

Two sides of the same coin? Unraveling the potential of inter-parliamentary cooperation in the European Union

As defined in Article 10 of the Treaty on European Union, the European Parliament (EP) and national parliaments are the two pillars of the EU's representative democracy. They thus have a strategic role to play as brokers of democratic legitimacy in the EU's multi-level political system. However, the untapped potential of their cooperation is one of the factors behind the rise of Euroscepticism, the success of populist parties and the *de facto* disenchantment of citizens with the EU political project. The extraordinary circumstances of the COVID pandemic have led, on the one hand, to the marginalisation of parliaments vis-à-vis the executives and, on the other, to the need to seek new areas of inter-parliamentary cooperation (IPC) to ensure adequate scrutiny, transparency and accountability of political decisions in response to the crisis. At the same time, IPC becomes especially crucial in the context of the ongoing Conference on the Future of Europe in the framework of which both the EP and NPs have a strategic opportunity to channel and develop proposals for EU reforms put forward by European citizens. Although the Lisbon Treaty offers several possibilities to strengthen the IPC, for certain reasons they remain unexploited, while the EP and NPs - instead of complementing each other's legitimacy - tend to compete for influence.

In this context, the underlying goal of this project is to explore the potential of IPC by identifying the drivers and hindering factors to effective cooperation between national parliaments and the EP in the field of European politics. This goal breaks down into two specific research objectives: The first is to identify, with most possible precision, the hitherto unexplored institutional preferences of the EP and national parliaments with regard to mutual cooperation. The research questions the project poses are: *What factors shape parliamentary preferences for IPC? Are they endogenous (i.e. related to political affiliation or nationality) or exogenous (i.e. determined by policy sectors or type of IPC)? What preferences do the EP and national parliaments have as regards potential reforms to strengthen IPC in the EU?*

The second research objective of this project is to determine the impact of the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) on IPC dynamics. The research questions become: *Does the CoFoE act as a driver or a hindering factor to cooperation between the EP and national parliaments? Have we observed a) an improvement, b) no change, or perhaps c) a deterioration in this respect and, if so, in which policy and institutional areas?* The working hypothesis of this project is that, given its institutional design, the CoFoE will be a catalyst for new forms of transnational parliamentarism in the EU. The parliamentary preferences identified beforehand will be used to nuance the impact of the CoFoE in relation to individual parliaments, parties or political groups.

In pursuing these research objectives, this project will fill the following gaps in the literature: By identifying factors concerning parliamentary preferences for IPC, the project will offer a new, theory-driven research perspective that goes beyond the descriptive dimension of 'what works and what does not' in inter-parliamentary relations. By treating parliaments as strategically oriented institutional actors, and party political orientations as one explanatory factor behind their preferences, this project will add to the existing body of work the hitherto missing partisan dimension of IPC. The envisaged 'preference mapping' will help to locate new areas of untapped potential of IPC that have so far remained overlooked. It will also be one of the first attempts to analytically examine the impact of the Conference on the Future of Europe on the IPC dynamics, thus contributing to a better conceptualisation and theorisation of the emerging phenomenon of transnational parliamentarism in the EU.