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# 4

## Interparliamentary Cooperation in the European Union: Patterns, Problems and Potential

*Claudia Heffler and Katjana Gattermann*

### Introduction

The Treaty of Lisbon has strengthened the rights of both the European Parliament (EP) and national parliaments in the European Union (EU) decision-making process. The EP has benefited from greater legislative rights and extended veto powers, which ultimately has implications for EU citizens, since most legislative decisions affect them directly. EU citizens are also represented by their national parliaments. The Lisbon Treaty acknowledges for the first time that national parliaments ‘contribute actively to the good functioning of the Union’ (Article 12, TEU). The Treaty provides them with the right to information directly from EU institutions and has established the Early Warning Mechanism (EWM) through which national parliaments can formally raise their concerns over subsidiarity infringements. Another important stipulation is that the Lisbon Treaty formally recognizes interparliamentary cooperation ‘between national Parliaments and with the European Parliament, in accordance with the Protocol on the role of national Parliaments in the European Union’ (Article 12 TEU), which allows them to determine ‘the organisation and promotion of effective and regular inter-parliamentary cooperation within the Union’ (Article 9 of Protocol 1 on the Role of National Parliaments in the European Union).

New legal provisions have in recent years underlined the increasing importance of interparliamentary cooperation on newly formalized intergovernmental decision-making competences in two core policy areas: Protocol 1 (Article 10) of the Lisbon Treaty arranged for an interparliamentary conference on matters related to the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), which was held in 2012 for the first time. In addition, Article 13 of the Fiscal Compact has granted Europe’s

parliaments formalized interparliamentary exchange within the field of economic governance. The first ‘Inter-parliamentary Conference on Economic and Financial Governance of the European Union’ was held in October 2013.

Notwithstanding these recent developments, interparliamentary cooperation has a long-standing tradition in the EU. The primary purpose of this chapter is to discuss the evolution of interparliamentary cooperation. We show that interparliamentary cooperation can take various forms, which we distinguish, first, by their formal or informal character, which is defined by formal rules of procedures or lack thereof; second, by their attendants who are either administrators or politicians; and, third, by the level of cooperation, which either involves national parliaments only at the transnational level or both national parliaments and the EP (cross-level cooperation). In recent years there has been a trend for interparliamentary cooperation to move away from all-embracing conferences debating wide-ranging topics such as ‘The Future of Europe’ towards more specialist meetings at the committee level or even between rapporteurs and spokespersons.

This links neatly to the second aim of this chapter, which is to put interparliamentary cooperation into an academic context. We discuss the findings of existing research and suggest avenues for future studies. The main functions of interparliamentary cooperation are the exchange of best practices and information (Bengtson, 2007; Miklin, 2013), policy influence (Wagner, 2013) and enhancing the democratic legitimacy of EU politics through participation and deliberation (see Crum and Fossum, 2013). From a rational choice perspective, interparliamentary cooperation provides national parliaments and the EP with the opportunity to pool their resources and acquire information independently of the executive, especially with respect to the political positions of other EU member states (see Benz, 2011). From a normative perspective, interparliamentary cooperation contributes to a transnational public sphere and mutual understanding (Wagner, 2013, p. 196) and is regarded as one possible solution to strengthening parliamentary control in the EU decision-making process (see Maurer, 2009; Eppler, 2011). We propose that interparliamentary cooperation can be studied from three different angles: by measuring policy influence, by explaining variations in parliamentary participation and by assessing the emergence of a pan-European network of parliamentarians. In the Conclusions, we discuss the inter-relations between the three research streams and highlight the implications for future research.

## **The evolution of interparliamentary cooperation**

Interparliamentary cooperation has a long-standing tradition in the EU. Ongoing European integration has consistently triggered new forms of cooperation in recent decades. These vary in their format and scope. We distinguish here

between formal and informal forms of interparliamentary cooperation, and also take into account the different forms of cooperation at the administrative and the political levels. We define formal cooperation as all institutionalized forms of interparliamentary cooperation which are guided by formal rules of procedure or by a set of concrete guidelines. Informal forms of interparliamentary cooperation take place on an ad hoc basis and do not rely on formal rules of procedure. Furthermore, interparliamentary cooperation can be transnational cooperation, that is, between national parliaments only, or cross-level cooperation, that is, between the EU and the domestic levels.

### **Formal interparliamentary cooperation**

The oldest form of interparliamentary cooperation is the 'Conference of Speakers of the Parliaments of the EU', which held its inaugural meeting in Rome in 1963. Meetings were organized irregularly until 1975. Since then it has met on an annual basis. The conference involves the Speakers of national parliamentary chambers and the President of the EP. Parliamentary speakers from candidate countries can participate as observers – an invitation which also applies to many other institutionalized forms of interparliamentary cooperation. Each conference is chaired by the speaker or president of the parliament which holds the EU Presidency during the second half of the preceding calendar year. Within the framework of interparliamentary activities, the Conference of Speakers regards its own central functions as to safeguard and promote 'the role of parliaments and carrying out common work in support of the interparliamentary activities', to represent a 'forum for the exchange of opinions, information and experiences among the Speakers' and to 'oversee the coordination of inter-parliamentary EU activities'.<sup>1</sup> As such, it is the only body which can take binding decisions on interparliamentary cooperation in the EU.

Perhaps the most prominent forum of interparliamentary cooperation is the Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs (COSAC). It held its inaugural meeting in 1989, and was formally recognized in 1997 in Protocol 1 to the Treaty of Amsterdam, on the Role of National Parliaments in the European Union. COSAC gathers twice per year and is organized and chaired by the respective parliament of the rotating Presidency, which also serves as the meeting venue. Each delegation consists of six members of its European Affairs Committees (EAC) and six Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), including a vice president responsible for national parliamentary relations and the chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs. They meet to exchange views, information and expertise on EU matters.<sup>2</sup> Often, they invite guest speakers, such as European Commissioners, or representatives of the rotating presidency. The agenda of the recent 50th COSAC meeting in Vilnius in October 2013 comprised, for instance, the 2014 EP elections, the 2020 Strategy and parliamentary relations with Ukraine. In addition, the

chairpersons of EACs also meet twice per year within the COSAC format. Like any other interparliamentary forum, the conclusions, recommendations or decisions reached in COSAC meetings are not binding on its members unless they address the conduct of the conference itself.

COSAC has published biannual reports on EU practices and procedures since 2004, which provide information about developments at the EU level and parliamentary practices in the member states. Furthermore, in recent years COSAC has become an important forum for coordinating the submission of reasoned opinions as part of the EWM, which was introduced by the Lisbon Treaty in 2009 as a control mechanism for the subsidiarity principle. Since a yellow card requires at least one-third of the votes allocated to national parliaments, interparliamentary coordination is indispensable to the success of the initiative. COSAC conducted several pre-tests prior to the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in order to assess the efficiency of the new instrument (see Kaczyński, 2011; Neuhold, 2011). Furthermore, Cooper (2013a) argues that the 47th COSAC meeting, among other things, worked well to prepare the first yellow card issued by national parliaments. It was organized by the Danish Presidency a month before the deadline for the Monti II proposal in April 2012.<sup>3</sup>

Both the EU Conference of Speakers and COSAC are able to rely on coordinators at the administrative level. These are the national parliamentary representatives. The Secretaries General 'or other designated officials convene regularly in order to prepare the agenda and the debates' of the Conference of Speakers,<sup>4</sup> and COSAC has its own secretariat, which assists in the preparation and post-processing of the meetings. Its members are officials from those national parliaments representing the Presidential Troika and the EP, plus currently a permanent official of the Cypriot House of Representatives (COSAC, 2014).

In addition, in the past few years, other formal formats have emerged for interparliamentary cooperation between the EP and its national counterparts. Table 4.1 provides an overview of these activities, which take place on a more irregular basis. Until recently, Joint Parliamentary Meetings have been a common format. They were hosted and co-organized by the EP in Brussels and the national parliament of the country that held the rotating presidency at the time. According to the European Parliament's annual reports (2009, 2010, 2011), Joint Parliamentary Meetings take a broader perspective in their debates and do not serve to produce 'common conclusions', but instead they aim to promote 'interparliamentary dialogue on major policy areas'. Table 4.1 shows that Joint Parliamentary Meetings have not been convened on a regular basis in recent years. Between 2005 and 2008, 16 Joint Parliamentary Meetings were organized by the EP. Furthermore, Gattermann (2014a) observes declining registration rates of MEPs and MPs at such meetings. The EP Legislative Dialogue Unit provides one possible explanation for

*Table 4.1* Overview of irregular formal interparliamentary cooperation activities

Year	JPMs	ICMs	JCMs	Meetings of committee chairpersons	Total
2009	3	6	1	8	18
2010	2	16	0	13	31
2011	2	9	2	13	26
2012	0	10	0	6*	15*
2013	0	8	1	10	19
Total	7	49	4	50*	109*

*Source:* Authors' compilation based on European Parliament (2014); \* incomplete information.

this on its website (European Parliament, 2014). It states that the diminishing relevance of Joint Parliamentary Meetings is linked to a new trend for specialization in interparliamentary cooperation, which has produced new formats and attracted more specialist parliamentarians. This development can be defined under the 'mainstreaming' trend, which Gattermann et al. (2013) identify as a new form of Europeanization for national parliaments. In particular, they argue that scrutiny of EU affairs is increasingly moving away from a concentration on a few select EU affairs specialists and EACs in national parliaments to MPs who are experts in certain policy fields and members of sectoral committees.

This trend is also apparent in the number of Interparliamentary Committee Meetings and Joint Committee Meetings, both of which take place in Brussels and are organized by the respective EP committees in collaboration with the EP Directorate for Relations with National Parliaments, although Joint Committee Meetings are co-organized by the national parliament of the country that holds the rotating presidency. The former specifically deal with policies that fall under the ordinary legislative procedure and discuss concrete matters or legislative proposals (European Parliament, 2012a, p. 10). They are described as 'more focused exchanges between experts' (European Parliament, 2013a, p. 9). The purpose of Joint Committee Meetings, on the other hand, is to 'promote the dialogue between European and national parliamentarians at committee level' and address topics of common interest (European Parliament, 2009, p. 26). As Table 4.1 demonstrates, Joint Committee Meetings have recently not been a prominent format. Just four have been held in the past five years. Interparliamentary Committee Meetings, however, are frequently organized (49 between 2009 and 2013). In the year after the Lisbon Treaty entered into force, 16 such meetings were held in Brussels. This shows that there is demand for parliamentary exchange between specialist parliamentarians, which is also apparent in the frequent meetings of chairpersons of all kinds of specialist parliamentary committees. These are organized by the parliament of the current

presidency, which also provides the meeting venue. As Table 4.1 shows, there have been at least 50 meetings of committee chairpersons in the past five years.

This trend for specialization is also reflected in the creation of two major interparliamentary conferences by the EU Conference of Speakers following the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty and the Fiscal Compact, respectively. Protocol 1 of the Lisbon Treaty arranged for an interparliamentary conference dealing with matters related to CSDP and CFSP. This field is dominated by intergovernmental interests. The Lisbon Treaty remained vague over the composition and competences of the conference, so it took some time to set it up (see Wouters and Raube, 2012; Huff, 2013). There were numerous arguments between members of national parliaments and MEPs over the allocation of seats, the meeting venue and the institutional location of the secretariat. In the end a compromise allowed for the participation of six members per national parliament – from both chambers where applicable – and 16 MEPs. The ‘Inter-parliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defence Policy’ held its inaugural meeting in Cyprus in September 2012, followed by two additional conferences in 2013. It is organized and chaired by the parliament of the country holding the EU presidency. Under its rules of procedure (Article 1), the conference seeks to provide ‘a framework for the exchange of information and best practices in the area of CFSP and CSDP’.

In response to the eurozone crisis, the ‘Inter-parliamentary Conference on Economic and Financial Governance of the European Union’ was set up following the recommendations of Article 13 of the Fiscal Compact. In the first conference in Vilnius in October 2013, under the Lithuanian Presidency, the EP and national parliaments sought to exert oversight over intergovernmental decisions in the area of economic and financial governance. However, Kreiling (2013) observed similar quarrels over competences and the composition of this conference as in the case of the interparliamentary conference on CFSP/CSDP. As a result, its composition is still not fixed: each parliament may determine the size of its own delegation and the conference is co-chaired by the Presidency’s parliament and the EP. Thus far, conference members have discussed matters related to the Fiscal Compact (Kreiling, 2013). The second ‘Inter-parliamentary Conference on Economic and Financial Governance of the European Union’ was planned for January 2014, within the framework of the European Parliamentary Week. It was co-organized by the Hellenic Parliament as part of its responsibility of the EU Presidency. The European Parliamentary Week was originally an initiative of the EP. It took place in Brussels for the first time in January 2013, as a response to the European Semester. Its purpose was ‘to debate together [with national parliaments] the European Commission’s annual growth survey and related issues’ (European Parliament, 2013a, p. 10). The European Parliamentary Week has brought together several formats of interparliamentary cooperation, including meetings of committee

chairpersons. According to the information on the website of the EP Directorate for Relations with National Parliaments, the European Parliamentary Week in 2014 was accompanied by Interparliamentary Committee Meetings (European Parliament, 2014).

Transnational interparliamentary cooperation at the political level, that is, between MPs, usually takes the form of cooperation within a small group of countries and parliaments. Besides bilateral meetings between two parliaments and multilateral meetings of parliaments from several EU member states, we define regional interparliamentary cooperation to include only a selected number of national parliaments. There are numerous forums, but due to space restrictions we refer to just one example – regional interparliamentary cooperation between the VISEGRAD countries (Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic). This is comprised of three forums: the Conference of Speakers, which first convened in 2003; meetings of EAC members, which had their inaugural meeting in 2005 and were preceded by meetings of the chairpersons of committees dealing with foreign affairs and defence since 1998 to prepare for EU accession; and meetings of Committees on Public Administration and Regional Policy, established in 2007. According to the online Lexicon of the Polish Sejm (2014), all these meetings provide ‘a forum for the exchange of experience in matters relating to EU membership’ and also serve ‘to exchange views on current issues, coordinate positions and take joint initiatives’.

Two interparliamentary databases serve to facilitate formal forms of interparliamentary cooperation at both the political and the administrative levels. The European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD) was established by the Conference of Speakers in 1977. It primarily functions as a network among the research units of the EP, the national parliaments of the EU member states, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the parliaments of those countries that are also members or observers of the Council of Europe. According to its statutes of September 2012 (Article 1.1), it has three objectives:

[T]o promote the exchange of information, ideas, experience and good practice among the administrations of parliaments in Europe on subjects of common interest; to strengthen close cooperation among parliamentary services in all fields of parliamentary administration, legislation, information, research and documentation; and to collect, exchange and publicise studies produced by parliamentary services.

Furthermore, each parliamentary chamber sends a correspondent from the parliamentary administration (Secretary General) to the annual Conference of Correspondents, which is responsible for the organization of the activities of the ECPRD (Article 5 and Article 6).



The 'Inter-parliamentary EU information exchange' (IPEX), which was established by the Conference of Speakers in 2000, serves to facilitate interparliamentary cooperation in the EU by providing an online platform for information and document exchange as well as a calendar of events. Through its website, [www.ipex.eu](http://www.ipex.eu), national parliaments have access to 'draft legislative proposals, consultation and information documents from the European Commission, parliamentary documents and information concerning the European Union'. It particularly seeks to provide up-to-date information on the individual review processes with respect to the EWM. However, it is the responsibility of each parliamentary chamber to provide the necessary information. IPEX, like the ECPRD, has also organized an annual Conference of Correspondents since 2011.

The ECPRD and IPEX as well as general developments in interparliamentary cooperation were evaluated by the first conference of EU affairs officers of national parliaments, which met in Brussels in September 2013 at the initiative of the EP Directorate for Relations with National Parliaments. The conference was attended by parliamentary officials from all 28 EU member states except Finland and Bulgaria. In addition, it was attended by a Norwegian parliamentary official as well as officers from COSAC and IPEX. The clerks of the EACs also formally gathered at the 47th COSAC meeting in Copenhagen, following a Dutch initiative (see Högenauer, Chapter 12, in this volume). In addition, parliamentary staff members are often found on the participation lists of Joint Parliamentary Meetings (see Gattermann, 2014a).

### **Informal interparliamentary cooperation**

Informal interparliamentary cooperation is, as the name suggests, much more difficult to grasp empirically, given its ad hoc character and the absence of formal rules of procedure. However, we are able to provide an overview of the different kinds of cooperation by relying on previous research, including the contributions of the other authors in this handbook, and the information provided by the EP Directorate for Relations with National Parliaments.

Informal interparliamentary cooperation between the EP and national parliaments can occur at the invitation of either side. At the EU level, rapporteurs have recently started to invite MPs for dialogue on certain legislative proposals (see European Parliament, 2013a, p. 10). The most recent meeting in 2013 was planned by the rapporteurs of the committee on transport and tourism, concerning legislation on rail market access and on the rights of air passengers (European Parliament, 2014). Videoconferencing is another new and welcome means of informal interparliamentary cooperation, which is being organized by the EP and is usable in 23 languages. It serves to enable ad hoc meetings and debate on salient issues (European Parliament, 2014). In other cases, MEPs travel to national parliaments for bilateral visits. These often follow

an invitation by an individual committee of the host parliament. There were '43 bilateral visits in 2012, in which 125 MEPs, 208 MPs and 190 staff participated' (European Parliament, 2013a, p. 10). In addition, the EP President regularly travels to Europe's capitals in order to meet with colleagues (see European Parliament, 2010, 2011).

The EP Directorate for Relations with National Parliaments can provide assistance for members and staff of national parliaments in planning their visits to Brussels (European Parliament, 2014). However, there is little information about how frequently MPs travel to Brussels to meet with colleagues. Neunreither (2005, p. 472) argues that the number of visits by MPs to the EP has increased in recent years. MEPs of the same nationality are often the first point of reference for many MPs, such as Austrian, Dutch, Portuguese and French MPs (see Miklin; Högenauer; Jančić; Tacea and Thomas, Chapters 19, 12, 18 and 8, in this volume). Conversely, many MEPs, such as Portuguese (see Jančić, Chapter 18, in this volume) and Danish MEPs (see Christensen, Chapter 13, in this volume), regularly participate in meetings of the EAC in their respective home country; and the French MEPs are formally invited to the *Assemblée Nationale* up to four times a year (see Tacea and Thomas, Chapter 8, in this volume). Ilonszki (Chapter 27, in this volume), however, finds that the participation of Hungarian MEPs in EAC meetings is rare. Strelkov and Hrabalek (Chapter 25, in this volume) state that the dialogue between Czech MPs and MEPs is inconsistent and that they benefit from 'information gathering and developing contacts [rather] than for coordinating the policymaking processes'. Tacea (Chapter 34, in this volume) finds that there is hardly any cooperation between Romanian MEPs and MPs.

Similarly, the extent to which MPs cooperate informally with each other on a transnational basis is also rather fragmented. Högenauer (Chapter 12, in this volume) maintains that Dutch MPs hardly ever engage with other MPs informally. According to Tacea (Chapter 34, in this volume), this also applies for Romanian MPs and parliamentary clerks, while Tacea and Thomas (Chapter 8, in this volume) stress that French MPs prefer individual contacts to institutional contacts at the transnational level.

Although informal interparliamentary cooperation at a general level is difficult to track, previous research has found that informal cooperation at the political level primarily evolves through party channels. Surveys of MEPs reveal that they are in close contact with their domestic party leaders, particularly by telephone and email (see Raunio, 2000; Miklin and Crum, 2011). Raunio provides an example in the Finnish chapter (Chapter 20, in this volume). One explanation is the electoral connection: in party-based electoral systems, the party executive is central to the selection of candidates for upcoming elections (see also Jančić, Chapter 18, in this volume). Miklin and Crum (2011) furthermore find that most party contacts are initiated by MEPs and that they

are mainly in touch with their colleagues from their home country rather than with MPs from other EU member states. However, the EP political groups also represent an important means of informal interparliamentary cooperation (Neunreither, 2005; Miklin and Crum, 2011). Within these, the political interests of individuals are less diverse than in the formal cooperation at the level of parliaments or committees (see Miklin, 2013, p. 25). Neunreither (2005, pp. 474–475) found that the major groups of the sixth EP organized regular meetings with their counterparts from the national parliaments, which ranged from large pan-European conferences to smaller events that addressed specific topics. However, research also identified variation in the motivations of political parties for engaging in interparliamentary cooperation (Miklin, 2013; Gattermann, 2014a), which are elaborated further below.

At the administrative level, national parliament representatives to the EU institutions have established an informal network in Brussels. All national parliaments have at least one representative in Brussels. Most of them have offices in the EP, but the German Bundestag has its own offices close by, which also host the party political representatives of the Bundestag. The meetings of the national parliamentary representatives are called Monday Morning Meetings. They serve to exchange information and in particular to coordinate the submissions of reasoned opinions within the EWM and thus provide a ‘bridge-building function’ across national parliaments (Högenauer and Neuhold, 2013, pp. 15–16). These meetings are valued, for example, by clerks in the Belgian Parliament for ‘establishing and strengthening interparliamentary relations’ (Randour and Delreux, Chapter 7, in this volume). Cooper (2013a) argues that the success of the first yellow card on the Monti II proposal was partially due to effective coordination by the national parliament representatives in Brussels and through their online exchange of documents at the initiative of the Danish representative. Similarly, Neuhold (2011) found that IPEX and the contacts of national parliament representatives were the most prominent tools of coordination of reasoned opinions during the pre-test phase monitored by COSAC. Little is known about bilateral visits at the administrative level, but Högenauer (Chapter 12, in this volume) states that clerks in the Dutch lower house are encouraged by the EU affairs coordinator to travel to Brussels regularly in order to establish and maintain contacts.

### **The research agenda on interparliamentary cooperation and challenges for the future**

This section discusses interparliamentary cooperation from three different angles: the potential outputs in terms of policy influence, the motivation for interparliamentary cooperation and its structure in terms of a pan-European parliamentary network. The aim of this section is twofold: first, it examines the

findings from past research on interparliamentary cooperation; and, second, it formulates tasks for future research, which we deem necessary in order to better understand the phenomenon.

### **Examining policy influence**

One underlying aim of interparliamentary meetings is to enable MPs to exert better policy influence over EU legislation. The literature identifies two main functions of interparliamentary cooperation with regard to policy influence: the exchange of information and best practice, which helps control the executive at the national and at the EU level; and the coordination of common positions in relation to EU legislation or subsidiarity control in the EWM (see Bengtson, 2007; Miklin, 2013; Knutelská, 2013a, p. 38). Policy impact is very difficult to measure directly, but the literature has identified four main indicators for the extent to which interparliamentary cooperation can be regarded as an effective means of policy influence: (a) the scope and format of interparliamentary meetings; (b) the profile of participating MPs; (c) the timing of meetings in the EU policy cycle; and (d) the outreach of the meetings. In addition, we assess the EWM's potential impact on strengthening interparliamentary cooperation.

As is noted above, a number of formats exist. In a survey of parliamentary administrators, Larhant (2005, p. 33) found that decentralized, informal cooperation at the administrative level, such as through IPEX, is preferred over formal meetings. Regarding meetings at the political level, we have shown that they vary in scope and format (for example, committee meetings versus general conferences). While bilateral and regional meetings are thought to allow more profound exchange of information, multilateral meetings have the advantage that they provide information not only about ongoing policy proposals but also on the positions of the other member states (Neunreither, 2005, p. 469). Regarding the format, Miklin's study on interparliamentary cooperation by members of the Austrian Parliament found that all parliamentary party groups regard interparliamentary committee meetings as more informative than general conferences (Miklin, 2013, p. 32). Thus, meetings on specific policy issues bringing together experts in the field are likely to create larger benefits for their participants. To understand the potential to influence policy, the interaction of different forms of interparliamentary cooperation should be taken into account. Administrative contacts and bilateral meetings could be used to prepare larger conferences, but these could also be used with different, unrelated objectives.

The format of a meeting defines certain criteria for participating MPs in terms of their policy area or formal status, which represents a second indicator of policy impact. The potential for the exchange of information and best practices depends crucially on the expertise and formal competences of the participants.

We can distinguish participants by their formal role in the national parliament, that is, members of the EAC versus members of sectoral committees, chairmen versus regular committee members, as well as by their party's status as governing or opposition party and their personal career status in terms of backbencher or frontbencher. In addition, participation is subject to rules of procedures or informal rules in a national parliament or within parliamentary parties. On the other hand, it is largely the motivation of individual MPs that decides whether to take the time to travel to an interparliamentary meeting. While there is an increasing body of literature that aims to explain variation in participation (see further below), it is important that future research studies the interrelations between the characteristics of participants and their likelihood of exerting policy influence. If we, for instance, find that it is predominantly backbenchers who participate in interparliamentary cooperation, the influence of interparliamentary exchange on domestic proceedings will be limited. However, if party leaders regard interparliamentary cooperation as another, more effective way of influencing policy outcomes, such as through MEPs, then these should be especially incentivized to take part.

A third indicator of policy influence can be identified as the timing of a meeting in the policy cycle (Mitsilegas, 2007). Mitsilegas' analysis presents challenges for interparliamentary cooperation in Justice and Home Affairs and stresses that continuous scrutiny throughout the legislative cycle combined with continued exchange among parliaments would be ideal for effective control. He recommends that national parliaments should follow the process in its early stages of the Commission Annual Work Programme and the Council Working Group meetings, as well as in its later stages through cooperation with the EP on final amendments, and in the implementation into national law by exchange of best practices among national parliaments (Mitsilegas, 2007, pp. 9–10). While the practicability of this idea is limited due to resource constraints, future research on interparliamentary cooperation should take account of the timing of interparliamentary contacts in relation to the policy cycle. In their study on the EWM, Gattermann and Heffler (2015) assessed whether a COSAC meeting taking place within the eight-week scrutiny period would increase the likelihood of the submission of reasoned opinions on the legislative proposal. While they could not find a causal link, more elaborate analyses taking account of different types of interparliamentary meeting might be able to show an impact on the legislative process.

Fourth, impact can be assessed by looking at outreach activities as well as the addressees of the conclusions of interparliamentary meetings. Here, the public, EU institutions and other members of the domestic parliament represent possible addressees. Media attention on interparliamentary meetings could not only increase the impact in terms of raising public awareness but also provide greater incentives for MP participation. This dimension should

therefore be included in future research on interparliamentary cooperation, which could assess press releases or the impact of interparliamentary meetings through media analysis (see de Wilde, 2011). The formulation and transmission of conclusions is one instrument for communicating with EU institutions. In general, existing interparliamentary meetings in the EU do not take binding decisions.<sup>5</sup> COSAC forwards its conclusions to national parliaments, the Council, the EP and the Commission. However they 'shall not bind national Parliaments and shall not prejudge their positions' (TEU, Protocol 1, Article 10). Bengtson (2007, p. 61) concludes that the lack of binding collective decisions at the EU level inevitably delimits the role of interparliamentary meetings to an advisory function. In order to link to other EU institutions, their members have been invited to speak at parliamentary conferences. COSAC, for instance, has invited high-ranking speakers, such as Commission President Barroso or President of the European Council van Rompuy. Furthermore, the feedback processes within each national parliament may contribute to the impact of interparliamentary meetings. Ruiz de Garibay (2010, p. 12) and Bengtson (2007, p. 62) propose investigating the feedback processes in national parliaments through document analysis of plenary and committee protocols, reports by delegations to interparliamentary meetings and interviews. This would answer questions about how often parliamentarians refer to the information they gain through interparliamentary cooperation and would reveal how far the additional information is made available in the scrutiny process of EU affairs.

Miklin (2013) assessed policy impact through coordination of common positions within party families. Through interviews with MPs of all party groups and civil servants in the Austrian Parliament, he found that coordination of positions is rare, except among the Green parties. The European Green Party Council regularly agrees to resolutions at the EU level, which are then taken as a basis for further activities by party groups in the national parliaments and in the EP. Miklin (2013, p. 34) found that these resolutions have a direct effect on the position of the Green Party in the Austrian Parliament, and that they rarely deviate from recommendations agreed at the EU level. His study shows that detailed case studies can provide information about the political logic and the potential impact of interparliamentary cooperation. Future research might also extend this line of research to test whether his findings hold true for other EU member states. Why does only this one EP party group coordinate common positions? Future studies might find ways to identify certain conditions based on Miklin's (2013) suggestions that include party status (government versus opposition), ideology or the electoral strength of the party family at the national and EU levels.

The coordination of common positions among party families within the ordinary legislative procedure is so rare that it has hardly been the subject of research until recently (Miklin, 2013). However, scholars predict a higher level

of coordination in the subsidiarity procedure. Since one-third of the votes of all chambers are needed to issue a yellow card, the EWM is expected to motivate parliaments to coordinate common positions in order to achieve the threshold (Neuhold, 2011; Cooper, 2013b; Knutelská, 2013a). Neuhold's (2011) analysis of the subsidiarity tests coordinated by COSAC before the Lisbon Treaty indicates that the network of National Parliamentary Representatives at the European Parliament is an important structure for coordinated action within the EWM. Through regular contacts among the permanent representatives of all EU member states and its location in Brussels, the network is able to flag up important dossiers to national parliaments and provide information about envisaged reasoned opinions from other national parliaments (Neuhold, 2011, pp. 15–16). Cooper (2013a) investigated the first successful yellow card from national parliaments on the Monti II proposal. Using interviews, he traced the process leading up to the yellow card and found that a COSAC meeting under the Danish Presidency which took place four weeks before the deadline for the subsidiarity check was crucial to its success (Cooper, 2013a). However, Gattermann and Heffler (2015) were not able to generalize this finding. In their analysis of the reactions of all 40 chambers to 411 Commission proposals between 2010 and 2013, COSAC meetings that took place within the eight-week deadline did not affect the likelihood of submissions of reasoned opinions. If subsidiarity control is understood strictly as judicial review, the exchange of the judicial analysis among the assemblies could be an efficient way to cooperate. Yet, if national parliaments instead view the subsidiarity mechanism as an opportunity to raise political issues, the dilemma of heterogeneous national interests would be relevant here too. In the future, when more yellow cards will have been issued, the analysis of their background will allow more detailed conclusions to be drawn.

### **Explaining variation in parliamentary participation**

Thus far, this chapter has examined the importance of interparliamentary cooperation to direct and indirect policy influence at the EU level. We argue that policy influence is one underlying motive for interparliamentary cooperation. However, we have also shown that there is variation across parliamentary chambers, political parties, types of interparliamentary cooperation and issue areas. Hence, the purpose of this section is to identify and discuss explanatory factors which have thus far received relatively little attention in previous research on interparliamentary cooperation. We assess meeting types and issue salience and discuss the role of parliamentary actors in more detail.

As is noted above, not all types of formal and informal interparliamentary cooperation receive the same amount of attention from the EU's parliamentarians. Joint Parliamentary Meetings, for instance, are no longer organized, while new formats are emerging, such as exchanges between committee chairpersons or videoconferencing. The shift away from generalist

outlets towards meetings which are more focused in their topics can be explained by the mainstreaming trend that Gattermann et al. (2013) identify in Europeanization processes inside national parliaments. However, it may be expected that not all policy fields are equally attractive. Nowadays, many policies are dealt with at the EU level and are subject to the ordinary legislative procedure, while other decisions are taken solely by the governments of the EU member states. The interest in taking parliamentary influence into intergovernmental policy areas is currently very high, as is demonstrated by the recent setting up of the Interparliamentary Conference on Economic and Financial Governance of the European Union and the Interparliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defence Policy.

Previous research has argued that some issues receive more attention from MPs in their EU affairs scrutiny than others. Gattermann and Heffler (2015) in their study of parliamentary behaviour with respect to the EWM find that national parliaments are more inclined to submit a reasoned opinion on draft legislative acts which are highly salient – particularly when it proposes new legislation rather than amends existing legislation and when it is debated in the Council or voted on in the EP plenary before the deadline for the scrutiny period. With a particular view towards interparliamentary cooperation, Gattermann (2014a) finds that MEP registrations at Joint Parliamentary Meetings were higher when they fell in the same month as an EU summit. Furthermore, MEPs were more inclined to take part when these meetings dealt with topics related to the budget, the economy or finances as opposed to meetings which discuss the future of Europe. Interparliamentary Committee Meetings and Joint Committee Meetings (co-)organized by these respective EP committees also attract more MPs from national parliaments to travel to Brussels than invitations from other committees (Gattermann, 2014b). Future research should investigate whether certain topics also cause variation in interparliamentary cooperation across parliamentary chambers. Auel and Höing (2013; 2015), for instance, show that not all parliaments engage in the current crisis management to the same extent and argue that this would be due to variation in legislative scrutiny rights and in their general engagement in EU affairs.

Variation across parliamentary chambers generally deserves more attention in future research. Some chapters of this handbook reveal that MPs from different parliaments have varying incentives to take part in interparliamentary cooperation. Kanev (Chapter 22, in this volume) argues that Bulgarian MPs are very active in formal interparliamentary cooperation, which the findings of Gattermann (2014b) support with respect to their participation in Interparliamentary Committee Meetings and Joint Committee Meetings. According to Raunio (Chapter 20, in this volume) and Ehin (Chapter 26, in



this volume), Finnish and Estonian MPs, respectively, are at the other end of the scale. Raunio's explanation is that Finnish MPs focus on executive scrutiny rather than on interparliamentary cooperation, while Ehin contends that COSAC meetings would not provide any benefits for the Estonian Parliament. Gattermann (2014b) proposes that electoral institutions, which vary across chambers, play an important role in MP participation in Joint Committee Meetings and Interparliamentary Committee Meetings. However, she was unable to establish a clear link between a chamber's scrutiny rights and MP engagement in interparliamentary cooperation. Future research should therefore enquire whether cross-chamber variation is due to differences in EU affairs scrutiny and legislative–executive relations, as some of the contributions to this volume suggest. Heffler (2014), for instance, underlined the relevance of parliamentary resources and the relationship towards the government for regular participation in interparliamentary cooperation in her comparative analysis of the Danish, German, Polish and Slovak parliaments.

Concerning political actors, previous research has investigated the incentives for political parties and individual MPs to take part in formal and informal interparliamentary meetings. Research on the motivations for parties and MPs to engage in general EU affairs scrutiny suggests that levels of public Euroscepticism (Saalfeld, 2005b; Winzen, 2013) and the seat share of Eurosceptic parties in national parliaments (Raunio, 2005; Karlas, 2012) matter. With regard to interparliamentary cooperation, Gattermann (2014b) finds that higher levels of party political contestation over the EU inside parliaments have a positive effect on MP attendance at Interparliamentary Committee Meetings and Joint Committee Meetings. With respect to variations across political parties, Miklin (2013) investigates the interest and actual engagement of Austrian political parties in interparliamentary cooperation and argues that the parliamentary status and ideology of a party matters. He finds that opposition parties are more interested in interparliamentary cooperation than governing parties because of their disadvantage when it comes to information. Furthermore, parties which do not belong to a European party family (two far-right parties in particular) would be more isolated and less able to link to the EP or other parliaments. Gattermann (2014a) reports similar findings for the EP political groups. Parties of the parliamentary minority register their attendance at Joint Parliamentary Meetings more often than majority groups, while larger parties and more cohesive groups are also more inclined to take part. Eurosceptic MEPs registered their attendance less often than pro-European ones. Future research should investigate whether these findings also hold for other parties across Europe. Christensen (Chapter 13, in this volume), for instance, suggests that Danish MEPs whose party supports a government back home are more inclined to engage in interparliamentary cooperation than those that belong to the domestic opposition.

The extent to which party preferences vary might also be reflected in the individual incentives for MPs to take part in interparliamentary cooperation. Gattermann (2013) maps the individual characteristics of MPs who travel to Brussels to take part in committee meetings. She finds that the majority of MPs travelling to Brussels are male and support a government; and that these MPs are generally more pro-European than their colleagues back home, except for MPs from upper houses. Regarding age and seniority, MPs from the old member states are not only older than their colleagues at home but also about four years older and with two more years of parliamentary experience compared to legislators from the new member states. However, there are no explanations for these phenomena. Future research could investigate explanatory factors by conducting surveys with MPs about their engagement in interparliamentary cooperation, both formally and informally. The findings of previous research on party preferences (Raunio, 2000; Miklin and Crum, 2011; Miklin, 2013; Gattermann, 2014a) might also have implications for further research on the individual incentives for informal cooperation. Longer-serving MPs, for instance, supposedly have a larger extra-parliamentary network as they have had more time to establish contacts across Europe; and MPs belonging to larger and less diverse European party families are likely to have more political acquaintances in general (see also Miklin, 2013; Gattermann, 2014a). This leads on to the question of whether a pan-European network of parliamentarians is emerging in Europe.

### **Assessing the emergence of a pan-European network of parliamentarians**

At the outset of this chapter we presented and discussed different formats of interparliamentary cooperation. This section assesses whether these regular interactions have led to the emergence of a pan-European network of parliamentary representatives. Overall, the difficulty of assessing policy impact through interparliamentary cooperation could lie in the nature of the issue itself. Some of the country chapters in this handbook indicate that the direct benefit of information exchange or any specific coordination of activities is not the main motivation for their participation in interparliamentary meetings. Högenauer (Chapter 12, in this volume) reports a focus on networking by Dutch MPs. Hrabalek and Strelkov (Chapter 25, in this volume) describe that for Czech MPs '[t]he added value of these meetings is "collecting mobile phone numbers" and networking, not lobbying or discussing specific policy details'. Thus, research should account for the long-term effects of building personal networks as an alternative to specific policy influence. To determine whether there is a pan-European network we must answer questions of whether MPs or MEPs perceive benefits from meetings in this respect and analyse the frequency of contacts between individual actors and the quality of relationships.

Crum and Fossum (2009) introduced the concept of the multi-level parliamentary field, which may serve as theoretical background for analysis of the structure of parliamentary cooperation.<sup>6</sup> It is defined as the sum of those institutions which share the function of representing the people's interests in the EU. Thus, it encompasses all levels of parliamentary representation. Within the field the added value of each institution can only be fully understood in relation to the others. This concept captures the structure of relations among parliaments in the EU. These are, among other things, apparent in the interparliamentary meetings and informal contacts between them (Crum and Fossum, 2009, 2013).

Herranz-Surrallés (2014) applies the framework of the multi-level parliamentary field to conflict or cooperation in cross-level cooperation on CFSP. She differentiates between formal constitutionally defined authority and the actual parliamentary capital. The capital of any actor in the field is defined by their economic (resources and staff), cultural (knowledge and expertise) and social (connections to other actors) characteristics. A discrepancy between constitutional authority and actual parliamentary capital in either the EP or national parliaments can lead to a sovereignty surplus. Here, more than one level of the EU polity claims authority over a certain policy area (Herranz-Surrallés, 2014, p. 5). For CFSP, she finds that the EP was able to gain in parliamentary capital beyond the formal definitions in the treaties through inter-institutional bargaining and agreements. Yet, since national parliaments are reluctant to acknowledge an extended role for the EP in this policy area, conflict over the allocation of competences is more present than a mutually beneficial exchange of information based on a shared sense of common purpose (Herranz-Surrallés, 2014, p. 15). The findings are in line with the expectations of Neunreither (2005, p. 46) and Costa and Latek (2007, p. 141), who assume that a rivalry for future influence over certain policy areas makes open and trusting cooperation unlikely (see also Westlake, 1995). Costa and Latek (2007, p. 157) argue that the EP is interested in strengthening its own position in the EU institutional balance through interparliamentary cooperation and raising the profile of important dossiers at the national level. Ruiz de Garibay (2010, p. 4) sees the EP's interest in interparliamentary cooperation in the avoidance of a formal third chamber of national parliaments, which would compete with the EP for legislative scrutiny rights. This implicit rivalry constrains the scope of cooperation in specific policy areas. He (2013) gives the example of parliamentary control over Europol. He argues that the EP favours a supranational solution to exert oversight of Europol in the long run, while national parliaments prefer an intergovernmental institution (2013, p. 93).

The relationship between the EP and national parliaments has been analysed extensively, and research on the topic has investigated a number of case studies which show different conditions depending on the policy area (see the edited

volume by Crum and Fossum, 2013). The theoretical framework provided by Herranz-Surrallés (2014) contributes to the understanding of the limitations on cross-level cooperation and should be extended in future research. This could help develop more specific expectations not only on what we *can* observe but also why we *cannot* find more substantive cooperation among parliaments. In addition, potential lines of conflict among national parliaments on the transnational dimension deserve more scholarly attention. Here, it could be interesting to investigate whether regional groups of national parliaments, such as the VISEGRAD group mentioned above, act in a coordinated manner at multilateral meetings. One consequence could be that this leads to conflict due to overlapping memberships.

To better understand the emerging structures of interparliamentary cooperation in the EU, a comprehensive database on interparliamentary meetings would be extremely valuable (see Neunreither, 2005, p. 473). Beyond the mere number of meetings, data on the topics discussed (in relation to timing in the policy cycle) and the profile of MPs participating would allow assessment of the inter-connectedness of parliamentary levels. In terms of an emerging network of parliamentarians in the EU, it would be interesting to find out whether specific meeting formats relate to each other: Are bilateral meetings used to prepare multilateral ones? Are meetings within political groups and at the administrative level used to increase the effectiveness of larger interparliamentary meetings? Do the same people meet frequently in different arrangements? Gattermann (2013), for instance, analyses individual-level data for 1,248 MPs from 27 EU member states who participated in 40 Brussels committee meetings between 2009 and 2012. She shows that some MPs were frequent participants – 217 MPs attended at least twice. To understand the frequency and quality of interactions, network analysis (see Scott, 2011) could be a relevant tool for studying the emergence of a parliamentary network in the EU. It aims to understand patterns of relationships by analysing the actors' participation in the network ('nodes') and the frequency and strength of their relations ('ties'), which are often depicted in a network diagram. This detects the interactions and resource and information flows at the individual or group level. It would potentially reveal whether certain national parliaments, party groups or individual MPs have built a core of interparliamentary contacts, and whether a systematic network of interparliamentary contacts is evolving.

In sum, as regards the structure of interparliamentary relations in the EU the current theoretical approaches and insights from other research areas should be linked and revised through comprehensive empirical research on both the cross-level and transnational dimension of interparliamentary cooperation. Only then can we assess whether parliamentary representation in EU decision-making is provided in the interplay at all levels.

## Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter was twofold. First, it mapped the various developments and formats of interparliamentary cooperation activities. We have shown that some formal meetings, including Joint Parliamentary Meetings that deal with general questions of EU integration, have been substituted by more specialist formats of interparliamentary cooperation, such as Interparliamentary Committee Meetings which address policy issues that fall under the ordinary legislative procedure. Furthermore, these formal meetings are increasingly complemented by informal parliamentary cooperation which can take many different forms – from meetings initiated by rapporteurs to conferences organized by the European party families – and together amount to a high frequency of interaction. In addition, national parliamentary representatives in Brussels have more regular contacts beyond the Monday Morning Meetings in the form of Conferences of Correspondents for IPEX and ECPRD.

Second, the chapter discussed the current research agenda and formulated tasks for future studies on interparliamentary cooperation. Compared to inter-governmental EU negotiations with clear rules on the decision-making process and binding outputs for all parties, research on interparliamentary cooperation is challenged by its rather ‘soft’ nature. Thus, important research questions address the motivation for interparliamentary cooperation and the benefits from the meetings. We discussed three different research streams: examining policy influence, explaining variation in participation and assessing the emergence of a pan-European network of parliamentarians. All three dimensions are connected by questions of who actually participates, under what conditions and why.

We argued that policy impact is difficult to measure, but proposed concentrating on four indicators identified by previous research through which to assess the effectiveness of interparliamentary cooperation: the scope and format of interparliamentary meetings, the profile of participating MPs, the timing of meetings in the EU policy cycle and the audience addressed beyond the actual participants. Existing research has provided some first indications on the single aspects. Future research could also investigate their interaction by, for example, asking whether a certain format draws more media attention which would in turn raise incentives for high-profile MPs to participate. However, contributions to this handbook highlight that MPs might be less motivated by the direct effect of meetings than the long-term benefit of building personal networks. Policy impact is therefore only one underlying motive for participation in interparliamentary meetings.

Beyond the general aims of the meetings, we still lack a comprehensive set of explanatory factors that capture differences in the formats and issues in interparliamentary cooperation, as well as the varying interests expressed

by chambers, parties and individual MPs. These could be identified through various methods such as interviews (Miklin, 2013; Hefftlar, 2014), surveys (Raunio, 2000; Miklin and Crum, 2011) or the examination of participation lists (Wagner, 2013; Gattermann, 2013, 2014a, 2014b). We argued that interest in interparliamentary cooperation is likely to be higher when the format is more precise, such as in the form of interparliamentary committee meetings, and if the issues at stake are highly salient, as are those policies related to resolving the current financial and economic crisis across Europe.

Electoral institutions constitute one possible explanatory factor for variations at the chamber level (Gattermann, 2014b), but future research should ask whether cross-chamber variation is due to differences in the scrutiny of EU affairs and in legislative–executive relations. Similarly, we relied on existing research on the incentives for political parties and individual parliamentarians to actively participate in interparliamentary cooperation. Here, explanatory factors include the level of party political contestation over the EU (Gattermann, 2014b), parliamentary status and the ideology of political parties (Miklin, 2013; Gattermann, 2014a), as well as the parliamentary experience and attitudes towards the EU of individual MPs (Gattermann, 2013).

Finally, we asked whether it is possible to observe the emergence of a pan-European network of parliamentarians. Here, research has a twofold task: to understand the potential conflicts among parliaments and to capture the structure of interparliamentary relations. Do interparliamentary meetings bring together experts on a certain policy field who develop strong links of frequent exchange over time? At the empirical level, we argue that a comprehensive database on parliamentary contacts in the EU would enable us to answer this question – possibly drawing on the method of network analysis. At the more theoretical level, existing research has provided several explanations for conflicts among MEPs and MPs linked to rivalry over future competences (Westlake, 1995; Neunreither, 2005; Costa and Latek, 2007) or through a ‘sovereignty surplus’ caused by a discrepancy in formal authority and informal powers (Herranz-Surrallés, 2014). Future research could extend the question of constraints on cooperation at the transnational level and conflicting interests among groups of national parliamentarians.

Overall, we argue that future research on interparliamentary cooperation should focus on explaining the incentives for and drawbacks of cooperation among parliaments. A valuable contribution has been made by Crum and Fossum (2013), which aims to capture the empirical reality of interparliamentary cooperation. The analyses of the contributors, such as Cooper on the Seasonal Workers Directive, Crum and Miklin on the Services Directive, Ruiz de Garibay on Europol and Peters et al. on the Atalanta mission, show that informal links among parliaments are much more dense than formal ones. Following Raunio (2009), research on interparliamentary cooperation

should focus on the analysis of actual activities. Given the high expectations of the relevance of interparliamentary cooperation to greater democratic legitimacy, future research should reveal its potential and highlight its limitations for EU policymaking.

## Notes

1. EU Conference of Speakers (2010) *The Stockholm Guidelines for the Conference of Speakers of EU Parliaments*, Article 2, <http://www.ipex.eu/IPEXL-WEB/euspeakers/getspeakers.do?id=082dbcc530b1bef60130b6cd58140086>, accessed 10 January 2014.
2. EU Conference of Speakers (2008) *Guidelines for Inter-parliamentary Co-Operation in the European Union*, Lisbon, 19–21 June 2008.
3. 'Proposal for a Council regulation on the exercise of the right to take collective action within the context of the freedom of establishment and the freedom to provide services', COM (2012) 130 final (21.3.2012).
4. EU Conference of Speakers (2008) *Guidelines for Inter-Parliamentary Co-operation in the European Union*, Lisbon, 19–21 June 2008, p. 4.
5. On the Inter-parliamentary Conference on CFSP and CSDP proposals exist, brought forward by the German and French delegations, to allow for binding decisions, see the interview with Johannes Pflug, chairman of the German Delegation in 2012, at [http://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2012/40505904\\_kw37\\_interview\\_pflug/index.html](http://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2012/40505904_kw37_interview_pflug/index.html).
6. Crum and Fossum (2009) defined the multi-level parliamentary field as an alternative explanation to the network concept of interparliamentary relations. In this chapter, we use the concept of a social network as a more abstract term for a social structure constituted of its actors and their relations among each other of which the multi-level parliamentary field is one possible realization.