

The relationship between national parliaments and the European Parliament remains contested in the area of economic governance

blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2014/09/26/the-relationship-between-national-parliaments-and-the-european-parliament-remains-contested-in-the-area-of-economic-governance/

26/09/2014

The Fiscal Compact, which was signed by 25 of the EU's member states in 2012, foresaw the creation of an inter-parliamentary conference to enable national parliaments to discuss major issues of economic and financial governance. The third meeting of this 'Inter-parliamentary Conference for Economic and Financial Governance' will be held on 29 and 30 September. [Valentin Kreilinger](#) writes that diverging views on the internal organisation of the conference have so far prevented it from meeting the aims originally envisaged in the Fiscal Compact Treaty.



Inter-parliamentary cooperation and scrutiny could compensate national parliaments for the transfer of power from the national to the European level and for the transfer of power from national parliaments to their governments with respect to fiscal and economic policy. It could also allow the European Parliament to exert influence in an area with little legislative activity and therefore an only marginal role for the European Parliament. In this [Inter-Parliamentary Conference on Economic and Financial Governance](#) both parliamentary levels could work together against their declining influence and exert countervailing power. The purpose of inter-parliamentary cooperation should be to 'discuss' matters of common interest and to 'control' in areas with weak parliamentary scrutiny, but not 'decide', because assigning decision-making power would significantly alter the inter-institutional equilibrium.

The need for better cooperation between national parliaments and the European Parliament with respect to the EMU was recognised in the Fiscal Compact treaty (TSCG) which was signed in March 2012:

'As provided for in Title II of Protocol (No 1) on the role of national Parliaments in the European Union annexed to the European Union Treaties, the European Parliament and the national Parliaments of the Contracting Parties will together determine the organisation and promotion of a conference of representatives of the relevant committees of the European Parliament and representatives of the relevant committees of national Parliaments in order to discuss budgetary policies and other issues covered by this Treaty.' (Article 13 TSCG)

On the one hand, the European Parliament has traditionally been sceptical about enhancing the role of national parliaments, fearing that this might undermine its position. In an own-initiative report on a genuine EMU, the European Parliament [stated](#) in November 2012 that only itself, 'as parliamentary body at the Union level for a reinforced and democratic EMU governance', had full democratic legitimacy to exercise control in that area, and described the possibility of creating a mixed parliamentary body as 'both ineffective and illegitimate'.

On the other hand, national parliaments have consciously adopted their positions towards inter-parliamentary cooperation; their preferences for the precise organisation of this kind of inter-parliamentary cooperation differ and the attitudes of national parliaments towards inter-parliamentary cooperation can be classified into three different roles: (1) inward-looking parliaments that rarely engage beyond the minimum requirements; (2) passively cooperative parliaments that participate in additional activities aimed at discussing inter-parliamentary cooperation; and (3) actively networking parliaments that try to build coalitions in order to bring inter-parliamentary cooperation forward. During the negotiations on the inter-parliamentary conference for Economic and Financial Governance, the

Danish, French, German and Lithuanian Parliaments have been important players and adopted strong and visible positions.

The Danish parliament organised two meetings of chairpersons of European affairs committees. In March 2013 chairpersons from 15 member states [declared](#) their preference for 'establishing a small effective conference focused on substantial issues – to be held in the margins of the biannual COSAC-meetings'. In the discussions around the inter-parliamentary conference of Article 13 TSCG, the French National Assembly was in favour of quickly establishing an inter-parliamentary conference and [proposed](#) to follow the model for CFSP and CSDP with 6 MPs per national parliament and 16 MEPs that would accompany and control the European Semester.

This idea was endorsed by the Speakers of Parliaments of the six founding member states in January 2013. Only at a very late stage, in the run-up to the first meeting of the conference in Vilnius in October 2013, the German [position](#) was made clear: It would be 'premature' to seek the adoption Rules of Procedure at that point, but the delegation welcomed the idea to discuss the aims and functions of the conference. The Bundestag has insisted on limiting the conference to being an advisory body. Although the time for preparing the first conference was limited, the Lithuanian parliament had [drafted](#) Rules of Procedure, but the Bundestag and the European Parliament succeeded in exerting pressure on the Lithuanian parliament to remove the item from the agenda of the conference.

These brief examples provide some evidence that the Danish Folketing was actively networking, but might not always be able and willing to pursue this strategy and more often act passively cooperative; that the German Bundestag was inward-looking, but turned into a passively cooperative parliament; that the French Assemblée nationale was actively networking; and, finally, that the Lithuanian Seimas took its Presidency seriously and was actively networking during that period of time. The resources that are available in a national parliament probably determine the extent of its inter-parliamentary activities. Besides that, the motivation of individual MPs to participate is a factor that also plays an important role.

At the moment, the Inter-parliamentary Conference of Article 13 TSCG meets on the basis of the conclusions of the Speakers' Conference that took place in Nicosia in April 2013 and remains a [missed opportunity](#) to agree on something more ambitious: Each parliament can determine the size and composition of its delegation. The conference takes place twice a year (with the Presidency shared between the European Parliament and the parliament of the member state holding the rotating Council Presidency in the first semester and the 'Presidency parliament' of the second semester presiding the conference on its own).

In the first semester of 2014 the Greek Parliament had asked the other parliaments for [their views on the internal organisation](#) of the conference. Now [the Italian parliament holds the presidency](#), facing the challenge of reconciling the different positions. It has scheduled time to have a debate about the Rules of Procedure, but it remains to be seen whether Rules of Procedure following the model of COSAC (Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs of Parliaments of the European Union) or the Inter-parliamentary conference on CFSP/CSDP will be adopted. In the continuum between [conflict and cooperation](#), the result of the conference will be a test-case in determining whether national parliaments and the European Parliament can move from a period of prevailing conflict to a more cooperative relationship.

Please read our comments policy before commenting.

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics. Featured image credit: © European Union 2014 – European Parliament (CC-BY-SA-ND-NC-3.0)

Shortened URL for this post: <http://bit.ly/1Cqctza>

Valentin Kreilinger – *Hertie School of Governance*

Valentin graduated from the LSE with a MSc Politics and Government in the European Union. He worked as a Research Fellow at Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute from 2011 to 2014 and is now a PhD candidate at the Hertie School of Governance in Berlin. His main research interests are national parliaments, fiscal and economic policy coordination in the Economic and Monetary Union, and inter-parliamentary cooperation in the EU.



-