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Parliamentary Communication in EU Affairs

Connecting with the Electorate?

Edited by
Katrin Auel and Tapio Raunio

Parliamentary Communication in EU Affairs

Over the last twenty years, the role of national parliaments in EU affairs has gained considerable academic attention. Much of the literature, however, has focused on parliamentary scrutiny and control in EU affairs. What tends to be generally overlooked is that the parliamentary communication function is at least as important in EU politics as the control function. Democratic legitimacy depends on a vibrant public debate on political solutions and alternatives to allow citizens to make informed political (electoral) choices and to exercise democratic control. Within the EU, it is precisely the opacity of policy-making processes and the lack of public discourse that have been defined as core problems of democratic legitimacy. Here, parliaments have the potential to provide an ideal arena for the deliberation of important European issues and thus to help overcome the much lamented distance between European policy processes and the citizens. Yet, despite parliaments' central relevance for the legitimacy of European politics, the parliamentary communication function remains so far under researched. The volume aims at filling this gap by providing both qualitative and quantitative comparative data on various communication efforts by national parliaments.

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The Operating Logics of National Parliaments and Mass Media in the Politicisation of Europe

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EU Politicisation and National Parliaments: Visibility of Choices and Better Aligned Ministers?

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Introduction: Connecting with the Electorate? Parliamentary Communication in EU Affairs

KATRIN AUDEL and TAPPIO RAUNIO

National parliaments have often been described as latecomers to European integration, but there is little doubt that they have developed the institutional means to become more involved over the last few years – and especially since the Lisbon Treaty. Accordingly, the main focus of the literature has been on this institutional adaptation and thus on the relationship between the parliament and the government in European Union (EU) affairs. Other parliamentary functions, and in particular those that relate to their citizens such as the communication function, by contrast, have been largely neglected. Yet democracy depends on a viable public debate on policy choices and political alternatives to allow citizens to make informed political (electoral) choices and to exercise democratic control. This collection therefore investigates whether, and how, individual members of parliament, political parties, or legislatures as institutions ‘link’ with their electorates in EU politics. This introduction discusses why engaging with the public in EU affairs is – or at least should be – an important aspect of parliamentary work, introduces parliamentary means of communication and assesses parliamentary incentives and disincentives ‘to go public’ in EU politics.

Introduction

The role of national legislatures in the political system of the European Union (EU) first received serious political and academic attention in the mid-1990s in connection with debates on how to cure the EU’s democratic deficit.¹ Academic interest in the topic drew further inspiration from the first comparative projects that showed domestic legislatures to be largely ineffective or uninterested in controlling their governments in EU matters (among many: Laursen & Pappas, 1995; Norton, 1996). Since then, the role of national parliaments has featured quite prominently on the research agenda of both parliamentary and EU scholars, with several comparative research projects on national parliamentary scrutiny of EU policies completed during the first decade of the new millennium (Auel & Benz, 2005; Barrett, 2008; Maurer & Wessels, 2001; O’Brennan & Raunio, 2007; Tans, Zoethout, & Peters, 2007).