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Debating the State of the Union? Comparing Parliamentary Debates on EU Issues in Finland, France, Germany and the United Kingdom

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Over the last 20 years, the role of national parliaments in European Union (EU) affairs has gained considerable academic attention. Much of the literature has focused on the parliamentary control function and shown that national parliaments are no longer docile lambs willing to be led to the European slaughtering block, but exercise tighter scrutiny of their governments in EU affairs. What tends to be overlooked, however, is that the parliamentary communication function is at least as important in EU politics. Yet while the literature has discussed reasons why members of parliament (MPs) or political parties may prefer to 'depoliticise' European issues by conducting their EU business away from the prying eye of the public, so far we have little empirical data on how parliaments communicate EU politics. This article will therefore provide a comparative analysis of parliamentary debates on EU issues in the UK, Finland, Germany and France.

Keywords: *national parliaments; EU; plenary debates; Finland; France; Germany; United Kingdom.*

Introduction

Parliaments are multi-taskers. They perform a large number of functions, including the election or selection of the government, policy-formulation and legislation, controlling the government and holding it accountable, aggregating and representing the interests of their citizens and informing them on important policy issues. Among the most important means for parliaments to fulfil a range of these functions, and most importantly the information and communication function, are public debates in the plenary or – to a lesser extent – in committees. Debates are vital elements of electoral competition as they provide for a public articulation of societal interests and the discussion of policies thus informing citizens about complex political issues. Without debates allowing the electorate to identify competing leaders and policy agendas it is difficult for them to assess the performance of the government and to hold it accountable.

As mentioned in the introduction to this volume, previous research has suggested that the role of the plenary has so far been limited in European issues (Bergman, Müller, Strøm, & Blomgren, 2003, p. 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. Recent research at least suggests that more salient EU topics – such as financial

frameworks (De Wilde in this issue), Treaty reforms (Maatsch, 2010), or European Council meetings (European Parliament, 2013; van de Steeg, 2010) – do appear to trigger plenary debates. In addition, previous research has paid hardly any attention to the variation between legislatures or policy areas, nor to the relationship between parliamentary cultures and debates.

Hence this study contributes to the literature through a comparative analysis of EU debates[i] 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 outline our case selection and data. Section four presents the 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 (Arter, 2006; Döring, 1995; Norton, 1998; Strøm, Müller, & Bergman, 2003). 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 (Strøm, et al., 2003).

Institutional Factors

Turning to institutional factors first, a much-used distinction is that between 'working' and 'debating' parliaments (Arter, 1999, pp. 211-217), or between 'legislating' and 'deliberating' parliaments (Loewenberg & 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 the 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, 1999, pp. 211-217; Bergman & Strøm, 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 and so on. Thus, another factor is the ability of backbenchers to influence the parliamentary agenda, that is, 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.

Case Selection and Data

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. 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.

TABLE 1

Due to space limitations, we present the main institutional and party related variables for the four parliaments in Table 1.[ii] With regard to the dependent variable, we draw on two data sources: our first source consists of a longitudinal comparison of the share or amount of EU debates in the four parliaments between 2002 and 2010 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, p. 118).

Problematic for the comparative analysis is that identifying EU debates is rather difficult in some parliaments. The *Bundestag* and the *Assemblée Nationale* provide a list of what they regard as their 'EU debates' on their websites for the current and previous 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 debates on European issues. In the case of Germany and France, we therefore first calculated the share of plenary days with a major EU debate out of all plenary days. Yet given the differences in terms of overall parliamentary time spent in the plenary as well as the length of the debates for each topic, the sheer number of debates may be somewhat misleading. In a second step, we therefore drew on the Observatory of National Parliaments after Lisbon (OPAL) data (see below) to calculate the average share of plenary time spent on EU issues. Both the *Eduskunta* and the House of Commons, in contrast, do not provide such information on their websites. Both have a search engine, but without going through the debates manually it is impossible to distinguish between debates on genuine EU issues and those where a key word (such as 'EU') was simply mentioned in a different context. Hence the analysis of Finland and the UK is based on other parliamentary documents and interviews.[iii]

In addition, we were able to expand our analysis to include the years 2010 to 2012 by drawing on a dataset established in the context of the OPAL project[iv] (Auel, Rozenberg, & Tacea, 2014, forthcoming). It provides data on parliamentary activities in EU affairs between 2010 and 2012 including, inter alia, data on the number of EU debates, the topics as well as the share of plenary time devoted to debating EU issues. Given that we had to resort to simpler means of identifying EU debates for the period of 2002 to 2010, our data is not directly comparable with the OPAL data. As a consequence, we are only able to draw tentative conclusions about changes over time in the level of debating activity.

For information regarding the institutional factors, we relied on parliamentary standing orders and the secondary literature (for details, see Auel & Raunio, 2012). For the party-related factors, we base our assessment on the Chapel Hill Expert Survey 2006/2010 and on 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.

Europe in the Plenaries – A Comparison

Finland

Between 2002 and 2010, plenary involvement in the *Eduskunta* was very limited. While data problems do not allow us to calculate the percentage of EU debates out of all debates, an analysis of plenary records between 1995 and 2010 shows that the share of European debates was very low and most likely below that found in the *Assemblée* and House of Commons (see below). Debates focused almost exclusively on 'high politics' matters such as treaty amendments, Finland's EU presidencies, single currency, and security and defence policy, while standard EU legislation was practically absent from the plenary agenda. The *Eduskunta* also did not debate annual EU budgets, and meetings of the European Council were on the agenda only when it convened to amend the treaties.

However, since 2010, we can observe a clear increase in the debating activity of the *Eduskunta*. Between 2010 and 2012, 18 debates took place on average per year, which amounts to roughly 14 per cent of the overall plenary time. A closer look reveals that around two thirds (63 per cent) of these EU debates were crisis-related. Yet despite the importance of European Council meetings and euro summits for the decisions on the crisis management and European economic governance reform, ex ante or ex post debates on these meetings are still extremely rare.

France

In the *Assemblée* topics are usually debated only once, but in rather long sessions. Between 2002 and 2010, the share of plenary days with a 'European' debate varied between 5-7 per cent. Overall, this amounts to an average share of plenary time of a little less than 3 per cent. EU debates largely focused on 'high politics' matters, but select European laws (including annual debates on the EU budget) were also debated on the floor. In particular, plenary debates on parliamentary resolutions were rare: only six were debated in the plenary in 2002-2007 and two (both by individual MPs) in 2007-2010.[v] In contrast, European Council meetings were regularly debated ex ante in the plenary.

Since 2010, the OPAL data suggest only a slight increase in plenary debates. Between 2010 and 2012, between nine and 10 debates took place on average per year, which amounts to around 4 per cent of the overall plenary time. And again, a large share of these debates, 62 per cent, was spent on euro crisis-related issues. The *Assemblée* continued to debate European Council meetings ex ante, but did not debate informal European Council meetings or euro summits.

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. Approximately 20 per cent of the plenary days in the 2002-2005 and 2005-2009 legislative periods featured 'EU debates', with the share reaching over 30 per cent in 2009-2010. This high number is partly due to debates following the decision of the German Federal Constitutional Court on the Lisbon Treaty and the *Bundestag*'s participation rights in EU affairs as well as debates on the euro crisis in 2010. Given that *Bundestag* debates are usually fairly short in comparison, this amounted to an average of roughly 3.8 per cent of the overall plenary time. Still, as indicated by the higher share of European debates, the *Bundestag* plenary has debated EU laws and other 'normal' European matters more often than the other three parliaments. European Council meetings were debated ex post until the 15th legislative period, but since then the debates have been held before the meetings.

According to the OPAL data, the *Bundestag* held on average around 42 EU debates per year in 2010 to 2012, amounting to about 12 per cent of the overall plenary time, which suggests a steep increase. However, it may also indicate that the lists of EU debates for 2002-2010 on the website were not exhaustive. Overall, the euro crisis played a less important role in plenary debates in the *Bundestag* compared to the French and the Finnish parliaments, with roughly 30 per cent of the EU debates dealing with crisis-related issues.

United Kingdom

The European Scrutiny Committee of the House of Commons 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. Between 2002 and 2009, only between one and four documents proposed for debate by the ESC were actually debated (House of Commons, 2009), which amounts to an average of 0.4 per cent of the annual plenary time. These EU affairs ranged from individual directives and policy questions to the EU budget and broader questions such as economic governance in the Union. This share does not include the 20 so-called 'opposition days' per year, during which the opposition can introduce debates on topics of its own choice. However, between 1997 and 2010, the opposition under the Labour government used its days to discuss EU issues on only 10 occasions.[vi] 'High politics' European issues are normally debated on the floor, with treaty amendments particularly 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 were very rare. When all these various forms of European debates are combined, it seems that the share of floor time spent on EU matters was roughly similar to that in the French *Assemblée*.

Since 2010, however, EU debates seem to have become somewhat more frequent. The OPAL data give an average of 22 to 23 debates per year, which amounts to 3.8 per cent of the overall plenary time. The share of debates on the financial crisis is lower than in the other chambers (26.7 per cent) but still rather high considering that the UK is not a member of the eurozone. In addition, a quarter of the debates were spent on the EU Bill of the Conservative government, the impact of the EU on the sovereignty of parliament and the possibility of a referendum over EU membership. The higher number of debates may also explain why the Labour party, in opposition since May 2010, made no use of their opposition days to discuss EU issues. Only the Democratic Unionist Party used the opportunity once to discuss 'the European Union'.

Table 2

Discussion and Conclusion

This article 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.

Overall, the *Bundestag* had by far the highest share of European debates, at least in terms of absolute numbers. 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 used to be 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 did 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 more limited control of the parliamentary agenda as all party groups, including the opposition, have the opportunity to put their issues on the agenda. Hence in the *Bundestag* both the government and the main parties had 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. More recently, cracks have appeared in the party consensus over the EU with the less pro-European stance of the Christian Social Union (CSU) and the Eurosceptic Left List. Whether the increase in debates is a result of these developments is difficult to tell, especially given that internal party divisions over the EU have also increased.

In the other three parliaments, party politics clearly work against a politicisation of EU issues through plenary debates. This was especially the case in the House of Commons until 2010, 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 Eurosceptic 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 prefer to 'park' EU issues in the European Committees whose recommendations and opinions the governments can also safely ignore. 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. As the data since 2010 show, debates have clearly increased under the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government, but with over 50 per cent of the debates on the euro crisis, the EU Bill, parliament's role in EU affairs and the EU Referendum, the debate activity regarding other, 'regular', EU issues does not seem to have increased that much since 2010.

In the *Assemblée*, debate activity was fairly low between 2002 and 2010, and the slight increase since then seems mainly due to the euro crisis. 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 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 the EU. In addition, the gap in support for European integration between the parties and the public has widened over recent years. Thus, even though in opposition until mid-2012, the Socialist Party had little to gain from initiating public debates. 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 was not represented in the *Assemblée* until the latest elections in 2012 (now two MPs), the Movement for France had only three, currently two, MPs.

The absolute number of EU debates was clearly lowest in Finland, although we detect a steep increase since 2010, mainly due to the euro crisis and the politicisation of EU in the run-up to the 2011 *Eduskunta* elections. Here, institutional factors play a greater 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 hardly ever debated on the floor. 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 is geared towards achieving a broad domestic consensus behind closed doors rather than making EU affairs a matter of public party competition. 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.

Although limited to four parliaments, our findings also shed a rather different light on the involvement of domestic legislatures in EU affairs. The powerful Finnish EU scrutiny model, based on the famous mandating model of the Danish *Folketing* and the blueprint for many of the newer member states, clearly performed worst in our comparison for the period 2002 to 2010. The *Eduskunta* is actively involved in EU affairs, and was, according to Auel et al. (2014), by far the most active parliament from 2010 to 2012, but apart from debates related to the euro crisis more recently, most of this involvement takes place behind closed doors. 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. This finding is also supported by Auel et al. (2014): with the exception of the Swedish *Riksdag*, most of the powerful mandating parliaments perform rather poorly when it comes to parliamentary debates. This does suggest that strong parliamentary influence and a system geared towards mandating the government's negotiations position may come at a cost regarding transparency.

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. Rather, the comparison suggests that plenary debates are more frequent in the absence of strong 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. One exception is the euro crisis, which seems to have increased the share of debates in all four parliaments, but especially in Finland. In addition, there are indications in the literature that the debates over the crisis are also highly polarised, mainly along pro and anti integration cleavages in the UK, and along party cleavages in Germany (Wendler, 2012). Whether this development will last, however, and spill over into other aspects of European politics, is so far an open question.

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

Parliament	Institutional Factors	EU Scrutiny System	Party-Related Factors
Eduskunta	Working parliament: emphasis on legislative scrutiny in committees, firm control of government over plenary agenda but strong opposition rights	Very strong scrutiny system, regular involvement of standing committees, extensive delegation: EAC acts on behalf of parliament (plenary cannot make decisions on mandate)	Limited contestation (partly due to the consensual EU scrutiny model), small anti-EU party, parties are internally divided over EU, larger opinion gap
Assemblée Nationale (until 2008/09)	Until 2008/09: more debating than working parliament, more limited role for committees, almost complete government control over plenary agenda, weak opposition rights (until 2008/09)	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	Limited contestation, but main parties internally divided over EU, small anti-EU party, occasionally strong conflicts over EU issues, smaller opinion gap, but growing
Bundestag	Working parliament: emphasis on legislative scrutiny in committees, but parliament controls plenary agenda, strong opposition rights	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	Limited contestation: fairly solid pro-European consensus among the main parties, share of anti-EU parties relatively small, main parties were cohesive over EU, but dissent has grown much stronger in 2010, small opinion gap, but growing
House of Commons	Debating parliament: central role for plenary, almost complete government control over the plenary agenda, weak opposition rights, main instrument: opposition days	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	Open contestation: strong Eurosceptic party, Europe features regularly in party competition and parties are internally divided over EU, large opinion gap

Table 2: Parliamentary EU debates in the Four Parliaments 2002–2010 and 2010-2012

	Eduskunta	*Assemblée Nationale*	*German Bundestag*	*House of Commons*
Overall share of EU debates 2002 - 2010	Focus on high politics issues, EU laws have been debated only twice during EU membership, no debates on European Council	Share of plenary days with EU debate: 2002-07: 30/577 (5.2%) 2007-10: 32/467 (6.8%) 2002–2010: av. of 7.3 debates per year, 2.91% of overall plenary time Focus on high politics issues, but also debates on EU laws, ex ante debates on European Council	Share of plenary days with EU debate: 2002-05: 39/187 21% 2005-09: 44/233 19% 2009-10: 27/82 33% 2002–2010: av. of 13.41 debates per year, 3.8% of overall plenary time Both high politics and normal EU matters are debated, ex ante debates on European Council	0.4% of floor time (1997-2010) spent on EU documents, i.e. between one and four debates per year Focus on high politics issues, but also debates on EU laws, rarely debates on European Council, short oral statement by PM
EU debates 2010–2012 OPAL	Av. of 18 debates per year, 14.10% of overall plenary time Share of debates on crisis: 63% only one debate on European Council	Av. of 9.67 debates per year, 3.86% of overall plenary time Share of debates on crisis: 62% Ex ante debates on ordinary European Council meetings, but not on informal meetings or Euro Summits	Av. of 41.33 debates per year, 11.85% of overall plenary Share of debates on crisis: 29.84% Ex ante or ex post debates on about 2/3 of European Council Meetings and Euro Summits	Av. of 23.67 debates per year, 3.82% of overall plenary time Share of debates on crisis: 26.67 % Regular, but very short debates on European Council meetings following a statement by the PM

Notes

[i] In an earlier, and much longer, version of this article, we also examined debates on three specific 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 – in detail (Auel & Raunio, 2012). Due to space limitations, we had to cut this analysis from the final version.

[ii] See Auel and Raunio (2012) for a detailed discussion of the institutional and party-related variables.

[iii] 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.

[iv] Observatory of National Parliaments after Lisbon (OPAL, opal-europe.org).

[v] An overview over the plenary debates of the Assemblée Nationale on EU affairs can be found at http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/13/europe/seances.asp.

[vi] The lists of Opposition Day debates for 1997–2010 and since 2010 can be found at http://www.parliament.uk/site-information/glossary/opposition-days/, last accessed 19.05.2013.