

When Party Politics and Institutional Culture Collide: the Politicization of EU Affairs in the Finnish Eduskunta

Introduction

'All parliaments are weak in dealing with EU-issues, and some are weaker than others. In comparison, the Finnish parliament is certainly not among the weakest. We have shown that the Eduskunta has made an encouraging start in participating in EU policy-making. Facilitated by its early involvement in the preparation of national policies, and by its decentralised decision-making, with all standing committees in a bigger role than in other EU member states, the Eduskunta is in our opinion in a better position to check the executive than other EU national legislatures. However, Finland has at the same time tried very hard to adapt itself to the requirements of the integration process. It has tried to be the best pupil in the class: Finns have been known for their readiness to compromise. It is not self-evident that this is the best way to further national interests in relation to the EU integration process. ... It is most unlikely that the Finnish parliament would start acting as a trouble-maker on EU issues, but it will continue to be well-informed and proactive in their handling of EU-issues.' (Wiberg & Raunio 1996: 320)

The above passage was written less than year after Finland had joined the European Union (EU). Titling their article almost defiantly, or optimistically, as the 'Strong Parliament of A Small EU-Member State', Wiberg and Raunio (1996) argued that the Eduskunta had adjusted quickly to the demands of EU governance, subjecting the government to active scrutiny in European matters. Nonetheless, that article also suggested some challenges, including the increased workload of committees, the lack of plenary debates in EU matters, and the ability to influence government behaviour. Interestingly, the authors also predicted that Finland and the Eduskunta would be constructive partners in EU, not causing problems for European level decision-making.

Indeed, parliamentary processing of EU matters in Finland has been characterized as consensual and pragmatic, with little if any public conflict between the political parties. The main goal is understood to be to achieve parliamentary unanimity – or at least broad consensus, which can arguably be translated into additional influence in EU-level bargaining. However, the euro crisis and the 2011 Eduskunta elections triggered a major domestic politicization of Europe, which has also affected parliamentary

⁴² I am grateful to Hannu Nurmi and the participants of the workshop 'National parliaments in EU policy-making', held in March 2014 at the Hanse-Wissenschaftskolleg in Delmenhorst, for their helpful comments.

behaviour and culture. Drawing on Eduskunta records (primarily committee minutes and reports) and interviews with MPs and civil servants, this chapter examines both the institutional norms guiding parliamentary scrutiny of European matters and the recent politicization of EU affairs in the Eduskunta. EU issues are debated more often in the full chamber, while voting has become more common in the Grand Committee, the European Affairs Committee (EAC) of the Eduskunta, with the losing opposition minority adding its dissenting opinions to the EU-related reports of the committees. Largely attributable to the strategies of the Eurosceptical The Finns Party, the politicization challenges the traditional consensual mode of parliamentary EU decision-making, resulting in a collision of party interests and institutional culture or rules of appropriateness.

Institutional norms, logic of appropriateness and the Eduskunta scrutiny model

Institutional theory considers the processes by which structures and norms become established as authoritative guidelines for social behaviour. Key concepts in this literature are path dependency and institutional equilibrium. Path dependency is often used to explain why certain institutional models are adopted, and it emphasizes that initial formations of political phenomena have a tendency to persevere and hence structure subsequent policy-making. Initially adopted policies or institutional choices get 'locked in', become the appropriate course of action and, as 'rules of the game', direct political behaviour with the consequence that 'initial actions push individual behaviour onto paths that are hard to reverse' (Pierson 1996: 146). The concept of feedback is closely associated with path dependency, for it means that 'once a set of institutions is in place, actors adapt their strategies in ways that reflect but also reinforce the "logic" of the system' (Thelen 1999: 392). Institutional arrangements thus reproduce the distribution of power in political systems. (E.g. North 1990; Goodin 1998; Pierson 2000; Rhodes et al. 2006) Institutional theories have also a prominent place in research on parliaments (Döring 1995; Martin et al. 2014).

Both the initial establishment and subsequent development of parliamentary EU scrutiny models have certainly been driven by path dependency and institutional equilibrium (Dimitrakopoulos 2001; Hefftlar et al. 2015). This applies very much also to the Eduskunta, where the design of the EU scrutiny model was based on two features central to parliamentary culture: committees and strong information rights. In fact, the Eduskunta (2010: 14) itself has remarked that the scrutiny model was deliberately designed to resemble as much as possible the parliamentary procedures for processing domestic legislation. In the Eduskunta, committee deliberations are a compulsory part of the legislative process, precede the plenary stage, and committees must report to the plenary on all matters under consideration except private members' bills and

motions.⁴³ In EU affairs the only real difference is that the specialized committees report to the Grand Committee and not to the plenary. The scrutiny model has also remained essentially unchanged since Finland joined the Union. This applies to both the procedures guiding scrutiny and the actual level or extent of scrutiny. (Raunio 2015)

The stability of scrutiny models can also be approached through the logic of appropriateness, initially developed by March and Olsen (1989, 2004, 2006) and strongly linked to the concepts of path dependency and institutional stability. The logic of appropriateness perceives political activity as the product of matching behavioural norms to situations and highlights the rule-driven and socially embedded natures of human (inter)actions: 'Actors use criteria of similarity and congruence, rather than likelihood and value. To act appropriately is to proceed according to the institutionalized practices of a collectivity, based on mutual, and often tacit, understandings of what is true, reasonable, natural, right, and good.' (March & Olsen 2004: 4) In a nutshell, an individual approaches a situation by interpreting it in the light of one's professional identity and context, evaluates the appropriateness of different courses of action and then selects the alternative that is perceived as the most appropriate. The logic of appropriateness is thereby also connected to the socialization effects of institutions, with individuals learning and becoming accustomed to the prevailing organizational norms and 'ways of doing things'. Central features of the logic of appropriateness are thus rules, social identity, and the recognition of situations (Messick 1999).

The logic of appropriateness framework has received also quite strong criticism, particularly regarding its lack of robustness and imprecision or how to refute or prove that such a logic explains individual or group behavior (e.g. Goldmann 2005). In contrast with the identity-based logic of appropriateness, in the logic of consequences (or calculation) action is more preference-driven and guided by evaluating alternatives based on their outcomes. That is, an individual or group chooses the alternative with the highest expected pay-off. But as March and Olsen themselves recognize, drawing a clear line between two such behavioural logics can be exceedingly difficult, as the strategy of complying with institutional norms can also be driven by a cost-benefit calculus regarding pay-offs. Operating logics can be complementary and established norms do not 'determine political behavior or policy outcomes precisely. Rules, laws, identities and institutions provide parameters for action rather than dictate a specific action.' (March & Olsen (2004: 10)

Commonly accepted rules are likely to be sustained as long as they are perceived both legitimate and efficient: 'rule-driven behavior associated with successes or survival is likely to be repeated. Rules associated with failures are not.' (March & Olsen 2004: 12) Rule changes are normally produced by a critical juncture, such as a major policy

⁴³ The Eduskunta along with other Nordic legislatures can be classified as a 'working' parliament as opposed to 'debating' parliaments like the House of Commons. 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. In addition, debating legislatures are, on average, less consensual, with the opposition using the plenary to criticise the government. (Arter 1999: 211-217; Bergman & Strøm 2011)

failure or significantly altered external circumstances. Time constraints are also likely to favour clear rules, as individuals and institutions need to cope with tight deadlines. Different operating logics can also apply to single institutions. For example, in parliament opposition MPs may employ more confrontational language in the plenary when criticizing the government, with the same legislators then engaging in more constructive argumentation in committees in order to maximize their policy influence.

Turning to the Eduskunta, we have already noted the durability of the scrutiny model. The Eduskunta (2005, 2010) has repeatedly expressed its satisfaction with the scrutiny system, with the critique limited to relatively minor adjustments regarding matters such as information provided by the government and the need to become more pro-actively involved in the processing of EU affairs. When scholars have ranked the effectiveness of the various parliamentary EU scrutiny mechanisms, the Eduskunta has without exception been categorized as one of the strongest parliaments (e.g. Karlas 2012; Winzen 2013; Auel et al. 2015). The Finnish scrutiny model has also been exported abroad. The parliaments of at least the Baltic countries, Hungary and Slovenia examined it closely when preparing for EU membership, adopting several features of the Finnish mechanism into their own scrutiny models.⁴⁴ Hence the basic set-up of the system has not been questioned at any point, not even by a minority of MPs, and the Eduskunta believes that the adopted model provides an efficient framework for parliamentary control of the government in EU policy.

The rules guiding EAC work

What are the rules guiding MP behaviour in the Eduskunta and its EAC – those that MPs should interpret as appropriate course of action? As discussed above, one of the challenges in the logic of appropriateness framework is to empirically prove a shared understanding of such rules among the individuals in the institution. Here this challenge is met through two sets of data: Eduskunta documents – the EAC rules of procedure, explanatory statements or reports about parliamentary EU scrutiny, and evaluations of the scrutiny model – and interviews with parliamentary civil servants and MPs.⁴⁵ Obviously access to committee meetings or discussions would have been valuable, but Eduskunta committees meet behind closed doors and there are no verbatim accounts of the sessions.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Working Group IV of the European Convention, which focused on the role of national parliaments, received reports about the Finnish model and the chair of the Working Group, Gisela Stuart, visited the Eduskunta during the Convention.

⁴⁵ The most important documents are Grand Committee statements (SuVL 3/1995; SuVL 2/2008) and its rules of procedure (SuVL 2000), and Eduskunta's evaluative reports on the scrutiny system (Eduskunta 2005, 2010). The interviews with parliamentary civil servants and MPs were carried out at various points between 1995 and 2014, particularly in 1995, 2004-2005, 2008 and 2013-2014.

⁴⁶ The documents considered by the EAC, together with the agenda of the meeting, are normally made available to the public, as are any formal statements or reports of the EAC and other committees. In addition, a press release is published after each meeting. The information contained in the public minutes of the committees is basically restricted to listing the agenda items, which parliamentarians and expert witnesses were present and spoke, and potential votes and dissenting opinions. Any speeches or questions, and any replies from government representatives are not minuted.

Two interconnected features of parliamentary EU scrutiny stand out as particularly relevant: government scrutiny and parliamentary unity. These features need to be understood in the context of the major constitutional reform which has radically transformed Finnish politics. A period of far-reaching constitutional change culminated in the new constitution which entered into force in 2000⁴⁷, curtailing presidential powers and bringing the Finnish political system closer to a pure parliamentary democracy (Nousiainen 2001; Raunio 2011). Hence EU membership presented a challenge for the Eduskunta, concerned not to see its new-won powers weakened as a result of the political dynamics of regional integration. The goal was to guarantee the Eduskunta as powerful a position in EU decision-making as possible for any national legislature, with the parliament studying closely the work of the existing scrutiny systems in the national legislatures, particularly that of the Danish Folketinget (Jääskinen 2000). In fact, the role of national parliaments has been an important theme in Finnish EU discourse. Finnish governments and MPs have repeatedly argued that national parliaments are the primary channel for providing democratic legitimacy to EU decision-making, with the European Parliament (EP) complementing the role of domestic legislatures.

The scrutiny model is primarily designed for controlling the government in EU affairs, with emphasis on mandating Brussels-bound ministers in the EAC. The Eduskunta has explicitly and consistently stated that the main objective of the scrutiny system is effective control of the government. The main procedural rules – relatively pro-active engagement, delegation of scrutiny to specialized committees, strong information rights, and confidential ministerial hearings in the EAC – aim at facilitating government accountability. It is the Grand Committee that coordinates parliamentary work on EU issues and speaks on behalf of the Eduskunta in such matters (with the exception of those questions that specifically require plenary approval). This emphasis on government scrutiny in EAC has clearly impacted plenary involvement in EU affairs which was, at least until the euro crisis, very limited (Raunio & Wiberg 2010: 85-86; Auel & Raunio 2014). Debates focused almost exclusively on ‘high politics’ matters such as Treaty amendments, single currency, and security and defence policy. However, the decision to delegate EU affairs almost completely to the EAC and the sectoral committees is, of course, also a deliberate decision from political parties. As European integration produces disagreement both within and among the parties, public debates on the floor might damage them by highlighting these internal cleavages.

With parliamentary activity geared to scrutinizing the government, it is not surprising that the approach of Eduskunta to either interparliamentary cooperation or to establishing closer links with Finnish members of the EP has so far been fairly passive. Overall, the Eduskunta has emphasized that it participates in EU governance by controlling the government, not through direct links with the EU institutions. The Eduskunta (2010) has indeed explicitly stated that it views any direct links between national parliaments and EU institutions as problematic, emphasizing that domestic legislatures participate in EU politics indirectly by controlling their governments. The

⁴⁷ The Constitution of Finland, 11 June 1999 (731/1999).

Eduskunta has even argued that there is only ever one Finnish position at the EU level – the one approved by the Eduskunta. The government and the Eduskunta do not have separate, independent positions on EU matters.

The Grand Committee aims at unanimity. This consensus-seeking approach applies both to the conduct of committee meetings and actual EAC decision-making. Overall, the processing of EU matters in the Eduskunta can be characterized as pragmatic, with little if any public conflict between or within the political parties. Several factors have contributed to this consensual approach. First, during the Cold War Finland's foreign policy could be labelled as 'compulsory consensus' and put a premium on maintaining amicable relations with the Soviet Union (Arter 1987). Largely the same logic continues to guide foreign policy decision-making in the post-Cold War era, with an emphasis on achieving national unity and avoiding public cleavages. The priority of the domestic EU coordination system is to manufacture national unanimity, or at least broad elite consensus, which can arguably be translated into additional influence in EU level bargaining (Johansson & Raunio 2010; Hyvärinen & Raunio 2014).⁴⁸ The fragmented party system, with no party as a rule winning more than 25 % of the votes in elections, also facilitates consensual governance and ideological convergence between political parties. Cabinet formation has something of an 'anything goes' feel to it and governments are typically majority coalitions that bring together parties from the left and the right (Arter 2009). Reflecting the consensus-seeking approach, the government–opposition dimension has not been anywhere near as significant in EU affairs as in domestic issues. The EAC has insisted that all relevant information is to be made available on equal terms to both government and opposition MPs. The objective is to produce unanimous 'committee' opinions instead of decisions that pit the governing parties against the opposition.⁴⁹

Regarding decision-making and outputs, the Grand Committee normally concludes the processing of the matter in the form of a summary by the chair. Written statements are reserved for more salient matters or if the EAC wants amendments to the government position. In other matters, the EAC simply gives its consent or agrees with the government position. The EAC does not usually impose strict mandates, leaving ministers a certain amount of room for manoeuvre. It is more important to define the range of outcomes acceptable to the EAC, which the government can then use as a bargaining chip in Brussels. This is reflected in the behaviour of the Finnish government in the EU, which has mainly been characterized by flexibility and the desire to make compromises. It is expected that MPs do not force votes to be held and that they do not add dissenting opinions to the committee minutes or statements.

⁴⁸ Interestingly, when Finnish and Swedish MPs were asked in a survey carried out in 2001–2002 who should have influence in domestic EU decision-making, Swedish MPs placed the electorate in second place (with the cabinet) after parliament, while Finnish deputies placed the electorate in eighth position after the various national political institutions (Ahlbäck Öberg & Jungar 2009).

⁴⁹ These features caught the attention of a visiting delegation from the House of Commons. According to Matthew Kirk, the UK ambassador to Finland, the visitors were particularly struck by the strong consensus among Finnish politicians, the wide cooperation between the government and the opposition on EU affairs and that in an otherwise transparent society such a large amount of parliamentary work was conducted behind closed doors. A. Sipilä, Suomen eduskunta antoi briteille mallia EU-asioiden käsittelyssä, *Helsingin Sanomat* 23.3.2005.

But while the processing of EU issues in the parliament is based on constitution and other formal rules, the appropriateness of various courses of action in the institution depends very much on voluntary compliance by individuals. Here it is essential to remember that parliamentary democracy is effectively party democracy. Division into government and opposition is the most important cleavage in all European parliaments, with both sets of parties aiming at maximizing their support in the next elections. Hence any study on parliaments must pay particular attention to the incentives and strategies of political parties. And as shown in the next section, in Finland the outbreak of the euro crisis and the 2011 Eduskunta elections certainly triggered a considerable politicization of European integration, thus challenging the institutional norms of parliamentary engagement in EU affairs.

Enter voting and disagreement: when the consensus is shaken

Finland used to have a relatively broad partisan consensus about Europe. The divisive nature of the EU membership referendum held in 1994, however, indicated that the commitment to integration which prevailed among the political parties was not shared to the same extent by the electorate. There was thus a notable lack of congruence between the citizens and the political parties, with most parties considerably more supportive of the EU than their supporters (Mattila & Raunio 2005, 2012). However, in the run-up to the 2011 Eduskunta elections, the problems affecting the Eurozone produced heated debates, and the EU – or more precisely the role of Finland in the bailout measures – became the main topic of the campaign. The election result was nothing short of extraordinary, producing major changes in the national party system and attracting considerable international media attention. The Eurosceptic and populist The Finns Party⁵⁰ won 19.1 % of the votes, a staggering increase of 15 % on the 2007 elections and the largest ever increase in support achieved by a single party in Eduskunta elections. All the other parties represented in the Eduskunta lost votes.

The election campaign also affected national EU policy. Since entering office in June 2011, the 'six pack' National Coalition-led cabinet has taken a tougher stance on EU negotiations. The government has demanded bilateral guarantees on its bailout payments; attempted, on its own, to reject 85 % majority decision-making in the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), demanding unanimity instead; and blocked, together with the Netherlands, the entry of Bulgaria and Romania into the Schengen area. Whether this signals a more long-term change to national integration policy remains to be seen, but at least in this electoral term the government is under considerable domestic pressure not to make too many concessions in Brussels. More broadly, it

⁵⁰ The party adopted its current English name in August 2011. Until then it had been known as the True Finns. According to the party leader, Timo Soini, the new simpler name is intended to emphasize the fact that the party represents ordinary citizens. Soini also felt that the old name had an extreme right or nationalistic slant to it. The exact translation of the Finnish name of the party, Perussuomalaiset, would be 'common Finns' or 'ordinary Finns'.

appears that the emphasis on national interests and the role of smaller member states has become more pronounced in Finland in recent years, and the success of The Finns Party has pushed the other parties in the direction of more cautious EU discourse.

The Finns Party clearly had an electoral incentive to capitalize on the euro crisis. The Finns Party is the only party represented in the Eduskunta that has consistently been opposed to European integration — and also the only party which has systematically used the EU as a central part of its electoral campaigns and political discourse. The Finns Party has forcefully attacked the consensual modes of decision-making and demanded public debates about Europe, calling for an end to ‘one truth’ politics. Indeed, it was the ‘outsider’ position which enabled The Finns to benefit from these developments. As the party was not part of the consensual arrangements, it could attack the existing status quo and the bailout measures with more legitimacy and credibility than its competitors.

Plenary debates and confidence votes

Before examining the changing work culture of the EAC, it is worth noting the effect of the euro crisis and The Finns Party on the plenary. In contrast to previous lack of European debates, between 2010 and 2012 18 EU debates took place on average per year, with 63 % of them focusing on the euro area (Auel & Raunio 2014). However, in many of these cases plenary involvement was required as the Eurozone coordination or bailout measures necessitated national legislation – that is, the issues were introduced in the parliament as domestic bills that essentially always require plenary approval. It is nonetheless obvious that there was considerable pressure for these debates to be held, and indeed now that the euro area problems have become less acute, the plenary also debates such matters less frequently.

More interesting are interpellations that have become the standard form of confidence vote. The number of interpellations has increased steadily, and their main objective is to raise the profile of the opposition and to stimulate debate on topical issues. Between 1995 and 2014 a total of 72 interpellations were tabled. Before 2010 two were EU-related, with both of them dealing with Common Agricultural Policy and its impact on Finland (the interpellations were from 1998 and 2003). However, since the outbreak of the euro crisis the opposition has tabled five crisis-related interpellations. The first of these was signed by the Left Alliance (VK 6/2010 vp), while the other four were put forward by The Finns Party (VK 2/2011 vp, VK 4/2012 vp, VK 5/2012 vp, VK 3/2013 vp). These interpellation debates are well-attended by MPs and the government and attract considerable media coverage. Hence they indicate that The Finns Party is not afraid to publicly challenge the government in EU affairs. These parliamentary debates about Eurozone are really the first time that the government has been forced to justify and defend its EU policies in public – and when the opposition has attacked the government publicly over its handling of European policy. Also in domestic politics the more confrontational style and colourful language of The Finns Party has impacted the tone of the plenary speeches that has previously been characterized as mainly facts-based and cautious and lacking real deliberation or dialogue (Pekonen 2011).

TABLE 1. *Dissenting opinions in Grand Committee statements, 1995-2013.*

Year / policy area	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total	%	DO	%
General affairs	1					1	2	3	2(1)		2			1		6(1)		1		19	23,2	2	8
Foreign affairs		1(1)							1		1	2(1)				1(1)				6	7,3	3	12
Economic and Financial affairs	1							1		2(1)						4(2)	7(6)	3(2)		18	22	11	44
Justice and Home affairs	1	1(1)	1	1		5	1					2(2)	1(1)	1(1)	2				1	17	20,7	5	20
Employment, Social Policy, Health, Consumer politics				1								1				1				3	3,7	0	0
Competitiveness (internal market, industry, research and space)					1		1	1		1(1)		2				1(1)				7	8,5	2	8
Transport, Telecommunications and Energy			1														1			2	2,4	0	0
Agriculture and Fisheries			1(1)													1				2	2,4	1	4
Environment																	1			1	1,2	0	0
Education, Youth, Culture and Sport															1(1)		1			2	2,4	1	4
European Council				1			1	2												4	4,9	0	0
Others												1								1	1,2	0	0
Total	3	2	3	3	1	6	5	7	3	3	3	8	1	2	3	14	10	4	1	82	100	25	100

TABLE 2. *Dissenting opinions in Grand Committee minutes, 2002-2013.*

Year / policy area	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total	%
General affairs														
Foreign affairs					1								1	3,3
Economic and Financial affairs			1						3	4	9	6	23	76,7
Justice and Home affairs		1											1	3,3
Employment, Social Policy, Health, Consumer politics														
Competitiveness (internal market, industry, research and space)														
Transport, Telecommunications and Energy														
Agriculture and Fisheries											2	1	3	10
Environment														
Education, Youth, Culture and Sport														
European Council								1			1		2	6,7
Others														
Total		1	1		1			1	3	4	12	7	30	100

TABLE 3. *Voting in the Grand Committee, 2007-2013.*

Year / policy areas	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total	%
General affairs	1		1	1	1			4	2,9
Foreign affairs									
Economic and Financial affairs				9	26	26	27	88	62,9
Justice and Home affairs	4	3	3	2	3		3	18	12,9
Employment, Social Policy, Health, Consumer politics			3		1			4	2,9
Competitiveness (internal market, industry, research and space)				1				1	0,7
Transport, Telecommunications and Energy			1			1		2	1,4
Agriculture and Fisheries		2	1		1	7	1	12	8,6
Environment				2		1	2	5	3,6
Education, Youth, Culture and Sport			1					1	0,7
European Council			1	2				3	2,1
Others							2	2	1,4
Total	5	5	11	17	32	35	35	140	

EAC decision-making

In line with the 'working parliament' thesis, committees are the backbone of the Eduskunta. They meet behind closed doors and are the central arena for constructive argumentation and party-political cooperation, including between government and opposition parties (Helander & Pekonen 2007; Rinne 2010; Pekonen 2011). Committees aim at unanimous decisions without voting, but an individual MP or the losing minority can add its dissenting view to the committee reports or statements. Overall, the number of such dissenting opinions has increased since the turn of the millennium, with roughly every fifth report or statement nowadays containing a dissenting view (Mattila 2014).

Examining Grand Committee decision-making and outputs, we can see a clear change from 2010-2011 onwards. The first indicator is the number of dissenting opinions appended to EAC statements (Table 1). Between 1995 and 2013 the EAC issued 82 statements, 25 of which included a dissenting view (a total of 43 dissenting opinions as many statements had more than one dissenting view). 18 dissenting opinions were issued up to 2009, and 25 during 2010-2013. During the latter period The Finns Party were signatories in 11, the Centre in 6, the Left Alliance in 5, the Social Democrats in 3 and the Christian Democrats in 2 dissenting opinions (two of which had signatories from more than one party). Particularly since the 2011 elections the dissenting views have been put forward by the two opposition parties, The Finns Party and the Centre. The clear majority of the post-2010 dissenting opinions have been added to statements on economic and financial affairs.⁵¹

Individual MPs or discontented minorities can also add their dissenting views to committee minutes (Table 2). Between 2002 and 2013 the EAC held 722 meetings, with the minutes of only 30 meetings containing such dissenting views. However, until 2009 four minutes had a dissenting view, with the remaining 26 again from the 2010-2013 euro crisis period (many of the minutes had more than one dissenting opinion). Examining the signatories from 2010 onwards, The Finns Party signed 26, the Centre 11, the Left Alliance and Christian Democrats 3, the Social Democrats 2, and the Swedish People's Party one dissenting view. As with the dissenting opinions added to EAC statements, the overwhelming majority of the post-2010 dissenting opinions dealt with economic and financial affairs.

Third numerical indicator is EAC voting (Table 3). All committees, and especially the Grand Committee, strive for consensus, with unanimous decisions without voting. Data for the 2007-2013 period shows that in both 2007 and 2008 there were 5, in 2009 11, in 2010 17, in 2011 32 and in both 2012 and 2013 35 votes (voting could be proposed by MPs from more than one party). Between 2010 and 2013 the votes were initiated by The Finns Party (66 times), the Centre (51), the Social Democrats (10), the Left Alliance (8), National Coalition and Swedish People's Party (2) and the

⁵¹ In Tables 1-3 the categorization by policy areas is based on Council configurations.

Christian Democrats (1). After the 2011 elections votes have been demanded by the two opposition parties and the overwhelming majority has been on euro crisis-related issues.

The numerical indicators and interviews confirm that the euro crisis ushered in a new era of more contested parliamentary engagement in EU affairs. There are more plenary debates and even EU-related interpellations, and there is considerably more voting instead of unanimous committee decisions, with the opposition also using the opportunity of adding their dissenting opinions to EAC statements. It is not easy to interpret the reasons behind this more assertive behavior. Particularly The Finns Party have an electoral incentive for publicly attacking the government in EU affairs, but while plenary debates are reported in the media, news coverage of EAC meetings is sporadic at best. The Finns Party MPs, 34 out of 39 of whom were first elected to the Eduskunta in 2011, may not share the behavioural norms of Eduskunta and its EAC to the same extent as their colleagues from the more established parties. It is nonetheless clear that there is also a lot of deep-felt frustration in the Eduskunta. MPs across the Union have questioned whether national parliaments can genuinely debate and examine the euro crisis issues, a concern that is understandable given the complexity of the situation, the need by the member states to achieve quick results, and the high number of European Council and other EU meetings that deal with the Eurozone crisis (Puntscher Riekmann & Wydra 2013).

Concluding discussion

There is no doubt that the system established for parliamentary scrutiny of EU matters works rather well. The initial mainly positive assessment by Wiberg and Raunio (1996) seems still valid, but perhaps it is more instructive to reflect here on two challenges they identified in that article from almost two decades ago – challenges that certainly are pertinent to national parliaments across the Union: the workload of the EAC and lack of adequate time for genuine deliberation, and the ability to influence government behaviour.

The basic scrutiny model has remained unchanged since Finland joined the EU. The mandate-oriented system is comprehensive, with the Eduskunta scrutinizing essentially all EU laws and at least the more important non-legislative EU matters. It is possible that the system could be made more selective, with parliamentarians focusing more on those issues which are genuinely salient. Obviously it can be useful, particularly from the point of view of government accountability, to demand information and hear ministers about all matters on the agendas of the Council so that MPs can intervene if needed, but Eduskunta could engage in more forward-looking issue selection with the help of either national or EU documents such as the Commission's annual legislative programme. This more selective approach would seem logical as most EU matters are not really debated in the Eduskunta, and the committees often just agree with the government position. The Eduskunta (2010) has noted this problem, recommending for example that specialized committees should not produce written reports on all EU

draft acts or that the EAC could issue more written opinions on salient non-legislative European issues. Second, although the Eduskunta becomes involved in the processing of EU matters on average much earlier than most national parliaments, the changing nature of EU governance, and particularly the early agreements in the co-decision procedure, reinforce the need for pro-active involvement. Hence, the Eduskunta has itself noted that it should become involved earlier, for example, at the stage when the Commission is drafting its initiatives. In addition, one option would be to increase the length of the meetings of the Grand Committee and the specialized committees, thus allocating more time for scrutiny of EU matters.

Regarding the impact of parliamentary EU scrutiny, Wiberg and Raunio (1996: 319) claimed that 'the Eduskunta has acted as much more than just a rubber stamp. The parliament has produced clear policy guidelines to the Finnish ministers which have then been successfully implemented in the overwhelming majority of cases.' Indeed, the Finnish scrutiny model puts strong emphasis on government scrutiny, which takes place almost exclusively behind closed doors in the EAC and the specialized committees. Nonetheless, it must be stressed that the formulation of national EU policy is very much government-driven – as indeed is the case for domestic policy too (Raunio & Wiberg 2008, 2014). On certain more controversial issues, most notably on joining the single currency in 1997–98 and the debates on the euro crisis and Finland's participation in the bailout measures in 2010–13, the Eduskunta and its EAC have demanded further information and reports from the government or even changes to the government's negotiating position. The dominant role of the government is not surprising, given that all the cabinets formed during Finnish EU membership have been majority coalitions with large majorities in parliament. It is thus more realistic to argue that instead of genuinely directing national EU policy, the Eduskunta sets constraints or the parameters for government's European policy (Raunio 2007).

Coming back to the main argument of the chapter, the analysis showed clearly how the euro crisis era has politicized EU affairs in the Eduskunta, with more European issues debated in the plenary and also considerably more contestation – as measured by voting and dissenting opinions – in the Grand Committee. Particularly the appearance of EU affairs in the plenary is a welcome development, as public debates and party-political conflicts should reduce democratic deficit by increasing media coverage and visibility of EU policy-making. But while academics and the media may have good reasons to promote openness and public contestation, politicians themselves may have equally good reasons to favour less transparent and consensual modes of policy-making. The Eduskunta has defended in camera committee meetings with the need to ensure confidential exchange of information with the government, which in turn (so the argument goes) facilitates stronger scrutiny of EU politics. MPs may also believe that unity at home improves the bargaining position of the national government in Brussels. The euro crisis period suggests that there need not be a trade-off: a more active role for the plenary in EU matters and more contested EAC decision-making do not rule out effective government scrutiny.

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