civil servants tend to have a larger role the MEPs have limited knowledge of the dossier or the political salience is low. When the issue is considered to be politically important or is contested between the political groups. Second, the secretariat is more involved when there is a conflict between the different institutions. Third, the role of administrators is more significant in case of non-legislative reports.

Egeberg et al. did not look into the relation between politicians and administrators, but examined how the organisational background influences the behaviour of the Parliaments civil servants. They not only analysed the officials working for the general secretariat, but also the advisors working for the political groups. Both groups of administrators valued European above national interests. Officials of the political groups however take their ideological setting much more into consideration – although often complemented with a sectoral/committee connection – and dedicate more attention to external actors that share their political affiliation (interest groups, officials of other EU institutions, etc.). The administrators working for the committee secretariats on the other hand emphasize sectoral and expert considerations. This also means that the way policy advice is organized has an effect on the ideological, sectoral

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and inter-institutional cleavages, since the EP officials situated in the general secretariat and the political groups contribute to these cleavages.\(^9\)

In sum, the literature has shown that the parliamentary administration plays an important role in the policy-making process, so the support capacity of the administrative services matters. Furthermore, it was argued that the administrative levels have a different mind-set in their policy work: whereas the officials of the central administration defend the interests of the committee or the entire institution, the political advisors put the interests of the political groups first. Consequently, increasing the capacity of the central administration follows a separation-of-powers logic and contributes to the cleavage between the institutions. Greater support for the capacity of the political groups on the other hand responds to a fused-power logic: they’re inclined to defend the interests of their party family across the institutions.

3. Quantitative Assessment

In the following paragraphs, capacity-building in the European Parliament will be examined by looking at the internal spending patterns of the European Parliament. More specifically, we will focus on the evolution over time of the EP’s expenditure on the personal assistants of the MEPs, on the political groups and on the parliamentary secretariat. The allocation of resources to these different expenditure categories gives an indication of the prevailing view on the internal organisation and decision-making in the Parliament.

It should be highlighted that the, although the budget of the European Parliament is part of the general budget of the European Union, the institution can independently determine its own expenditure. The first step of the EU annual budgetary procedure is that all institutions must prepare estimates of its expenditure for the following year before the 1\(^{st}\) of July.\(^{10}\) The European Commission collects all these estimates and submits a draft general EU budget for examination to the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament. Both institutions have to agree on the entire budget, although there is a gentlemen’s agreement since 1970 that the two institution would refrain from scrutinizing each other’s budget.\(^{11}\) In other words, the European Parliament is free to determine how it will spend its resources.

Internally, the Secretary-General has agenda-setting power over the Parliament’s budget.\(^{12}\) He prepares a report on the proposed priorities and resources for the following year. The Bureau, which consists of the President of the Parliament, the 14 Vice-Presidents and the five Quaestors, subsequently draws up the preliminary draft estimates based on this report and sends it to the Committee on Budgets (BUDG). The Committee prepares a parliamentary report with the priority objectives and proposed budget of the Parliament. If the views of the Committee and the Bureau diverge, an internal conciliation procedure is put in place. When the two bodies

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\(^{10}\) The Annual budgetary procedure is described in Article 314 of the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union.


\(^{12}\) The internal procedure is described in rules 96 and 97 of the Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament.
reach an agreement, the report is submitted to the plenary of the Parliament for the final adoption of the estimates.\textsuperscript{13}

In the EP’s annual accounts, expenditure categories for the three administrative levels can be observed. First, the Parliament allocates resources for parliamentary assistance of the MEPs. The Members are given a fixed monthly sum – around €21 000 in 2014 – which is used to employ personal assistants. This budget can only be used to hire assistants, and the amount that is not used, flows back to the Parliament.\textsuperscript{14} Second, in the budget of the parliament a fixed amount is included for the political groups. This sum is distributed among the political groups according to a specific allocation formula: 12.5 per cent is dispersed in even parts among the political groups (not to the non-attached members), 45.5 per cent is distributed according to the number of languages in the group and 42 per cent of the sum is allocated in proportion to the number of Members.\textsuperscript{15} The political groups can use these resources for administrative and operational expenditure and political and information activities. Third, the resources used to cover the personnel costs of the General Secretariat will be included in the analysis. This amount is used to cover the salaries of the officials and temporary staff working for the parliamentary administration.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Expenditure.png}
\caption{Expenditure for Personal Assistants, Political Groups and the General Secretariat (1974-2014) based on own calculations of the EP’s annual accounts}
\end{figure}

Figure 1 shows the evolution over time of the expenditure for the three levels. These sums reflect the actual expenditure the parliament has made and not the estimates that were drafted in the budget.\textsuperscript{16} Three main observations can be made. First, all three categories show a rising trend, although this is less pronounced in case of the expenditure for the political groups.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{14} N. Nielsen, MEPs to raise monthly allowances, 17-04-2015 (01-08-2015: https://euobserver.com/institutional/128360)
\item \textsuperscript{15} Rules on the use of appropriations from budget item 400 adopted by the Bureau on 30 June 2003.
\item \textsuperscript{16} The data in the figure were not adjusted to indexation, since we are interested in the comparison of the three categories and not their growth over time.
\end{itemize}
Second, the expenditure for the personnel costs of the secretariat increases more than the other two categories. The sum spent on staff salaries was only €18.3 million in 1974 and had increased to a total of €592.2 million in 2014. Third, whereas the expenditure on political groups and personal assistants remained roughly at the same level during the 1970s and 1980s, the amounts spent on the personal assistance grew significantly faster during the 1990s and 2000s. In sum, it appears that the European Parliament has invested the least to increase the capacity of the political groups.

![Proportion of expenditure on political groups and personal assistants in the total budget of the European Parliament](image)

**Figure 2: Proportion of expenditure on political groups and personal assistants in the EP’s total budget (1974-2014) based on own calculations of the EP’s annual accounts**

This evolution becomes more evident in Figure 2, which shows the evolution of the share of the expenditure on personal assistants and political groups in the total budget of the European Parliament over time. Whereas the amount spent on personal assistants is very low – around two per cent – in the beginning of the 1970s, it continuously increases in the subsequent years to a share of 10-11 per cent. The expenditure on political groups on the other hand shows the opposite trend. After sharp increases in the 1980s, its share has stabilized around 3-4 per cent in the 1990s and 2000s.

However, it should be noted that the political groups not only receive a fixed sum from the EP’s budget, but that they are also entitled to a specific number of personnel, which are paid directly by the Parliament. The number of administrators is determined in proportion to the number of Members of the Group.¹⁷

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Figure 3: Number of Advisors of the Political Groups and the Parliamentary Administration (1975-2016) based on own calculations of the EP’s annual accounts

Figure 3 shows the evolution over time of the number of advisors allocated to the Political Groups and the number working for the Parliamentary administration. Both groups of advisors are characterized by a rising trend. However, the share of the administrators working for the political groups shows a slight decrease. Whereas during the 1980s and 1990s the share of political group advisors was around 16 to 18 per cent of the total advisors, it lessened to 13 to 15 per cent from 2004 onwards. These numbers also show that build-up of policy advice capacity was more significant in the general secretariat than in the political groups.

However, in the same period, two additional categories of expenditure were added to the budget of the European Parliament. In 2004, direct funding from the European Parliament for European political parties was introduced. The main rationale behind these subsidies is to ensure the further development of these European political parties to enable them to play their role in the EU decision-making system. There is a direct connection between the funding for these European political parties and their representation in the European Parliament. As is the case with the political groups, every year a fixed amount is determined for the financing of these Europarties. In a second step, this sum is divided among the parties: 15 per cent in equal shares and the remaining 85 per cent in proportion to the number of MEPs of the Party. In 2007, this source of funding was supplemented by direct subsidies for the European political foundations. The advocates emphasized that these foundations would carry out policy analysis and provide policy support to the Europarties and MEPs in order to enhance the ideological debate on EU level. When the subsidies for the Europarties and European political

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18 All staff included in the “AD 5-16” level.
foundations are added to the funding for the EP Political Groups (Figure 4), the total evolution of the expenditure on the political level shows a strong increase. This indicates that the capacity-building at the political level is characterized by an important extra-parliamentary dimension in the last decade.

Figure 4: EP’s Expenditure on the Political Groups, European Political Parties and the European Political Foundations (1974-2014) based on own calculations of the EP’s annual accounts

4. Qualitative Assessment

In the following paragraphs, we will look at capacity building at the different administrative levels from a qualitative perspective. We will focus on the level and the nature of the policy advice. First, the personal staff of the MEPs will be discussed. Second, we will look into the advisors working for the political groups. Third, policy advice in the general secretariat will be analysed. Special attention will be dedicated to the newly established European Parliamentary Research Service.

4.1. Personal Assistants to the Members of European Parliament

When looking at the personal staff, a (limited) process of professionalization can be recognized. Personal assistance for the Members of European Parliament was only established in 1974. In the first two decades of the assembly’s existence, there was no budget for assistants. During that time, the MEPS still had a double mandate, dividing their time between the national parliament in their Member State and the European Parliament. It was assumed that the Parliamentarians received substantial support in their national parliament. In 1974, a separate allowance was created to provide the MEPS with personal assistance. However, the assistants predominantly had an administrative and not a political function, which was demonstrated by the low remuneration they received. In fact, the assistants were basically the only staff that

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were not included in the European remuneration system, since they were employed with national contracts. In 2009, Regulation 160/2009 was adopted, bringing the parliamentary assistants under the European Payments System, which ended the discrepancies in employment conditions between the assistants and the other EP staff.\(^23\) The new regulation was a direct consequence of an internal EP audit that pointed at a corruptive use of the secretarial allowances. Regulation 160/2009 not only made the system more transparent, but also made the function of parliamentary assistant more attractive, leading to more professional assistance.

When looking at the day-to-day work of the assistants, it is stipulated in the Staff Regulations that the assistants should perform secretarial, political and research activities to support the MEPs.\(^24\) In practice, their tasks can differ significantly. In general, since 2009 there are two types of assistants: (1) the local assistants that are based in the member state of the MEP and manage the relations with the voters and local party branch, and (2) the accredited assistants that work in the European Parliament and support the Member in his or her legislative work. MEPs can employ up to three accredited assistants and an unlimited number of local assistants with their secretarial allowances. In practice, the far majority – around 65 per cent – of the assistants are indeed local assistants, whereas only 35 per cent of the secretarial allowances are spent on accredited assistance.\(^25\) The work of the latter category depends to a great extent on the vision of the Member: some assistants mainly carry out secretarial and administrative tasks, whereas other assistants are specifically hired as policy advisors.\(^26\) Compared to most national parliaments, the personal assistance of the MEPs is quite extensive, but when looking at the personal advisors that are supporting the Members of US Congress, the parliamentary assistance is rather limited.\(^27\)

### 4.2. Advisors in the Political Groups

The political groups receive an allowance to build up a secretariat since the beginning of the Assembly in 1953. A decade later, in 1962, there was an innovation in the staff regulations with important consequences for the political groups: the function of temporary official was created. From this moment, the political groups were supported with these temporary functionaries, directly paid through the EP’s budget. However, until the first direct elected parliament in 1979, the staff of the political groups remained very limited, especially compared to the committee secretariats: whereas most committee secretariats has two administrators, the advisors in the political groups needed to follow-up on multiple committees.\(^28\) From 1979 however, there was a significant increase in the staff levels for political groups, but they remained disadvantaged compared to the committee secretariats.\(^29\) Instead of increasing their policy support capacity, the political groups strengthened themselves through another strategy: the politicization of the central administration. During the 1980s and 1990s, administrators

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\(^{25}\) Website of the European Parliament; nevertheless, the number of accredited assistants shows a significant increase: 1325 in 2009, 1504 in 2010, 1603 in 2011, 1705 in 2012, 1764 in 2013, 1686 in 2014 and 1754 in 2015.

\(^{26}\) Neunreiter, 2003, pp. 9-10.


\(^{28}\) Pegan, 2015, pp. 133-134.

\(^{29}\) See Figure 3.
were “parachuted” from the political groups into the services of the General Secretariat. This practice would give rise to an internal reform of the parliamentary services (see infra).

When looking at the tasks of the staff of the political groups, it involves both administrative and political functions. Most of the political work is taken up by the advisors: the follow-up of the work in the parliamentary committees, writing summaries, policy papers and meeting minutes, drafting amendments and voting lists. Another important function of them is also to watch over the group line: they act as antennae to spot disagreements between national delegations or MEPs in the parliamentary committees. In the first decades, the organizational tasks prevailed, but when the European Parliament got more legislative powers, the follow-up of the parliamentary committee became more important. However, a certain tension exists between the advisors of the political groups and the administrators working for the committee secretariats: the latter remained for a long time the main advisors of the lead MEPs or “rapporteurs” in the committee. There have been proposals to limit the involvement of the administrators of the secretariat to drafting a background file and let the political group advisors take over from there, but this practice is far from established. The role of the policy advisors also significantly differs between the political groups and even between the committees they follow. In general, the larger the political group, the more the advisors can specialize: in smaller groups the advisors often have to follow more than one committee. However, the EFA/Greens Group focus their resources on policy advice: they limit the administrative tasks of the group staff, which enables significant specialization among them. In most political groups, the advisors work for the entire group, whereas in others – like EFDD and to some extent the ECR – the advisors are divided among the national delegations.

In sum, a large variety exist in the functions that the advisors of the political groups fulfill: some deal mainly with organizational tasks, act as a fire alarm to signify disagreements between MEPs of the group or as liaison officers to communicate with the other political groups. Others are hired specifically because of their policy expertise and provide in-depth advice their MEPs. In general, the administrators of the committee secretariats give more direct advice, although a tendency can be recognized of increasing involvement of the group advisors at the expense of the committee secretariats.

4.3. General Secretariat

4.3.1 Early decades and first organizational changes

The General Secretariat of the European Parliament was formed in the French tradition of an independent civil service: recruitment took place on the basis of merit and a general competition, as opposed to the spoil system of the United States were political appointments are the common practice. In the early decades, the administrative services enjoyed a high degree of independence: especially before 1979, when the MEPs divided their time between the European and their national parliament, but also during the 1980s. This allowed particularly

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30 Pegan, 2015, pp. 138-139.
31 Ibid. p. 91.
33 Ibid., p. 9.
35 Ibid., p. 93.
the officials working in the committee secretariats to build up knowledge and expertise. As the legislative powers of the EP increased, the political level took a more leading role.\textsuperscript{36}

From an organizational perspective, there were not many changes in the first decades. The services that provided most legislative assistance were DG Research and DG Committees and Delegations. The most significant change was the creation of Science and Technology Assessment Unit in 1987. This service was created from the need for \textit{objective} information and was attached to DG Research. Its main role was to assist the parliamentary committees in their legislative work with regard to science and technology.\textsuperscript{37} The centre of gravity in policy support remained with the committee secretariats. An internal study that was conducted in the beginning of the 1990s showed that well above 80 per cent of the administrators working the committee secretariats gave advice beyond mere technical and procedural questions.\textsuperscript{38} Neunreiter estimates the share in the beginning of the 2000s well above 50 per cent.\textsuperscript{39} The MEPs themselves also appreciate the involvement of the administrators from the committee secretariats. They could give policy advice, help with contacts with the other institutions, help in drafting or even draft the report.\textsuperscript{40}

In 2001, the Bureau assigned one of the Vice-Presidents, James Provan, to work out proposals to reform the internal functioning and organization of the European Parliament. He drafted a number of documents, to which is referred as “the Provan Report”. Regarding policy support for the Members, his report contained three main issues. First, he stressed the need to strengthen the staff of individual members, pointing at the need for increased support capacity close to the MEPs. Second, Provan wanted to limit the role of the political group secretariats in legislative assistance. Third, he emphasized the value of policy support from a high quality non-partisan parliamentary administration with more immediate and responsive back-up facilities. In other words, he wanted to put an end to the politicization of the central administration and increase the support capacity of the parliamentary services and bring them closer to the day-to-day work of the MEPs. However, only his third point was endorsed by the Bureau, which wanted to focus on the restructuring of the internal services, which would lead to the “Raising the Game” reforms.\textsuperscript{41}

\subsection*{4.3.2. “Raising the game” (2003)}

In 2003, a new package of internal administrative reforms named “raising the game” was launched on the initiative of Secretary-General Julian Priestley. The main goal of this reform was to adapt the European Parliament to its changing context: the increasing legislative powers of the institution and the upcoming enlargements. The package aimed at maximizing the substantive and technical expertise available to the Members of Parliament.\textsuperscript{42} However, the

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{neunreiter2003} Neunreiter, 2003, p. 6.
\bibitem{ep} European Parliament, \textit{Science and Technology Options Assessment}: \url{http://www.europarl.europa.eu/stoa/cms/home/about}
\bibitem{neunreiter2003p8} Neunreiter, 2003, p.8.
\bibitem{ibidp8} Ibid., p. 8.
\bibitem{provan2011} Provan, 2011.
\end{thebibliography}
reform was only focused at the central administration; the advisors of the political groups and the personal assistants of the MEP’s were not affected. The two main consequences of the reform were the strengthening of policy support at the level of the parliamentary committees and a stronger division between substantive and technical advice by the administrators of the general secretariat.

First, In order to improve the capacity of the secretariats of the parliamentary committees, five thematic “policy departments” were created: Science Policy, Economic & Social Policy, Structural & Cohesion Policy, Citizen’s Rights & Constitutional Affairs and External Relations. These departments were linked to the committee secretariats and were specifically designed to provide immediately relevant policy support to the committee members.43 From an organisational perspective, DG Research – that was stationed in Luxemburg – was merged with DG Committees and Delegations into two new DG’s: DG Internal Policies (IPOL) and DG External Policies (EXPO).44 This internal shift implied a different focus of the available support capacity in the Parliament: whereas DG Research made studies following requests from individual MEPs and to a lesser extent parliamentary committees, the new policy departments would provide policy support exclusively to the committees. The organisational change also involved the physical relocation of policy support capacity from Luxemburg to Brussels. DG Research was located in Luxemburg and an important criticism on its working was that it was too detached from parliamentary day-to-day work and questions were raised on the applicability of their research.45 The fact that the policy advisor were now closely linked to the committee secretariats would bring their work more in line with the actual themes that were dealt with in parliament.

Second, the policy departments would further be strengthened by the recruitment of external experts and specialists in the priority policy areas. These high-level experts would be recruited from outside the parliament on the basis of temporary contracts to support the policy advisors of the different policy departments.46 Third, the parliamentary committees were attributed with so called “expertise budgets”. These annual financial envelopes could be used by the committees for the procurement of external specialised research and support. It were the parliamentary committees themselves that could decide how to spend the money, based on their own political priorities and committee work.47

The second consequence of the Raising the Game reform was the stricter division between substantive and technical support at committee. It is clear that newly created policy departments were meant to be the main focal point for substantive policy support at committee level, which implied that the committee secretariats could now focus more on technical-procedural advice. Furthermore, a new service was created: the Tabling Office. This new unit was staffed with lawyer-linguists and served two main purposes. First, the service is responsible for the technical-linguistic verification of all parliamentary texts – particularly the translations – in order to ensure high-quality legislative texts. Second, the Tabling Office can

44 Neunreither, 2003, p. 11.
46 Priestley, 2005, pp. 5-6.
47 Ibid., p. 2.
assists rapporteurs, committees and secretariats during the writing stage of committee texts by provide linguistic/drafting advice.\textsuperscript{48}

In sum, the “Raising the Game” reform signified an important strengthening of the parliamentary administration; support at the level of the political groups or the personal assistants was not increased. However, the reform was characterized by a sectoral logic: there was a clear shift of support capacity from the level of the entire institution (DG Research) to more specialized support at the level of the parliamentary committees.

4.3.3. Increased Staffing at Committee level

In 2010, the committee secretariats were again reinforced: the increased legislative and budgetary competences for the European Parliament following the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty caused an increased workload in a number of the parliamentary committees.\textsuperscript{49} The main motivation of the increased support was that more capacity was necessary to ensure high quality service to Members as a counterweight for the immense resources and expertise that is available in the European Commission and for the Member States’ representatives in the working groups of the Council.\textsuperscript{50} Especially the sharp increase of the number of first reading agreements – and correspondingly the number of trialogue meetings – a reinforcement of the policy support for the EP’s negotiating teams was necessary to match the expertise available to the Council’s delegation. In other words, the main motivation of this support capacity growth was clearly inspired by an separation-of-powers logic.

5. The European Parliamentary Research Service

5.1. Organisation of the European Parliamentary Research Service

The creation of the European Parliamentary Research Service was the most important reform within the General Secretariat since “Raising the Game”. This new service was advocated by Klaus Welle, who had succeeded Harald Romer as Secretary-General in 2009.

\textsuperscript{48} Priestley, 2005, pp. 6-7; see also: Welle, K., Total quality management along the whole legislative cycle: a fresh look at better lawmaking, 2014, Brussel, p. 6.

\textsuperscript{49} In particular the Committees for International Trade (INTA), Civil Liberties and Home Affairs (LIBE), Agricultural Affairs (AGRI), Fisheries (PECH) and Regional Affairs (REGI).

\textsuperscript{50} Cabinet of the Secretary-General, 100 Steps forward, p. 116.
Figure 5: The organogram of the Directorate-General for the Parliamentary Research Service (2016)

The newly established European Parliamentary Research Service consists of three Directorates (Figure 5) and is composed of already existing services and newly created units. Before 2013, the Library services were part of DG Presidency. With the set-up of DG for the Parliamentary Research Service, the Library services were transferred to this new Directorate-General and reorganised into two directorates. The Directorate for the Library delivers more classic on-site and on-line library services. The Directorate Members’ Research Service is more focused on policy analysis by building on already available expertise in the Library services. The Directorate provides comprehensive and clear policy documents, based on own research and research of other EU institutions, national parliaments’ research services and think tanks. The latter is organised into five units (Figure 6), which corresponds to the clusters of the parliamentary committees. The main aim is to provide proper research and analytical support to Members in all policy areas, both pro-actively and on demand.

The Directorate for Impact Assessment and European Added Value was created in the beginning of 2012 as a part of the DG for Internal Policies. In 2013, it was moved to the newly created DG for the Parliamentary Research Service. It consists of seven very diverse units that are involved in different aspects of policy analysis and support. The oldest is the Scientific Foresight Unit, already created in 1987 as the Science and Technology Options Assessment (STOA) Panel, which does interdisciplinary research and provides strategic advice in the field of science and technology to the Members (see supra). The Ex-Ante Impact Assessment unit

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51 Interview with an administrator of DG Parliamentary Research Service, 23.07.2015.
52 Interview with an administrator of DG Parliamentary Research Service, 17.07.2015.
53 Cabinet of the Secretary-General, 100 Steps forward, p. 109-110.
is oriented towards the European Commission. It analyses the Commission’s roadmaps on future legislation and undertakes an initial evaluation of the Impact Assessments of the European Commission. On the request of one or more parliamentary committees, the unit can go into a detailed analysis of the Commission’s Impact Assessments or undertake a complementary or substitute impact assessments.\footnote{Interview with an administrator of DG Parliamentary Research Service, 23.07.2015.} The Ex-Post Impact Assessment Unit – which was only established in September 2013 – acts as an information hub on the implementation, application, impact and effectiveness in practice of EU legislation and/or policies to support the parliamentary committees when they’re drawing up “implementation reports”. For this purpose, the unit monitors and analyses the activities of the European Commission and other relevant bodies.\footnote{Interview with an administrator of DG Parliamentary Research Service, 17.07.2015.} The European Added Value Unit evaluates the potential impact and identifies the (dis)advantages of future action at European level. The unit draws up “Cost of Non-Europe” reports on policy themes were there are significant potential efficiency gains through policy action at EU level.\footnote{Interview with an administrator of DG Parliamentary Research Service, 23.07.2015.}

Figure 6 shows the number of administrators (AD level) in the parliamentary administration that provide direct legislative assistance to the MEPs. As can be observed, the establishment of the European Parliamentary Research Service (DG EPRS) in 2013 was not at the expense of support capacity in other DG’s. On the contrary, the total capacity for policy support increased. The establishment of the Research Service indeed involved a further strengthening of the policy support capacity of the parliamentary administration.

![Number of Policy advisors in the different DG's](image)

**Figure 5: Number of policy advisors in the different Directorates-General of the European Parliament (2009-2015)**

### 5.2. Vision and motivation for the creation of the Parliamentary Research Service

The establishment of the European Parliamentary Research Service was advocated with internal as well as external arguments. From an intra-parliamentary perspective, the creation of the research institute was seen as a way of strengthening the entire institution. Whereas

\footnote{Interview with an administrator of DG Parliamentary Research Service, 23.07.2015.} \footnote{Interview with an administrator of DG Parliamentary Research Service, 17.07.2015.} \footnote{Interview with an administrator of DG Parliamentary Research Service, 23.07.2015.}
increasing policy support at the level of the parliamentary committees is of particular importance for the key actors in the committee, the European Parliamentary Research Service provides expertise to all Members. This is significant taking into account that almost eighty per cent of the legislation is agreed in first reading after trialogue negotiations between the Parliament, Council and Commission. These meetings are attended by only a small delegation from the Parliament, consisting of less than ten Members. That implies that only a limited number of MEPs are well-versed on the particular legislative dossier, but all Members need to vote on it in the plenary session of the Parliament. The Parliamentary Research Service provides an accessible content-rich analysis for every legislative file, in order to inform the Member about the impact of the legislation.\(^{57}\)

As Secretary-General Klaus Welle puts it: "The rapporteurs as key actors of course always had been well advised by committee secretariats and policy departments. But 90% of our Members are not experts in the field that is just up for voting in Plenary [...] We have to assure that they also have all the relevant information available when it comes for them to take the decision. The Members' Research Service has been planned and built up as tool for exactly these 90% of the House."\(^ {58}\)

The design of the European Parliamentary Research Service is not only motivated by intra-parliamentary decision-making and working culture, but there is also by an extra-parliamentary motive. It reflects a broader view that the Parliament should try to maximize its influence vis-à-vis the other EU institutions. Secretary-General Klaus Welle has emphasized that the involvement of the European Parliament should not be limited to a short phase in the legislative process, but that the institution should be present during the whole legislative cycle, from the agenda-setting to the evaluation stage.\(^ {59}\)

He has described the European Parliament as a “democratic entrepreneur” that “will act within the law, but he will also have a very strong focus on opportunities. He will be quick in using swiftly any opportunities available”.\(^ {60}\) The institution should identify unused opportunities to maximize its influence in the EU’s decision-making system through political action. Through increased involved of the European Parliament – the only directly elected institution in the EU – in the entire legislative cycle, the decision-making process is democratized further. Specifically to influence the different stages of the democratic process, the European Parliament has built up its policy support capacity in its administration.\(^ {61}\) The view of the European Parliament as a democratic entrepreneur is reflected in the set-up of the DG for the parliamentary research service, in particular the Directorate for Impact Assessment and European Added Value Unit.

In order to enable the European Parliament to have more influence on agenda-setting at EU-level, the European Added Value Unit was established, which examines where efficiency gains can be accomplished by political action at European level.\(^ {62}\) The unit summarizes these results in the so-called “cost of non-Europe”-studies. By putting these issues on the political agenda, the Parliament can provide a counterweight to the European Commission, who has the

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\(^{58}\) Welle, *Total quality management along the whole legislative cycle*, p. 6.

\(^{59}\) Welle, *Total quality management along the whole legislative cycle*, p. 8.

\(^{60}\) Welle, *The European Parliament as a democratic gatekeeper*, p. 2.

\(^{61}\) Interview with an administrator of DG Parliamentary Research Service, 17.07.2015.

\(^{62}\) Interview with an administrator of DG Parliamentary Research Service, 17.07.2015.
monopoly over legislative initiative in European decision-making. Secretary-General Klaus Welle emphasized that “[the] Parliament, through its own work, has thus put itself in a position to be able to shape the agenda for the coming five years”. In his view, such an approach should enhance inter-institutional planning in the agenda-setting phase by pushing the Council, Parliament and Commission to come together and agree what they would like to carry through.

Also when it comes to consultation, the capacity of the parliamentary administration has been strengthened with the creation of the “Ex-post Impact Assessment Unit”. Whereas consultation on upcoming legislation predominantly takes place in the European Commission, the Parliament tries to reduce its dependency of the Commission’s actions. This unit aims at bringing together all available expertise and feedback on existing legislation and it closely follows up on the Commission’s Annual Work Programme and upcoming new legislation. All the available information is communicated to the rapporteurs, shadow rapporteurs and other committee members in short reports.

Also when it comes to scrutiny of existing legislation, and EU and even national policy, the capacity of the European Parliament has been strengthened. As a reaction to the new system of EU economic governance that was put in place in the aftermath of the financial and economic crisis, the European Parliament created a Policy Cycle Unit. These administrators are monitoring the implementation of the national reform programmes and report their findings to the Members of Parliament. Furthermore, they scrutinize the decisions of the European Central Bank, particularly in the field of banking supervision. Another service that was established is the European Council Oversight Unit. This unit analyses the decisions that are taken by the European leaders and monitors their compliance, especially in the field of economic policy and the euro. Although there is no treaty base for the scrutiny of the European Council by the European Parliament, the institution tries to maximize its role and to push for a debate with the government leaders. The totality of these units in the European Parliamentary Research Service should contribute to a stronger position of the European Parliament in EU decision-making.

5.3. The establishment of the European Parliamentary Research Service

As mentioned above, The establishment of the European Parliamentary Research Service was the initiative of the Secretary-General Klaus Welle. As the most senior official and Head of the Parliament’s administration, he is the main responsible for the administrative organisation. The “Raising the Game” Reform for example was the initiative of Secretary-General Julian Priestly.

However, the Secretary-General falls under the leadership of the political level, more specifically the President, the Bureau and the Conference of Presidents. It is therefore perfectly possible that Well could have been overruled by for example the EP President. In most recent years, EP President Martin Schulz has overruled Welle’s “New World of Work” plan to fundamentally change the Parliament’s working environment and has been very critical of his
plan to extent the MEPs’ office space to accommodate more assistants. Furthermore, President Schulz has a different view of how the Parliament should be run. He wants an institution that is run by the political groups that (de facto) form a parliamentary majority, resembling parliaments in fused-power systems. On the Bureau meeting of 8 April 2013 he shares his vision of a parliament with a number of political groups with shared political goals should cooperate, which would form a political majority vis-à-vis minorities. He has also made a number of suggestions to limit the powers of the smaller political groups and individual MEPs in favour of the larger political groups and the EP President. In 2015, the Secretary General drafted a document on the initiative of President Schulz with proposals to strengthen the position of the EP President and limit the powers of individual MEPs. Similarly, the two biggest political groups – the European People’s Party and the Socialists and Democrats – and supported by EP President Schulz pushed for less powers for the smaller groups in the first semester of 2016.

So why did the Secretary-General succeed in pushing through the reorganisation. There are three important elements: (1) the incremental process of the establishment, (2) the fact that the creation of the EPRS was budget-neutral, (3) the narrative around the reform.

First, the creation of the European Parliamentary Research service was not a sudden decision, but the result of a gradual process of several years. The first steps were already taken in 2010, two years before Martin Schulz became EP President. In this year, the Secretary-General received the approval of the Bureau to reorganise Directorate-General of the Presidency, which accommodated among others the Library. These reformed library services would constitute one of the core components of the future parliamentary research service. Welle built on complaints from the MEPs and the EP leadership about the limited library capacity, and studies comparing the EP library services to those of other parliaments to propose a reform. He suggested to develop the library into a scientific service that could provide in-depth support for individual MEPs. His plan was approved in the beginning of 2012 and implemented during the following months.

In 2011, Welle responded to a call from the MEPs for a uniform impact assessment mechanism. The Secretary-General proposed to the Bureau to create a Directorate for Impact Assessment, which was supported. The same year, the European Added Value unit was also created, building on the suggestions of EP Vice-Presidents Gianni Pittella and Alejo Vidal-
Quadras. Both services were put in the Directorate-General for the Internal Policies. In 2012, the Economic Governance Unit was established to provide analytical support to the MEPs on the new EU economic governance structure.

So the majority of the units was already established when in May 2013 the Bureau approved the suggestion of Secretary-General Klaus Welle to establish a new Directorate-General for Parliamentary Research Services, composed of the reformed and expanded library services of DG Presidency, the Directorate for Impact Assessment with among others the units on European Added Value and Economic Governance. At the end of 2013, the new European Parliamentary Research Service was eventually established. It completed a process that already started four years before and could fall back on support of the members of the Bureau, which made it more difficult for President Schulz to stop the reorganisation when he came into office in 2012.

Second, the establishment of the EPRS was a budgetary neutral operation. The members of the Bureau only approved the reform of DG Presidency, the creation of the Directorate for Impact Assessment and the development of the Directorate-General for Parliamentary Research Services if this could happen without raising the administrative expenses.

Indeed, the major challenge to build up this parliamentary research service was the tight budgetary context in which this process had to take place. In June 2013, the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament Legal Affairs Committee – after two years of negotiations – agreed on a compromise for the package of austerity measures and reforms of the European civil service. Among other things, the agreements included a reduction of five per cent of staff of all EU institutions during the period 2013-2017, which implied a decrease of 2 500 administrative posts. Additionally, there was disagreement between the Secretary-General of the European Parliament and the secretary-generals of the (main) political groups on the allocation of funds. In 2013, the number of posts in the General Secretariat increased whereas the number of staff of the political groups remained at the same level (See also Figure 1). The representatives of the political groups feared that a further reduction of their staff would put them in disadvantage compared to the General Secretariat. They saw it as an attempt of the Secretary-General to reduce the role of the political groups. Consequently, they opposed further staff reductions in the political groups during the budget negotiations for 2014. Overall; the number of staff was decreased with 0.55% in 2014 compared to the previous year, but the staff level of the political groups remained at the same level, whereas the number of administrators in the General Secretariat decreased.

However, in order to set up the European Parliamentary Research Service, additional staff was necessary. This was realised by making further savings and efficiency gains in other services, particularly translation and interpretation. Furthermore, in December 2013, the European

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79 Bureau decision of 20.05.2013 to establish the Directorate-General for Parliamentary Research Services (EPRS).
83 Cabinet of the Secretary-General, 100 Steps forward, p. 109-110 and p. 112 for an overview of the translation gains. One of the priorities of Secretary-General Klaus Welle was to invest heavily in resources for policy advice: he aimed at moving 200 posts from the linguistic services to policy support and expertise, see: Welle, K., The
Parliament reached an agreement with the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on an inter-institutional cooperation project. An analysis of the translation services of the CoR and EESC had showed that there was a high potential for productivity gains. Within the framework of this cooperation project, the European Parliament offered 80 officials that were affected by the restructuring of the two Committees' translation services the option to work for the Parliament’s new Research Service (on a voluntary basis). This allowed the Secretary to build up the number of policy advisors (cf. Figure 6) and create the European Parliamentary Research Service without giving up the expected overall staff decrease in the General Secretariat.

The third important element was the narrative that Secretary-General Welle build up around the administrative reform and the creation of the European Parliamentary Research Service. He made a high number of speeches in support of the establishment of the research service, both inside and outside the parliament. He intervened in a large number of Bureau meetings to extensively support is plan. He also held a large number of speeches and interviews outside the parliament to set out his view on the organisation of the European Parliament. The leitmotiv of these interventions is the need to strengthen the position of the European Parliament in the changing decision-making system and how the internal reorganisation can contribute to that.

It should be taken into consideration that this was also the period of the economic crisis and the set-up of the new Economic and Monetary Union (intergovernmental) governance structure. After two decades of strengthening the supranational EU institutions – and particularly the European Parliament – now a new shift towards renewed intergovernementalism could be recognized. It is therefore not surprising that the Secretary General’s discours on a stronger position of the European Parliament was well received among the members of the Bureau. President Schulz for example stated in April 2013 that the system of the checks and balances in the European Union is increasingly being jeopardised, since the European Commission is increasingly being marginalized and there is a shift of power towards the Council without any balancing factor. He expressed his support for the plans of the Secretary-General for the internal reorganisation in this respect. These three elements enabled Klaus Welle to establish the parliamentary research service.

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European Parliament as a democratic gatekeeper – Evolutions and future challenges, Records of the lecture at the KU Leuven, 13.02.2015, p. 20


85 Debate about the Future of the European Parliament at the Centre for European Policy Studies, 29 March 2012; Discussing impact assessment at the European Parliament with the Stoiber High Level Group, 03 May 2012; European Parliament in a time of growing complexity, Interview with Euractiv on 9 May 2012; Opening address at the 42nd Annual Conference of the UACES on 3 September 2012; Speech on building the capacity to decide at the European Central Bank, 28 September 2012; Speech by Klaus Welle at the Ecole Nationale d’administration on 16 January 2013; Debate on the EP in a multi-level governance EU – Ways to reduce the democratic deficit at the Centre for European Policy Studies on 26 June 2013; Institutional changes likely to further empower European citizens. A perspective from the European Parliament at RAND, 17 September 2013; etc.

5. Conclusion

In this paper policy support at the three administrative levels – the personal assistants, the political groups and the general secretariat – of the European Parliament was analysed. The institution has characteristics that correspond both to a legislature in a fused-power system and a separation-of-powers system. The Leitmotiv of the paper was to examine which of these two logics prevailed in the process of capacity-building in the parliamentary administration. The overview of the existing literature showed that the policy advisors do play an important role in the decision-making process and that there is a difference between the officials working for the political groups and the central administration: whereas the political advisors put the interest of their ideological party family first, the officials of the general secretariat defends the interests of the committee or the entire institution.

The quantitative analysis showed that the resources for the central administration and to a lesser extent the personal assistance of MEPs increased much faster than the funds for the political groups. Also the share of the advisors for the political groups in the total number decreased slightly. These patterns of resource allocation follow a separation-of-powers logic, where the services of the entire institution are strengthened, as opposed to stronger support for the political groups. However, one must also take into account that two additional sources of funding were established in the last decade: direct finances for the European Political Parties and the European Political Foundations. These subsidies could point at a process of extra-parliamentary capacity-building for the party families. However, additional research is needed to examine the relations between the political groups and their respective Europarties and Foundations.

The qualitative analysis showed similar results: the advisors of the committee secretariats were key players in the decision-making process in the Parliament’s first decades. Although their role has slightly decreased in the last ten to fifteen years, they remain an important source of policy support. The advisors of the political groups and the personal assistants are characterized by significant diversity in their work: some are specialized in specific policy issues, whereas others mainly deal with technical-administrative affairs. An important task of the political advisors is also to deal with the political organisation of the group, although their advisory role has also become slightly more important in the last decade.

During the same period, we can also observe further capacity-building in the General Secretariat. The “Raising the Game” reform in 2003 has significantly strengthened the committee secretariats. The establishment of a European Parliamentary Research Service in the last years – driven by Secretary-General Klaus Welle – has created substantial policy support at the level of the entire institution. In fact, an important motivation for the creation of the new service was precisely to strengthen the European Parliament vis-à-vis the other institutions. Instead of opting for a stronger politicization within the institution, policy supports organized from a separation-of-powers view and should enable the European Parliament to take a stronger position towards the other EU institutions. However, the creation of this in-house think tank was only possible because of the incremental development process, its budget neutrality and the narrative that Secretary-General Klaus Welle constructed around the issue.
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