Debating the State of the Union?
A Comparative Analysis of National Parliamentary Debates on EU Affairs

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Introduction

The role of national legislatures in the EU political system first received serious political and academic attention in the mid-1990s in connection with the debate on the democratic deficit of the European Union (EU). However, early studies suggested that national parliaments added little value to the democratic legitimacy of EU policy-making: domestic legislatures seemed not only ill equipped, but also rather uninterested in controlling their governments in EU matters. Since then, national parliaments have come quite a way. The first decade of the new millennium has seen the completion of several research projects on parliamentary involvement in EU affairs, which have shown that while national parliaments have certainly been late adapters to integration, they are no longer docile lambs willing to be led to the European slaughtering block, but able to exercise tighter scrutiny of their governments.

Thanks to this lively academic debate, we are now in a much better position to evaluate parliamentary scrutiny of EU affairs and to compare and explain the scrutiny models adopted by the national parliaments. What tends to be overlooked, however, is that parliaments have functions other than controlling the government. Parliamentary activity is not a ‘l’art pour l’art’ exercise, but one that is carried out on behalf of the citizens. Democratic legitimacy depends on a vibrant public debate on political solutions and alternatives to allow citizens to make informed political (electoral) choices and to exercise democratic control. It requires mechanisms for steady and reliable information and communication between decision makers and citizens to ensure that citizens are able to evaluate the actions of their representatives. As a result, it has been argued that this is precisely where we can expect national parliaments to contribute to making European policy-making more democratic (Auel 2007). Parliaments provide a major space for public debate and are thus the ideal forums for the deliberation of important European issues and their domestic implications. Yet, despite normative demands that national parliaments should act as arenas for public debate in EU affairs and thus ‘serve as channels between citizens and the EU and between the EU and citizens’ (Philip Norton), we know very little about such activities.

Among the most important means for parliaments to fulfil their communication function are plenary debates. Debates are vital as they provide for the public discussion of policies thus informing the public about important political issues. In addition, debates allow the electorate to identify competing policy agendas and to assess the performance of the government. Previous research has suggested that the role of the plenary has so far been limited in European issues (Bergman et al. 2003: 175). However, this comparative data is somewhat dated, and it is possible that the debates on transparency in EU affairs as well as on the role of national parliaments in EU governance have led to a greater involvement of the plenary. More recent research has at least
suggested that more salient EU topics – such as Treaty reforms (Maatsch 2010), or European Council meetings (van de Steeg 2010) – do appear to trigger plenary debates (Zajc 2008; Raunio & Wiberg 2010).

Hence this paper contributes to the literature through a comparative analysis of EU debates in four member states – Finland, France, Germany and the UK. In the next section we discuss both institutional and party-related factors that may impact the emphasis of parliamentary debates and introduce our hypotheses. In section three we justify our case selection and data, and provide an overview of the variation between the four legislatures. Section four contains the empirical analysis of the debates on three major EU issues: European Arrest Warrant (EAW), the Services Directive, and providing financial aid to Greece in the spring of 2010 (‘Cash for Greece’). In the fifth section we provide longitudinal data on the overall level of plenary debates on European matters in the four countries. We show how both institutional and party related factors impact the level and nature of debates, with our findings confirming significant variation between both the four member states and different types of EU matters.

**Institutional Context + Party Interests = Different Outcomes?**

Our basic premise is intuitively very simple: the institutional context, expressed through different parliamentary rules and cultures, should produce variation in our dependent variable – parliamentary debates on EU issues. While European parliaments perform largely the same set of functions in their respective national systems, previous literature has shown there to be significant variation between the legislatures in terms of which function is emphasised most (Döring ed. 1995; Norton ed. 1998; Strøm et al. eds. 2003; Arter ed. 2006). ‘After all, the institutions provide venues for the interactions between MPs and ministers, rules for behaviour of participants and above all, role models for the “inmates” of the parliamentary/governmental complex’ (Andeweg & Nijzink 1995: 157). In addition, national parliaments are party-political institutions, bringing together legislators representing different political parties. Government formation is based on bargaining between political parties, with the opposition parties trying to unseat the cabinet or increase their support in the run-up to the next elections. Parties are also responsible for setting the parliamentary rules of procedure: the agenda and powers of committees and the plenary as well as the rights of individual members and party groups are all decided by political parties. Hence any realistic explanation of parliamentary activities must also include the incentives of parties. (Bergman et al. eds. 2000; Strøm et al. eds. 2003).

**Institutional Factors**

Turning to institutional factors first, a much-used distinction is that between ‘working’ and ‘debating’ parliaments (Arter 1999: 211-217), or between ‘legislating’ and ‘deliberating’ parliaments (Loewenberg and Patterson 1979). Working parliaments are characterised by standing orders that emphasise committee work over plenary debates, with a parliamentary culture where MPs focus on scrutiny of documents in committees instead of grand speeches on the floor. As the name implies, in debating parliaments, on the other hand, the focus is more on plenary debates. In addition, debating legislatures are, on average, less consensual, with the opposition using plenary to criticise the government. The ‘ideal’ example of a debating parliament is arguably the British
House of Commons, with the Nordic parliaments constituting typical cases of working parliaments (Arter 1984, 1999: 211-217; Bergman & Strøm eds. 2011).

H1: Debating vs. working parliaments: the more the parliament resembles a debating legislature, the more we expect parliament to fulfil its communication function through plenary debates.

It is plausible, however, to argue that participation in EU governance has contributed to all national parliaments becoming more committee-based. After all, all national parliaments have established one or more European Affairs Committees (EAC) for coordinating parliamentary work in EU affairs, and the specialised standing committees are becoming more regularly involved in EU matters in many parliaments. But parliaments differ with regard to the degree to which they have delegated EU affairs to committees. While in some parliaments the EAC (or the standing committees) regularly act on behalf of the whole parliament, for example when issuing resolutions on EU documents or mandating the government, others require or at least permit a vote on the floor of the house and thus the involvement of the plenary – even if this does not always include a debate.

H2: Delegation to committees: the more EU affairs have been delegated to committees, the less we expect parliaments to fulfil their communication function through plenary debates.

This leads us to a third institutional factor. Even if the bulk of parliamentary work in EU affairs takes place in Committees, plenary debates may still take place, for example based on motions on EU documents, interpellations, topical hours etc. Thus, another factor is the ability of backbenchers to influence the parliamentary agenda, i.e. to initiate debates on EU issues. The easier it is for single MPs or groups of MPs to put EU issues on the plenary agenda, the more plenary debates we can expect. This is especially the case regarding opposition rights. In parliamentary systems of government, public assessment and criticism of the government’s actions is mainly the responsibility of the opposition, while we can hardly expect the majority party or parties to have a great incentive to engage in publicly scrutinising and much less criticising the government (Auel 2007).

H3: Backbench Agenda Control: the greater the ability of backbenchers (and the opposition in particular) to influence the parliamentary agenda in EU affairs, the more we expect parliaments to fulfil their communication function through plenary debates.

Party Strategic Factors

Institutional factors, however, only provide or constrain opportunities for parliamentary activities. Whether these opportunities are actually used also depends on party political incentives. As mentioned above, we therefore expect party-related factors to play a decisive role regarding whether parliaments (or MPs) will emphasise the communication function and thus have an impact on the importance of parliamentary debates in EU affairs.

In general, one can assume that where EU issues are electorally salient, parties have to compete publicly over these issues to address the interests of their voters. This is even more the case, where public opinion is unsupportive or sceptical of EU integration. In this case, parties have to assure
their voters that they will defend their national interests at the European level. However, these general assumptions have to be qualified as it may not always be in the interest of parties to politicise EU issues. Where parties are internally divided over EU issues, and/or considerably more supportive of EU integration than their voters, this may in fact impact negatively on their electoral success (Hooghe & Marks 2009). For them, EU issues are thus more of a liability than an asset, and we can assume they will focus on traditional socio-economic issues in public debate. Eurosceptical parties, in contrast, and especially those on the ideological fringes, have an interest in politicising EU issues to broaden their voter base, because their position on the left/right dimension is likely to limit their potential voter pool (De Vries & Edwards 2009). This leads us to the formulation of the following hypotheses:

H₄: EU-scepticism in public opinion: the greater the electoral salience and the stronger the EU-scepticism in public opinion, the more we can expect parliaments to fulfil their communication function through plenary debates.

H₅: Distance: the greater the distance between parties and their voters regarding their support for EU integration, the less we can expect parliaments to fulfil their communication function through plenary debates.

H₆: Internal cohesion: the less parties are internally cohesive regarding EU, the less we can expect parliaments to fulfil their communication function through plenary debates.

H₇: Presence of anti-EU parties: the greater the share of Eurosceptical parties, the more we can expect parliaments to fulfil their communication function through plenary debates.

Data and Case Selection

The hypotheses developed above should be seen as neither complementary nor as necessarily competing. Rather, we investigate what factors and in which combination have explanatory value with regard to the degree to which parliaments fulfil their communication function through public debates. We have therefore chosen the parliaments of four member states: Finland (Eduskunta), France (Assemblée Nationale), Germany (Bundestag), and the United Kingdom (House of Commons). The case selection is primarily explained by institutional and partisan variation, with the parliaments differing from one another in terms of parliamentary rules, EU scrutiny models, and party politics (see below). Given the low number of cases, and the fact that some of the variables, especially the institutional factors, are difficult to quantify in a consistent and comparable manner, we do not attempt a quantitative analysis, but rather follow a qualitative-interpretative approach.

With regard to the dependent variable, our empirical analysis is based on two sets of data. First, we examine the parliamentary processing of three major EU issues – the European Arrest Warrant, the Services Directive, and the decisions to provide financial aid to Greece through the establishment of the European Financial Stabilisation Mechanism in May-June 2010 (‘Cash for Greece’). All three issues were undoubtedly highly salient, both domestically and at the European level. We are particularly interested in the public debates in the four parliaments, but also analyse
how the issues were overall processed by the legislatures. Parliamentary scrutiny of the three cases can be divided into two stages: scrutiny of the initial EU level decision and scrutiny of the domestic laws implementing the European decisions (which necessitated parliamentary approval). We examine both stages with the exception of the Services Directive where we focus on the processing of the proposal for the directive, which was far more important and contested than domestic implementation. In addition, transposition in the case of the Services Directive was achieved through changes to a multitude of domestic laws (or executive regulations without parliamentary involvement), which makes it almost impossible to distinguish between EU-related and domestic debates.

Our second data consists of a longitudinal comparison of the share or amount of EU debates in the four parliaments as well as the issues debated in the plenary to gain insight into the general importance of parliamentary debates in EU affairs. In this context, we also examine whether the parliaments hold debates about European Council meetings (either ex ante or ex post). This choice is explained by the role of the European Council, which ‘functions as the principal agenda-setter, the ultimate arbiter in decision-making, and the motor behind European integration’ (van de Steeg 2010: 118). For both data sets, we used mainly information resources the four parliaments provide via the Internet.

Institutional and Party-Related Factors in Finland, France, Germany and the UK

Regarding the institutional factors, we can observe significant variation between the four parliaments. The Eduskunta and the Bundestag can be considered ‘working parliaments’ due to the central role of committees, with MPs clearly focusing on legislative scrutiny behind the closed doors of the standing committees. The role of the plenary is more limited in both parliaments, but particularly so in the Eduskunta, where the government also exerts firm control over the plenary agenda (despite it being the Speaker’s Council that formally determines the agenda). In the Bundestag, in contrast, the plenary agenda is decided by the parliamentary party groups in the Council of Elders, and all groups (but no individual MPs) have the opportunity to put their issues on the agenda. In terms of policy influence, the Bundestag and Eduskunta are also arguably the strongest of the four legislatures.

The ‘rationalised’ Assemblée Nationale (Huber 1996), in contrast, has traditionally been a weak legislature under the Constitution of the 5th Republic, with limited policy influence and firm government control of its agenda (Kerrouche 2006; Meny 1996; Grossman and Sauger 2007). The effects of the constitutional and procedural constraints were summed up by Frears (1990: 33): ‘complete executive supremacy in the legislative process, severely limited opportunities for general debates criticizing government, virtually no opportunities for scrutinizing executive acts and making the executive give an account of them […] executive power is a little too immune from proper scrutiny.’ Recent amendments to the Constitution (2008) and the Parliamentary

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1 In addition, we carried out interviews with selected MPs and parliamentary civil servants in the four countries. We are particularly grateful to Graham Ziegner and Peter Saramo for their generous help regarding the House of Commons and the Eduskunta data.
Standing Orders (2009)² have strengthened the role of the Assemblée and its committees, but the long-term impact of these reforms is not yet clear.

The House of Commons, finally, can be categorised as a true ‘debating parliament’, where the role of the plenary is central to parliamentary business, at least in domestic affairs, while committee work plays a less important role in legislation. In addition, the government is in firm control of the parliamentary agenda, giving backbenchers little opportunity to shape the agenda more regularly outside of adjournment debates, opposition days or the topical hours introduced in 2007.

The four legislatures also differ regarding government-opposition dynamics. In the working parliaments relations between parties in general and between government and opposition in particular are more consensual. Clearly, the Finnish and German polities are dominated by strong coalition cabinets, but in both parliaments cooperation between policy experts from all parties in the standing committees is fairly common. In EU politics, in particular, the government-opposition dimension in the Eduskunta, but also in the Bundestag, is not as significant in EU affairs as in domestic politics (Auel 2006; Raunio 2007). In addition, the opposition enjoys strong control rights including the right to co-decide the parliamentary agenda (in the Bundestag) or to introduce bills, amendments and motions. The British and French systems, on the other hand, are more adversarial, with the government-opposition cleavage more prominent in parliamentary work. At the same time, control rights of the opposition are less pronounced in both parliaments. This applies especially to the ‘tribal politics’ of the House of Commons, which usually rules out cooperation between the opposing parties.

A similar pattern can be found in EU affairs, where the Eduskunta has the strongest scrutiny system of the four parliaments due to its mandating system, the broad involvement of the standing committees³ and the early involvement in the European legislative process (Jääskinen 2000; Raunio 2007). Delegation to the EAC is extensive: The Grand Committee (the EAC) is the only parliamentary body that can issue a mandate. Overall, the processing of EU matters in Finland has been characterised by consensus and pragmatism, with little if any (public) conflicts between the parties or between government and opposition. This is, however, less due to a broad cross-party consensus on EU affairs (see below), but rather to a coordination system designed to manufacture national unanimity or at least broad agreement, which can arguably be translated into additional influence in EU level bargaining (Johansson & Raunio 2010).

The Bundestag is also considered as one of the more powerful parliaments in EU affairs (Auel 2006) due to the formal responsibility of the standing committees for all EU policies except ‘high politics’ issues, which are dealt with by the EAC. Resolutions of the Bundestag, which can be introduced by a committee or by a party group, have to be voted on in the plenary. According to Article 45 of the German Basic Law, the EAC can adopt a resolution on behalf of the plenary –

² For details see Assemblée Nationale (2009a).
³ The designated standing committees have an obligation to report to the EAC, but in less salient questions at least some committees just indicate their position briefly in the minutes of the committee meeting (for example, that the committee agrees with the government position) (Eduskunta 2010: 30).
either if specifically authorised by the Bundestag or as long as none of the standing committees disagree - but it makes only rare use of this right. Formally, the government is able to decide against the opinion of the Bundestag where important foreign or EU affairs are concerned, but it must report on the reasons why it had to deviate from the parliamentary resolution – in a plenary debate if so demanded.

The Assemblée Nationale, in contrast, is categorised as having a weaker EU scrutiny system, at least with regard to parliamentary influence (Nuttens & Sicard 2000: 61; Szukala & Rozenberg 2001: 229; Grossmann and Sauger 2007). The EAC is the main forum for EU affairs, but resolutions (proposed by the EAC or individual MPs) require the involvement of the Assemblée. The EAC can only formulate a proposal for a resolution, which then has to be sent to one of the standing committees. They can adopt the proposal as is, amend or reject it, and their final motion for a resolution can then be put on the agenda of the Assemblée upon the request of a party group, a committee chair or the government. If no such request is made, the text adopted by the standing committee is considered final and transmitted to the government. Resolutions, however, are explicitly non-binding and considered as having less of a politically binding effect as well. Assemblée Nationale (2009b).

The House of Commons is also considered as weaker when it comes to actual policy influence. European documents are first transferred to the permanent European Scrutiny Committee (ESC) whose task is to examine their legal and political importance. Important documents are then referred for debate to an ad hoc European Committee or to the plenary. In either case, resolutions require a final vote on the floor of the house, but where debates have taken place in a European Committee, the plenary usually votes without further debate. The process is also completely controlled by the government (House of Commons 2010a): it not only decides whether a document will be referred to a committee or the plenary, it also formulates and puts down the final motion for the resolution in the plenary without having to take into account the view of the European Committee.

Finally, the four parliaments also differ with regard to the party related factors. We base our assessment on the Chapel Hill Expert Survey 2006 and the European Election Studies (EES) 2004/2009 as well as the comparative project of Taggart and Szczerbiak (2008) who distinguish between three broad types of contestation: limited, open and constrained. The Chapel Hill data measures party positions and internal party dissent on EU as well as the salience of Europe for national parties, whereas the EES data is used to examine opinion congruence on the EU dimension between parties and their voters (see the appendix for details).

According to Taggart and Szczerbiak (2008: 351) ‘Germany provides perhaps the best paradigmatic example of a system of limited contestation’, with the main parties solidly supportive of further integration. Indeed, the German party system is overall the most pro-European of the four countries with only one truly anti-European party, the Left List (formerly

\[^4\] Until 2005, the European Standing Committees had permanent memberships. Since then, a European Committee is appointed for each document referred for debate.
Party of Democratic Socialism, PDS). In addition, most parties experience little internal dissent over integration, the exception being again the Left List, curiously one of the very few Eurosceptical parties in our sample not to be firmly united in their anti-EU stance. In Germany the gap between voters and their parties over EU is much smaller than in the other three countries. European issues also have a relatively low electoral salience, both for the parties and for public opinion, and ‘Europe’ has only rarely featured among the issues German citizens considered important (Auel 2006). Thus, overall Germany is still characterised by a relatively broad elite and public pro-European consensus, even though more recently first cracks have begun to appear. In addition to the Left List, the Christian Social Union (CSU) has also adopted more cautious positions on Europe, not least concerning Germany’s contributions to the EU budget and enlargements.

In the Finnish party system we also find a broad but less enthusiastic partisan consensus on the EU. Strong anti-EU sentiments have largely been confined to the True Finns, which have significantly increased their support in recent elections. However, the Left Alliance as well as the Christian Democrats are also more neutral, if not to say lukewarm in their position on European integration. Yet as mentioned above partisan conflicts about integration are (intentionally) reduced through the consensual EU scrutiny system. As Taggart and Szczterbiak (2008: 352) point out, Finland is ‘an interesting case of limited contestation … conflict over the European issue is not absent and remains as a potential characteristic of party competition, but … the structures of Finnish politics limit its manifestation.’ Parties are also internally rather cohesive in their stance on European integration, with only the Centre Party and the Left Alliance experiencing some internal dissent. However, the commitment to integration, which prevails among the parties, is not shared to the same extent by the Finnish electorate, with a notable lack of congruence between the citizens and the political parties (Mattila & Raunio 2005, 2011). The opinion gap is most pronounced in the three largest parties: Centre, National Coalition, and the Social Democratic Party (SDP).

In France, mainstream parties are also largely supportive of integration with anti-EU parties found mainly at the fringes, such as the Communist Party, the Front National and the Movement For France. European matters have, however, produced strong divisions in the main parties, especially in the Socialist Party and the Greens, but also in the centre-right Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) (Bornschier & Lachat 2009). Opinion congruence between parties and their electorates over EU fell quite significantly between 2004 and 2009. However, the fluctuating nature of the party system together with highly contested referendums on Treaty amendments (1992, 2005) has contributed to Europe making occasional waves instead of constituting a permanently salient issue in domestic party politics. The same is true for public opinion. While the French public is in general pro-EU, anti-EU sentiment has occasionally flared up and made Europe much more salient. As Taggart and Szczterbiak (2008: 351-352) summarise: ‘despite Euroscepticism emerging throughout the party system, the dominant pro-European consensus means that it has not resulted in any of the major parties in the two blocks taking a consistently Eurosceptical position, nor have European issues played a decisive role in determining domestic political outcomes.’
The UK, finally, is the only clear case of open contestation, with Europe as an issue also causing severe internal divisions within the main parties. Euroscepticism is not confined to smaller parties at the fringes, such as UK Independence Party, but is also represented by the Conservative Party. And while competition over European issues now largely follows the pronounced confrontational two-party competition between the overall more pro-European New Labour and the Eurosceptic Conservatives, both large parties have been and still are internally divided over Europe. While the salience of European integration is not greater for British parties than for parties in the other member states (with the exception of the single issue UKIP), public opinion is traditionally rather sceptical of EU integration. The UK exhibits low levels of opinion congruence between parties and their supporters, with the British party system in fact having least opinion congruence in 2004 of all the EU member states. Particularly the Conservatives are out of tune with their electorate over integration. (Mattila & Raunio 2011) According to Taggart and Szczerbiak (2008: 354-355) the ‘British case serves as the pre-eminent case of a party system in which Europe has featured as an issue of contestation and in which there has been a wide range of opinions on European integration …in terms of Euroscepticism, the UK has had it all: major party Euroscepticism, factional Euroscepticism within major parties, Euroscepticism within peripheral parties, Europe as an issue of importance in party politics, and single-issue Eurosceptical parties.’

TABLE 1

The four parliaments and political systems thus exhibit significant variation regarding their institutional context or parliamentary cultures, EU scrutiny models, as well as electoral salience, public Euroscepticism and levels of party contestation over Europe (Table 1). At the same time we can see interesting similarities, especially concerning the increasing use (except in the House of Commons) of standing committees in EU affairs. In the following sections, we test our hypotheses, with the next section examining our concrete cases (EAW, Services Directive, Cash for Greece) and the fifth section providing an overview of the share of EU debates in the four parliaments.

Empirical Analysis of three EU issues

European Arrest Warrant

The European Arrest Warrant framework decision, adopted in June 2002, requires the judicial authorities of EU member states to recognise (with certain exceptions) requests for the surrender of a person made by the judicial authority of another member state. Through its principle of mutual recognition of judicial decisions, the EAW hence brought to the fore the sensitive question about the division of competencies between the EU and its member countries, especially as the national criminal justice system has traditionally – but also very recently in the German Federal Court’s decision on the Lisbon Treaty – been considered a key area of statehood and sovereignty (Sievers 2008; Fichera 2009). Interestingly, however, the EAW did not produce much contestation in Finland, Germany or France, either in the society at large or in parliament.
In the Eduskunta the EAW was not debated in the plenary at all. Two standing committees reported to the Grand Committee on the EAW, with the EAC basically just rubber-stamping the nearly unanimous opinion – only the True Finns recorded a dissenting opinion – of the committees without any real debate. The subsequent domestic law implementing the framework decision was again processed by two committees, with the plenary adopting the bill without debate.

In France, the proposal for the EAW framework directive was dealt with in the EAC, which produced an information report and a favourable opinion, but did not deposit a proposition for a parliamentary resolution. As a result, there was no further deliberation in the standing committees or the plenary. The transposition of the framework directive into French law, however, made an amendment of the French Constitution necessary. Consequently, the constitutional amendment bill was introduced in a first reading in November 2002 and sent to three committees for further consideration. The Committees for Legal Affairs and Foreign Affairs and the EAC each produced a report in mid-December 2002, and the plenary debate took place on 17 December 2002. After the Senate had also ratified the amendment bill in early 2003, the final ratification took place on 17 March 2003 in the Congrès du Parlement (joint session of the two houses). The session included a statement of the minister of Justice on the EAW and the constitutional amendment, which was followed by a short debate in which party representatives explained the motivations for their vote (‘explication des votes’). Only the Group Communists and Republicans voted against the bill.5

In Germany, the Bundestag hardly noticed the Council framework decision of June 2002. The issue was transferred to two committees (EAC and Legal Affairs), which seem to have merely taken notice of the matter.6 The same is true for the first implementation bill: in the debate on 11 March 2004, only the MP from the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) actually gave his speech, while the responsible MPs from the other four parties only submitted written statements which were added to the minutes. In the end the bill was approved unanimously despite the fact that some of the statements did express concerns about the framework. However, the Bundesrat vetoed the bill and called for the establishment of a mediation committee. After negotiations in the mediation committee failed, the Bundestag decided to treat the draft as an objection bill (Einspruchsgesetz), which enabled it to overrule the veto. The issue only became truly salient for the Bundestag when the Federal Constitutional Court (FCC) ruled the first transposition act unconstitutional in July 2005. The renewed legislative process triggered two further debates: the first took place in January 2006 based on a government report, which was followed by a plenary session in June 2006 on the revised Act. However, both debates were rather short, and it is fair to say that if the Bundesrat had not exercised its veto and the FCC had not ruled the act

5 Further transposition bills included a law on the adaptation of the justice system to development in crime (Loi n° 2004-204 du 9 mars 2004 portant adaptation de la justice aux évolutions de la criminalité), which, however, concerned a large number of domestic changes unrelated to the EAW. This bill was extensively debated in May and November 2003, but in the debates the EAW was very rarely mentioned.

6 Since committee meetings are private, the parliamentary search engine does not give any information about the processing of the matter. Indeed, during the proceedings before the FCC, MP Kauder, the only speaker during the debate in March 2004, declared not to have been able to reconstruct the development of the framework decision (see the stenographic minutes of the proceedings in Schorkopf 2006: 43).
unconstitutional, the transposition would have happened almost unnoticed by parliament. When the framework decision was amended in 2009, on the initiative of – inter alia – Germany, the Bundestag again simply took notice of the decision in the committees without any further deliberation.

In the UK, on the other hand, the EAW resulted in rather extensive debates, with both Eurosceptical and left-wing MPs criticizing the bill. Much of the debate focused on the differences between the common law system in the UK and the continental civil law systems. It had in fact been the Labour government that had initially suggested the principle of mutual recognition of judicial decisions as a way of preventing harmonisation in judicial matters. The ESC published three reports on the proposal for EAW, with the European Standing Committee B holding two public hearings with the minister responsible for the matter. In addition to committee deliberations, the plenary debated the domestic law, the Extradition bill, twice, with the second reading (9 December 2002) lasting around six hours and third reading (25 March 2003) over five hours. The parliament was very critical of the Extradition bill, with backbench Labour MPs demanding changes to the government’s proposal as well. Parliamentary scrutiny of the domestic law EAW was stringent, with the Commons making several amendments to the bill (Sievers 2008: 117-118; House of Commons 2009a).

Services Directive

The Services Directive of 2006 aims at the removal of legal and administrative barriers to trade in the services sector. Thus it dealt with an issue of fundamental importance to Europeans, the delivery of public services, exposing a strong cleavage on the left-right dimension – or between regulators and liberals. Positions on the directive depended also on the goodness of fit between the existing domestic policies and the draft directive. Finland, France and Germany had in this sense more to lose, whereas the UK government was from the start more supportive of the proposal (Chang et al. 2010; Crespy & Gajewska 2010).

The Eduskunta did not debate the directive in the plenary. This is highly interesting given the salience of the welfare state and the role of the public sector in providing public services. The directive did attract considerable media coverage throughout the Nordic EU countries, with especially left-wing parties and interest groups concerned about the impact of the directive on the Nordic welfare state model. None of the Finnish parties recommended that the directive should be debated in the plenary (the same applied to the EAW). The Services Directive was, however, discussed rather extensively in the committees, with seven standing committees (due to its horizontal nature the initiative belonged to the jurisdiction of several committees) reporting to the EAC, which in turn also debated the proposal quite thoroughly.

In France parliament started to deal intensively with the directive in February 2005. The EAC deliberated the directive and published a report together with a proposition for a resolution in early February 2005. In addition, members of the Socialist Party (PS) submitted their own report and proposition for a resolution, which again triggered a third report and proposition for a resolution of the governing Union for a Popular Movement (Union pour un Mouvement Populaire, UMP)
group. This report was nearly identical to the EAC report. The main difference between the EAC/UMP and the PS reports were the conclusions drawn: while the former demanded a thorough revision of the directive, the report by the socialists demanded its complete withdrawal. All three reports were subsequently sent to the Economic Affairs Committee, which adopted the EAC/UMP report and submitted the proposition for a resolution to the Assemblée. It was debated in mid-March 2005 in a very long plenary session, and the Assemblée finally adopted a rather critical resolution, which clearly stated that the parliament ‘considered the directive proposal to be unacceptable and resolutely demands its re-examination’.

What raised the salience of the directive further is the fact that debates on the directive took place at the same time as the debates on the French referendum on the Constitutional Treaty started to heat up. Not surprisingly, the left coalition against the Treaty used the directive in its campaign as the symbol for the social consequences of neo-liberal EU policies (Crespy 2010: 10). March 2005, the month in which the Assemblée adopted the above-mentioned resolution against the directive, was the same month that also showed the first clear shift in public opinion against the Treaty. In 2006, the directive was again subject of a parliamentary debate. The group Communists and Republicans under Alain Bocquet submitted a report and proposition for a resolution, which was subsequently debated in a plenary session on 14 March 2006. The Communists severely criticised the government for not pursuing the concerns expressed by Assemblée a year earlier in the negotiations on the directive at the European level but rather ignoring the issue level as soon as the referendum had been over. In addition, the directive was one of the major topics in the June 2006 debate on the government’s European Council declaration. In both instances, the French left saw the referendum as a clear and binding verdict of the French people on neo-liberal policies in the EU in general and on the directive in particular.

In the Bundestag, the first Commission draft on the Services Directive was merely taken note of in committee without further debate or report. It was only several months later and after massive protests by German trade unions that the Bundestag took notice of the issue. When in March 2005 the government submitted the first revised draft of the directive, it was subsequently sent to the Economic Affairs Committee (and 11 other committees in advisory capacity) for further deliberation. In late May 2005, the Economic Affairs Committee organised a first public hearing (with trade unions, employer associations and other interest groups and policy experts) on the issue, and in late June the committee issued its report and proposal for the parliamentary resolution, which was put on the plenary agenda for a short debate on the next day (30 June 2005). According to Crespy (2010: 11), the fact that the Bundestag did deal with the directive was mainly due to MP Siegrid Skarpelis-Sperk, a prominent left-wing figure in Social Democratic Party (SPD) and close to the services union federation Verdi. Skarpelis-Sperk was nominated as rapporteur for the directive in the Committee for Economic Affairs and able to convince the main parties to ‘reopen’ the parliamentary process on the directive and to put it on the plenary agenda.

Due to the summer recess and the general elections in September 2005, public debate on the directive reopened once the new grand coalition government had settled into office. In November 2005, the Left List had initiated a debate based on a major interpellation but since the
interpellation was not put on the plenary agenda until December 2006, when the legislative process at the European level was finished, speakers from all parties merely submitted their statements to be added to the minutes. In January 2006, a larger debate took place on the basis of two opposition resolutions, which called for radical changes to (SPD-Greens) and the complete rejection (Left List) of the directive, respectively. In addition, and as in France, several MPs used the opportunity of a government declaration on the European Council in March 2006 to discuss the directive. The final revised version of the directive, proposed in April 2006 by the Commission and adopted in December 2006, in contrast, was not subject of a debate. The Committee for Economic Affairs, however, organised a second public hearing in October 2006.

In the House of Commons the Services Directive enjoyed a much smoother passage than in the other three parliaments. The lack of any serious contestation is probably in large part explained by the above-mentioned domestic support for the proposal, with both the Labour government and the Conservatives in favour of the liberal draft act. The ESC reported on the proposal four times, and while it did consider the directive as politically important the committee raised no serious concerns. Consequently, it did not recommend it for debate on the floor but in committee. The document was debated on 16 May 2006 (and thus far later than in the other three parliaments) in European Standing Committee B. During the meeting, which started with an evidence-taking session with the minister for trade, all parties expressed their support for the directive, but also their disappointment at the watering down of the first directive proposal. The directive was not debated on the floor, with the plenary 'taking note' of the matter (deciding without debate) on 22 May 2006.

Cash for Greece

In what we have somewhat disrespectfully termed ‘Cash for Greece’ decisions, the Eurozone countries agreed in late spring 2010 to bail Greece out of its near-bankruptcy and to set up the European Financial Stabilisation Mechanism. The total amount of the loan was 110 billion Euros, with the Eurozone countries covering 80 billion and the International Monetary Fund 30 billion Euros. Germany (22.4 billion) and France (16.8 billion) were the largest lenders, with Finland contributing 1.5 billion Euros. The loan package was obviously a major financial and political commitment from the Euro countries. Considering the large sums involved, it is not surprising that the Greek crisis provoked throughout Europe serious debates about the fate of single currency, European identity and the solidarity of EU countries. As the UK is not in the single currency area,
it did not take part in the specific rescue operation by lending money to Greece. However, given the salience of the Euro debate in the UK and the fact that – until 2013 – all EU member states including the non-Euro countries, take part in the European Financial Stabilisation Mechanism (though not the financially far more important European Financial Stability Facility), it is well worth including the House of Commons in this case study as well.

The financial aid package stimulated colourful debates in the Finnish, French and German legislatures. In Finland plenary involvement was obligatory for legal reasons, as lending money to Greece required an additional state budget and the establishment of the European Stabilization Mechanism necessitated the adoption of domestic laws. However, it is obvious that even without such legal imperatives the political pressure to hold debates was formidable. The Eduskunta debates were exceptionally colourful, with most of them lasting several hours each. It is fair to claim that no other EU matter has produced similar tensions in the chamber after Finland’s entry to EU and the Eurozone. In the debates, especially the more Eurosceptical parties (True Finns, Christian Democrats, Left Alliance) and the main opposition party, SDP, attacked the government, with the Social Democrats adopting a highly publicised position against lending money to Greece and the opposition parties in general voting against the aid measures.

While the opposition parties, as well as a notable share of individual backbench MPs from governing parties, were clearly aggravated by the EU’s response to the Greek crisis, it is clear that the debates were also strongly influenced by the upcoming Eduskunta elections scheduled for April 2011. The support of the SDP had, according to public opinion surveys, declined rather drastically, and this probably explains in part the aggressive strategy of the party. Many representatives also emphasized the problems involved in adopting such decisions with potentially significant long-term implications without sufficient time for proper parliamentary deliberations. But whatever the reasons behind party behaviour, the ‘Cash for Greece’ debates were in many ways the first time when the government really was forced to justify and defend its EU policies in the plenary – and when the opposition truly attacked the cabinet publicly over the handling of EU matters.

In the Assemblée Nationale, the budget revision necessary for the aid package was introduced rather early, on 21 April 2010, which gave parliament more time to deliberate the measures. The Committee for Economic Affairs, Finances and the Budget issued its report on 28 April 2010 and organised a hearing with the Minister for the Economy and the Minister for the Budget on 3 May. On the same day, the Assemblée debated the European financial stabilisation measures in one very long debate (5h 30 min) on the Revised 2010 Budgetary Act (‘projet de loi de finances

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9 Subsequently the issue became one of the main themes of the spring 2011 Eduskunta elections, this being the first time that European matters feature prominently in parliamentary elections. The opposition, led by the Left Alliance, also tabled an interpellation (VK 6/2010 vp) on government positions regarding the financial stabilization measures in March 2011.

10 In fact, a rare piece of drama was seen in the debates held on 9 March 2011 on the stabilization of the European economy when PM Mari Kiviniemi accused the opposition of ‘regrettable and unpatriotic behaviour’. The PM and the government also stressed that Finnish positions and bargaining strategies should be discussed in the EAC and not in the plenary (PTK 168 2010 vp).
rectificative pour 2010’) followed by final ratification in which party representatives explained the motivations for their votes in short statements. During the heated debate, strong criticism was expressed by MPs from the left wing groups Democratic and Republican Left\textsuperscript{11} and Socialist, Radical, Citizen and Miscellaneous Left\textsuperscript{12}, but in the end the Act was adopted with only the GDR voting against it. Four weeks later, on 31 May and 1 June 2010, the Assemblée debated the measures regarding the European Stabilisation Mechanism. The debate was continued on the next day with short statements of group representatives outlining the motivations for their vote. The bill was supported by all groups except the Democratic and Republican Left and the New Centre.\textsuperscript{13} As in Germany (see below), the Assemblée was not involved in the European Financial Stability Facility Framework Agreement.

In the Bundestag, the extensive parliamentary debates (almost nine hours in all) took place amidst heated discussions in the media\textsuperscript{14} as well as the public. The debates started on 5 May 2010 with a declaration of the chancellor on the stabilisation measures and the special meeting of the Eurozone countries on 7 May, followed by a high-profile 90-minute debate with party group leaders as speakers. In addition, the first reading of the ‘Act on Financial Stability in the Monetary Union’ (Währungsunion-Finanzstabilitätsgesetz, WFSStG), was introduced in first reading and transferred to the Budget Committee and several other committees including the EAC as advisory committees. On the same day, the Budget Committee held a public hearing on the Act. The second long debate took place on 7 May 2010. During the debates, all parties except the Left List supported the measures, but the government was severely criticised by the opposition for the late involvement of the Bundestag that now had to pass the measures under immense time pressure.

Debates continued in mid-May (19 May 2010) with a declaration of the Chancellor on the measures to stabilise the Euro and the introduction of the Act on the European Stabilisation Mechanism. In addition, the Budget Committee held a second public hearing on the European Financial Stabilisation Mechanism on the same day. A second debate (second and third reading of the Act) followed on 21 May. In this case, the government lacked the support of SPD and Greens who abstained in the final vote. In addition, six members of the governing coalition voted against the Act, among them CSU MP Gauweiler, who later filed a constitutional complaint against the Stabilisation Mechanism. Finally, in July conflicts arose in the Bundestag over the lack of parliamentary involvement regarding the European Financial Stabilisation Facility Framework

\textsuperscript{11} In the 13\textsuperscript{th} legislative period, the parliamentary party group Democratic and Republican Left (Gauche démocrate et républicaine, GDR) consists of the MPs of the Communist Party, the Greens and further small left-wing parties.

\textsuperscript{12} In the 13\textsuperscript{th} legislative period, the parliamentary party group Socialist, Radical, Citizen and Miscellaneous Left (Socialiste, radical, citoyen et divers gauche, SRC) consists of the MPs of the Socialist Party (Parti Socialiste) as well as a number of smaller left-wing parties.

\textsuperscript{13} The New Centre (Nouveau Centre) is the main successor of the liberal Union for French Democracy (Union pour la Démocratie Française, UDF).

\textsuperscript{14} The mass tabloid BILD was especially hostile towards any financial help for Greece, famously demanding in early March 2010 that ‘if we have to help them with billions of Euro, they should give us something in return – for example some of their beautiful islands’. ‘Verkauft doch eure Inseln, ihr Pleite-Griechen ... und die Akropolis gleich mit!’, BILD 4 March 2010, online at http://www.bild.de/BILD/politik/wirtschaft/2010/03/04/pleite-griechen/regierung-athen-sparen-verkaufteinseln-pleite-akropolis.html, last accessed 18.3.2011.
Agreement of 7 June 2010. On 8 July, the Greens introduced a bill on the Agreement, which was delayed until the fall and voted down without debate in October 2010.

In the House of Commons the situation was different as UK is not in the Eurozone. Hence the financial crisis touched the country less directly as Great Britain did not lend money to Greece. However, while the Greek bankruptcy and the problems facing the Euro were not debated as topics of their own, the issues did nonetheless surface in the plenary several times during spring and summer of 2010, for example in connection with debates on the European Council meetings held in March and June. The elections held on 6 May 2010 also complicated the situation as the Commons was dissolved on April 12 and returned to work only in late May. However, subsequently in late 2010 and early 2011 the European Stability Mechanism and more broadly the challenges facing Euro were debated quite extensively in the plenary and in the committees. Overall the tone of the debate has nonetheless been quite different given the partly ‘outsider’ status of the UK. In particular, the debate has not been characterised so much by a government-opposition cleavage as the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition did not need to justify its decisions to the same extent as the Finnish, French or German governments. Hence the debates have focused more on the overall effects of the European Financial Stabilisation Mechanism and associated measures.15

### TABLE 2

**Overall Share of EU Debates**

Before proceeding to our analysis, it is necessary to emphasise that the four parliaments have rather different procedures regarding plenary involvement and how the role of plenary is recorded in parliamentary documents and search engines. For example, EU matters can officially be on the plenary agenda even if the full chamber only sends the proposal to a standing committee or approves it without debate or vote. Moreover, European matters are often introduced in parliaments as domestic bills (for example for the transposition of directives or other EU decisions), and hence these may not even be identifiable as EU debates. In the Bundestag and the Assemblée it is relatively straightforward to calculate the share of EU debates. Both parliaments provide a list of what they regard as their ‘EU debates’ on their websites for the last three legislative periods. And while these may not include all debates that have an EU focus, one can argue that these are the debates both parliaments advertise as their important debates on European issues. Yet given the differences in terms of number of sessions per year, the number of issues debated per session and in the length of the debates for each topic, it is almost impossible to calculate the precise share of EU debates out of all debates. In the case of Germany and France we therefore resorted to calculating the share of plenary days with a major EU debate out of all plenary days. Both the Eduskunta and the House of Commons, in contrast, do not provide such information on their websites, and identifying EU debates would require going manually through

15 This may be in part explained by the fact that it was the Labour government which agreed in May 2010 that the UK would take part through the EFSM in subsequent bail-outs. Hence the decision to lend money to Ireland, which also included a bilateral loan from the UK, was attacked and defended by both the opposition and governing party MPs.
Hence the analysis of Finland and the UK is based on multiple sources of parliamentary documents as explained in the text.

**Finland**

In the Eduskunta, plenary involvement in European matters has so far been limited. While data problems do not allow us to calculate the percentage of EU debates out of all debates, analysis of plenary records between 1995 and 2011 shows that the share of European debates has been very small, and most likely below that found in the Assemblée and House of Commons (see below). Debates have almost exclusively focused on ‘high politics’ matters such as Treaty amendments, Finland’s EU presidencies, single currency, and security and defence policy. The Eduskunta does not debate annual EU budgets or European Council meetings, with the latter on the plenary agenda basically only when the European Council has convened to amend the Treaties. Proposals for European laws have only twice featured on plenary agenda, in 2008 when three EU draft acts dealing with energy and environmental policies were debated in the same plenary session (the debate preceded the European Council meeting that discussed the proposals), and in late 2010 when the chamber debated the Commission’s legislative package for strengthening the Stability and Growth Pact.

**France**

In the Assemblée topics are usually debated only once, but in rather long sessions. The share of ‘European’ debates has varied in the two latest legislative periods (2002-2007, 2007-) between 5-7% of all debates. In particular, plenary debates on parliamentary resolutions have decreased over the years: the Assemblée adopted 74 resolutions in the 10th, 51 in the 11th, 41 in the 12th and 32 resolutions in the current 13th legislative period. Of these, only 33 were debated in the plenary during the 10th, 8 during the 11th, 6 during the 12th and 2 (both by individual MPs) during the 13th legislative term (Assemblée Nationale The l, 2010). In France, EU debates have largely focused on ‘high politics’ matters, but also select European laws (including annual debates on the EU budget) are debated on the floor. European Council meetings are debated ex ante in the plenary.

**Germany**

In the Bundestag, issues are often debated several times, for example in a short debate before and a longer debate after the committee stage. At the same time, debates are usually shorter than in the other parliaments, between 30 minutes and two hours, which allows the Bundestag to deal with more issues. Approximately 20% of the debates in the 2002-2005 and 2005-2009 legislative periods were designated as ‘EU debates’, with the share reaching over 30% in the current electoral term (2009-). The high number in the current term is partly due to a number of debates on legislation concerning the involvement of the Bundestag in EU affairs. Still, as indicated by this much higher share of European debates, the Bundestag plenary has debated EU laws and other ‘normal’ European matters more often than the other three parliaments. With very few exceptions,

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16 Both have a search engine that allows for the search according to specific key words (such as European Arrest Warrant), but without going through the debates manually it is impossible to distinguish between debates on the issue and debates where the key word was simply mentioned in the context of the debate on a different matter.
these debates also concern ‘genuine’ EU-matters rather than domestic implementation laws. European Council meetings were debated ex post until the 15th legislative period, but since then the debates have been held before the meetings.

United Kingdom

The ESC has the right to recommend EU documents for plenary debate, but the government decides which topics are debated on the floor – and indeed sometimes the cabinet does not follow ESC’s recommendations. The number of documents recommended by ESC for plenary debate varies, but since the 1997-98 session on average five documents per year have been considered salient enough by the ESC to warrant plenary debate. The highest figure has been 11 (2001-02, 2007-08) and the lowest one (1998-99). Between 2002 and 2009, only between one and four documents were actually selected for a debate on the Floor (House of Commons 2009b). On average, 0.4 % of annual plenary time was taken up by such matters between the 1997-98 and 2009-10 sessions (high of 1 % in 1997-98 and low of 0.02 % in the 1999-2000 session). These EU affairs range from individual directives and policy questions (such as EAW) to the EU budget and broader questions such as economic governance in the Union. It must be remembered that according to parliamentary standing orders these debates can only last for an hour and a half, with longer debates taking place only if agreed to by the government. However, this share does not include European matters that are debated in the plenary in the form of government bills (such as domestic transposition laws or Treaty reforms). Nor does the figure include so-called ‘opposition days’ during which the opposition can introduce debates on topics of its own choice. However, the opposition has only very occasionally wanted to debate EU issues during these sessions.17 ‘High politics’ European issues, finally, are normally debated on the floor, with particularly Treaty amendments inspiring long debates in the chamber. Finally, the prime minister also gives an oral statement in plenary on European Council meetings (often both ex ante and ex post), but debates on the meetings are very rare. When all these various forms of European debates are combined, it seems that the share of floor time spent on EU matters is roughly similar to the situation in the Assemblée.

To conclude, it must be emphasised that we have focused on actual plenary debates only – both regarding the three concrete cases and in our longitudinal analysis. Regarding the three cases, particularly the Services Directive and the decision to lend money to Greece have also been mentioned or debated shortly in connection with other matters, with particularly the Greek crisis surfacing repeatedly in subsequent debates on the financial crisis. These issues and other European matters also surface in oral parliamentary questions, but we have excluded them from analysis as question times typically contain a lot of questions from a broad range of policy areas. The impact of Europe or the EU framework also often features, or forms a part, of a question on a domestic matter. Hence it can be very difficult to separate EU issues from domestic matters, a topic that we shall return to in the concluding section.

Concluding Discussion

This paper has compared parliamentary EU debates in four member states. The analysis has been guided by a number of hypotheses explaining variation between the legislatures with both domestic institutional and party-related factors. Our results provide support for our hypotheses, but we can also observe interesting deviations that deserve further research.

Analysis of the three highly salient EU issues – EAW, Services Directive, and Cash for Greece – showed clear differences between the four parliaments. While all three issues were debated at some length in the Bundestag and the Assemblée, the Eduskunta only debated the financial loan to Greece in the chamber, while the House of Commons debated only the EAW. The loan to Greece, in particular, was the subject of heated debates, with Finnish, French and German MPs engaging in wide-ranging and colourful debates that touched on fundamental questions about European identity and the future of integration. That the House of Commons did not debate the Cash for Greece decisions can be explained both with the limited involvement of the UK and the fact that the general elections took place precisely at the same time.

As regards the general data on plenary EU debates, the Bundestag had by far the highest share of EU debates. It is also the only legislature where standard EU legislation and policy are often debated on the floor. European matters features far more rarely on the agendas of the Assemblée, the House of Commons and especially the Eduskunta. In the Assemblée and the House of Commons, select ‘normal’ EU issues are debated in the plenary, though very infrequently. In the Eduskunta, finally, essentially only ‘high politics’ EU matters are debated in the chamber, while normal EU policies are dealt with exclusively in committees.

We believe that our results are primarily explained by party politics. Institutional factors do play a role, but only insofar as they serve either the interests of the government (especially in the UK) or the main party groups. In particular, our findings suggest that the general distinction between working and debating parliaments seems to have little explanatory value in EU affairs. This is especially true for the Bundestag, which is the most active when it comes to plenary debates on EU affairs, and the debating chamber House of Commons, which clearly emphasises committee work in EU affairs (see also Neuhold & de Ruiter 2010).

In Germany, parties are clearly more cohesive in their pro EU stance than parties in the three other countries, and given the rather broad support for European integration in the public, parties do not have to fear a serious electoral backlash due to anti-EU sentiments. In addition – and in contrast to the other parliaments – the government has a more limited control of the parliamentary agenda with all party groups, including the opposition, having the opportunity put their issues on the agenda. As the lists of EU debates in the Bundestag show, opposition motions feature prominently on the agenda. This does not, however, translate into heated party competition over EU issues given the overall broad support for integration. While parties differ on specific EU policies, all have an incentive to demonstrate that they are ‘good’ Europeans. Even the Left List, the only Eurosceptic party in the Bundestag, is not united in its opposition. Hence in the Bundestag both
the government and the main parties have less reason not to debate EU policies in the plenary, and both government and opposition groups use the opportunities to put EU issues on the agenda.

In the other three parliaments, party politics clearly work against a politicisation of EU issues through plenary debates. This is especially the case in the House of Commons where the Labour government had few incentives to politicise EU affairs. This was not only due to their internal division over Europe potentially triggering criticism from their own backbenchers, but also because public debates would have given the Eurosceptical Conservatives the opportunity to accuse the government publicly of ‘selling out to Europe’ and to score points with the Eurosceptic public and media. It is therefore hardly astonishing that British governments prefers to ‘park’ EU issues in the European Committees whose recommendations and opinions the governments can also safely ignore. While the European Committees meet in public, it is obvious that similar criticism in the plenary would attract much more (media) attention that might cause serious problems for the cabinet. Thus, in the UK, the Labour government used its firm control over the agenda to keep EU issues out of the plenary. And considering the internal splits of the Conservatives, even the main opposition party had fewer incentives to engage in public debates about Europe. It will be interesting to see whether this changes under the current Conservative-Liberal Democrats coalition. The very high level of internal dissent in the Conservatives over the EU and the fact that conservative EU-sceptics and the pro-EU Liberals have to work together, however, lead us to believe that great changes are unlikely.

In the Assemblée, proposals for resolutions can be put on the agenda by party groups, and government control of the plenary agenda is therefore somewhat less tight in EU than in domestic affairs. Reasons for the small share of EU debates thus lie not only with the governing parties but also with the opposition. Here, the internal divisions of the main parties over the Europe also provide a strong disincentive to politicise EU issues. This is especially the case for the largest opposition party, the Socialist Party, which is characterised by severe internal dissent over EU. In addition, the gap in support for European integration between the parties and the public has widened over the last years. Thus, even though in opposition, the Socialist Party may have little to gain from initiating public debates outside of their traditional issues which also touch French voters’ sensitivities regarding neo-liberal EU policies such as the Services Directive. Expressing their position on EU affairs is generally difficult for the Socialists, which have been accused of both selling out socialist values to an increasingly neo-liberal Europe or of getting into bed with anti-EU extremists. The two anti-EU right wing parties, the Front National and the Movement for France, finally, have little direct influence on the plenary agenda, although they do, of course, influence the French debate on the EU. While the Front National is not represented in the Assemblée at all, the Movement for France has currently only 2 MPs, which leaves the small Democratic and Republican Left as the only united Eurosceptic parliamentary party group in parliament.

The share of EU debates is lowest in Finland. Here, institutional factors do play a larger role since according to the constitution the plenary can debate EU matters but is not entitled to take decisions on such issues (with the exception of those questions that specifically require parliamentary
ratification). This contributes to the Eduskunta essentially only debating ‘high politics’ EU matters in the chamber. The Eduskunta is also exceptional as it is the only parliament where European Council meetings are never debated on the floor. Plenary debates are thus less attractive, as Finnish MPs clearly do not like to just ‘talk’ about matters – regardless of whether they are domestic or European issues. However, the decision to delegate EU affairs almost completely to the EAC and other committees is, of course, an intentional decision of political parties who have designed a scrutiny system for EU affairs which aims at the effective scrutiny of the government and is geared towards achieving a broad domestic consensus behind closed doors rather than making EU affairs a matter of public party competition. One of the reasons is that for a smaller EU member state speaking with a strong and united national voice at the European level (arguably) strengthens their bargaining position at the European level – which is less of a worry for the other three more powerful member states. In addition, parties are not only internally divided over Europe, the gap in opinion between the parties and their voters also presents a problem especially for the main pro-EU parties.

Our findings are also interesting in terms of evaluating the involvement of domestic legislatures in EU affairs. The powerful Finnish EU scrutiny model, based on the famous mandating model of the Danish Folketinget and adopted by many of the newer member states, performs clearly worst in our comparison. The Eduskunta is actively involved in EU affairs, but essentially all of this involvement takes place behind closed doors. The Eduskunta has argued that the confidentiality of committee deliberations facilitates government accountability, but it also means that the electorate receives very little information about European matters. Considering the limited role of plenary debates in European matters, citizens and the media have – beyond access to documents – hardly any possibilities to follow parliamentary activities in EU affairs. Although the Assemblée Nationale and the House of Commons did not fare that much better with regard to plenary debates on EU issues, both provide at least much better access to committee meetings and information. Although the Eduskunta is the only parliament in our sample with a mandating system, which makes generalisations difficult, our findings do suggest that strong parliamentary influence and a system geared towards mandating the government’s negotiations position may come at a cost regarding transparency.

However, perhaps the most important result of this paper concerns the methodological difficulties involved in separating EU affairs from other matters handled by national parliaments. While certain matters such as Treaty amendments, the EU’s budget and other laws can be categorised rather easily as European issues, more typical are cases where EU and domestic spheres become

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18 Interestingly, when Finnish and Swedish MPs were asked in a survey carried out in 2001/2002 who should have influence in domestic EU decision-making, Swedish MPs placed the electorate in second place (together with the cabinet) after the parliament, whereas Finnish MPs placed the electorate in the eighth position after the various national political institutions (Ahlbäck Öberg & Jungar 2009).

19 This lack of openness was noted by a visiting delegation from the House of Commons. According to Matthew Kirk, the UK ambassador to Finland, the visitors had been particularly struck by the strong consensus among Finnish politicians, the broad cooperation between the government and the opposition in EU affairs, and the fact that in an otherwise transparent society such a high share of parliamentary work is conducted behind closed doors. See Annamari Sipilä, ‘Suomen eduskunta antoi briteille mallia EU-asioiden käsitelyssä’, Helsingin Sanomat 23.3.2005.
so intertwined that ‘isolating’ the EU dimension is very challenging. This applies particularly to policy-related questions (e.g., agriculture, economy, environment), regardless of whether the matter is of European or national origin. Not only does an increasing share of matters formally decided at the national level have a European dimension, but also debates on EU laws or European level processes can be dominated by domestic issues. This was certainly the case in each of the four parliaments analysed in this paper – and there is no good reason to expect the situation to be any different in the other member states. This interesting finding is also in line with multi-level governance theorizing according to which integrative Europe is characterised by growing interconnectedness of national and EU agendas.

Finally, as our study has been limited to four parliaments, we must also underline the preliminary nature of our findings. However, we believe that our results and the hypotheses informing our paper can be utilized in subsequent research on other national legislatures. The picture painted by our limited investigation so far is rather bleak. Over the last two decades, parliamentary attention for EU issues has clearly increased, and national parliaments now also provide more information on EU politics and their own activities to their electorates, for example through the access to documents or minutes of committee meetings. While this may have increased the transparency of EU politics at the domestic level, it has not, however, led to a greater politicisation of EU politics or increased party competition over EU issues. On the contrary, the comparison suggests that plenary debates are more frequent only in the absence of party political conflict and Eurosceptic public opinion. While specific and very controversial EU topics and decisions are being debated, so far most parliaments do not live up to their task of bringing ‘Europe’ closer to the citizens or enabling them to make informed political (electoral) choices and to exercise democratic control on EU affairs.

References


Table 1. Comparison of the Lower Houses of the Finnish, French, German, and UK Parliaments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parliament</th>
<th>Parliamentary culture</th>
<th>EU scrutiny system</th>
<th>Party-related factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eduskunta</strong></td>
<td>Working parliament: emphasis on legislative scrutiny in committees, firm control of government over plenary agenda</td>
<td>Very strong scrutiny system, regular involvement of standing committees, extensive delegation: EAC acts on behalf of parliament (plenary cannot make decisions on mandate)</td>
<td>Limited contestation (partly due to the consensual EU scrutiny model), small anti-EU party, parties are internally divided over EU, larger opinion gap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assemblée Nationale (until 2008/9)</strong></td>
<td>Until 2008/9: more debating than working parliament, more limited role for committees, almost complete government control over plenary agenda, weak opposition rights (until 2008/9)</td>
<td>Weaker, regular involvement of standing committees, broad delegation: standing committees (but not EAC) can act on behalf of parliament, but any party group can request EU resolution be put on agenda</td>
<td>Limited contestation, but main parties internally divided over EU, small anti-EU party, occasionally strong conflicts over EU issues, smaller opinion gap, but growing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bundestag</strong></td>
<td>Working parliament: emphasis on legislative scrutiny in committees, but parliament controls plenary agenda, strong opposition rights regarding agenda</td>
<td>Moderately strong: standing committees have formal responsibility for EU policies, limited delegation: EAC can act on behalf of parliament under specific circumstances, but rarely does so</td>
<td>Limited contestation: fairly solid pro-European consensus among the main parties, share of anti-EU parties relatively small, parties are cohesive over EU, small opinion gap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>House of Commons</strong></td>
<td>Debating parliament: plenary in a central role, almost complete government control over the plenary agenda, weak opposition rights, main instrument: opposition days</td>
<td>Emphasis on careful committee scrutiny of documents but weak influence, limited delegation: resolutions have to be voted on in the plenary, but usually without debate, process dominated by government</td>
<td>Open contestation: strong Eurosceptic party, Europe features regularly in party competition and parties are internally divided over EU, large opinion gap</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Parliamentary EU debates in the four parliaments (2002 – 2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Eduskunta</th>
<th>Assemblée Nationale</th>
<th>German Bundestag</th>
<th>House of Commons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall share of EU debates</strong></td>
<td>Focus on high politics issues, EU laws have been debated only twice during EU membership, no debates on European Council</td>
<td>2002-7: 30/577 (5.2%) 2007-2010: 32/467 (6.8%)</td>
<td>2002-5: 39/187 21% 2005-9: 44/233 19% 2009-10: 27/82 33%</td>
<td>0.4% of floor time (1997-2010) spent on EU documents, i.e. between 1 and 4 debates per year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus on high politics issues, but also debates on EU laws, ex ante debates on European Council</td>
<td>Focus on high politics issues, but also debates on EU laws, ex ante debates on European Council</td>
<td>Both high politics and normal EU matters are debated, ex ante debates on European Council</td>
<td>Focus on high politics issues, but also debates on EU laws, rarely debates on European Council, short oral statement by PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Services Directive</strong></td>
<td>No plenary debate</td>
<td>No debate on initial proposal, later two plenary debates (15.3.2005, 14.3.2006), also debated in several debates on broader issues</td>
<td>No debate on initial proposal, later two debates (30.06.2005, 26.1.2006), also debated in several debates on broader issues Two public hearings in Committee for Economic Affairs (30.5.2005, 16.10.2006)</td>
<td>No plenary debate Public hearing in European Standing Committee B (16.5.2006)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### APPENDIX - Chapel Hill Expert Survey 2006 Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Pro-anti</th>
<th>Salience</th>
<th>Dissent</th>
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<tr>
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<td>2.73</td>
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<td>2.73</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2.45</td>
<td>1.80</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2.60</td>
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<td>3.33</td>
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<td>4.00</td>
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</table>

**Position**: overall orientation of party leadership towards EU integration from 1=strongly opposed to 7=strongly in favour. Q1 in questionnaire: How would you describe the general position on European integration that the party leadership took over the course of 2006?: **Pro-anti**: recoding of position on trichotomous variable: 1=anti (3.5 or less), 2=neutral (3.51 – 4.5), 3=pro (greater than 4.51). **Salience**: relative salience of EU integration in the party’s public stance: 1=no, 2=little, 3=some, 4=great. Q2: Over the course of 2006, how important was the EU to the parties in their public stance? **Dissent**: party unity/dissent over European integration: from 0=completely united to 10=extremely divided. Q3: What about conflict or dissent within parties over European integration over the course of 2006? The CHES dataset is available online at: www.unc.edu/~hooghe. See also Hooghe et al. (2010).
## European Election Survey 2004 / 2009 Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
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<th>EES 2009</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Green Party</td>
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<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents were asked to place both themselves and the parties in their respective countries on the EU dimension, which was operationalised in the questionnaires as a 1–10 scale measuring respondents’ attitudes towards European unification. The exact wording of the question was: ‘Some say European unification should be pushed further. Others say it already has gone too far. What is your opinion? Please indicate your views using a 10-point scale. On this scale, 1 means unification “has already gone too far” and 10 means it “should be pushed further”. What number on this scale best describes your position?’ This question was followed by several questions where the respondents were asked to indicate, using the same scale, where the main parties of their countries were located. The entries in the table report the difference between the average party position and the average voter position per party. Positive values indicate that parties have more pro-integration stances than their voters. For details, see Mattila and Raunio (2011).