Designing Politicization

How Control Mechanisms in National
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Pieter de Wilde is PhD fellow at ARENA - Centre for European Studies, University of Oslo. E-mail: p.d.wilde@arena.uio.no

Abstract

This paper asks how ex ante and ex post control mechanisms structuring the involvement of national parliaments in EU policy-formulation affect the size and scope of conflict of parliamentary debates. The direct and indirect effects of control mechanisms are assessed in a comparative case study on plenary parliamentary debates in the Danish Folketing and Dutch Tweede Kamer on the EU multiannual budgets Delors II, Agenda 2000 and Financial Perspectives 2007-2013. It finds that control mechanisms have direct effects on the size of parliamentary debate and indirectly on the scope of conflict. As control mechanisms structure the timing of debates, different interactions with the policy-formulation process and media coverage are created leading to different scopes of conflict. It finds that ex ante mechanisms trigger smaller, more partisan debates at an early stage of the policy-formulation process, whereas ex post mechanisms stimulate larger, later and intergovern-mental debates. If, from a normative democratic point of view, we value large, partisan debates, these findings present a problem as there appears to be a trade-off between high quantity on the one hand, and partisan conflict on the other hand.

Keywords

Introduction

National parliaments of European Union (EU) member states struggle to hold their governments accountable for policy-formulation in the EU (Maurer and Wessels 2001; Norton 1996a; O'Brennan and Raunio 2007b; Raunio and Hix 2001). In their efforts to safeguard or regain control over government activity, national parliaments face a question of institutional design. Some of them – like the Danish Folketing – have created control mechanisms to strengthen *ex ante* accountability in the form of strong European Affairs Committees (EACs) (Laursen 2001; Møller Sousa 2008). Others – like the Dutch Tweede Kamer – have created less powerful EACs but added *ex post* mechanisms. This choice between different control mechanisms may result in unintended consequences. Of particular interest from a democratic perspective are consequences to the extent and nature of parliamentary debates (Auel 2007). These debates need to be substantial in size and feature differences of opinion in order to facilitate collective will-formation and exchange of arguments (Eriksen and Fossum 2002) as well as to signal party positions to voters, thus presenting them with a meaningful choice and the possibility to 'throw the rascals out' in future elections (Mair 2001).

The main question of this article is how and to what extent ex ante and ex post control mechanisms affect the size and scope of conflict of parliamentary debates in EU policy-formulation. To answer this question, we first discuss the importance and conceptualization of parliamentary debates on EU issues. It then presents an explanatory framework in order to analyze how variations may be caused by different forms of control mechanisms. Although from the perspective of alleviating the democratic deficit we would prefer large parliamentary debates with partisan dimensions of conflict, this study presents evidence that we are in reality faced with a trade-off, which can at least partially be attributed to the design of ex ante and ex post control mechanisms.

Debating Europe in national parliaments

As the EU increasingly resembles a polity – or 'political system' (Hix 2005) – normative standards of democratic legitimacy increasingly apply (Bellamy and Warleigh 1998; Føllesdal and Hix 2006; Lord 1998). Since the EU is not a full blown federation or state, and the legitimacy of the European Parliament is questioned, there remains an important role to be fulfilled by national parliaments (Auel 2005; Kiiver 2006; Tans et al. 2007). Especially, since all EU member states have some form of (semi-)parliamentary democracy, where government is directly accountable to parliament (Müller et al. 2003). Aside from ensuring democratic legitimacy at EU level, national parliaments are the main representative body to support democratic legitimacy at national level. This increasingly requires an involvement in EU policy-formulation as many political decisions made in 'Brussels' directly affect citizens in the Member States.

Although there are different categorizations of functions of parliaments in the literature, these generally fall into two groups: controlling government and providing an arena for public debate (Müller et al. 2003: 20). On the one hand, parliaments hold government accountable for its actions and make sure that government acts in correspondence with the will of the majority in parliament. On the other hand,

parliaments are a central institutional arena for public deliberation and will-formation for two reasons. Firstly, arguments about European integration should be exchanged in an effort to reach optimal policies (Eriksen and Fossum 2002). Secondly, debates are needed through which party positions on EU issues can be signaled to voters, thus allowing voters to recognize which party best represents their interests and thereby inform their votes in the next election (Føllesdal and Hix 2006; Mair 2005; 2007). Thus, there is a democratic need for *politicized* debates in parliaments, i.e. debates sufficiently large and conflictual to ensure a sufficient exchange of arguments in which political parties defend different positions (De Wilde 2007).

Most studies on national parliaments in the EU are interested in their 'control' function (Maurer and Wessels 2001; Norton 1996b; O'Brennan and Raunio 2007b; Tans et al. 2007). Thanks to this literature, we know there is a wide range of 'control mechanisms' (Norton 1996b; Pollack 1997) created by national parliaments. The most notable of these are European Affair Committees (EACs) in which representatives of all political parties discuss European matters with the relevant ministers. All Member States have created such specialized committees (O'Brennan and Raunio 2007a). There remain, however, strong national differences as to how powerful EACs are (e.g. Raunio 2005). It is therefore interesting to study how these different control mechanisms affect parliamentary debates.

Conceptualizing debate: size and scope of conflict

As clearly recognized in the literature, parliamentary activity in Europe should be understood in terms of political parties (King 1976). To conceptualize quality, we need to take into account party political dynamics, where different views on politics, policy preferences and policy priorities are more often located between parties, than within parties. Furthermore, in parliamentary democracies, parties may either be in government, or they may be in opposition which will affect their primary stance towards government and their inclination to support or challenge government policy. In order to understand how these party dynamics play out in EU policy-formulation, we also need to understand the specificities of EU issues next to the effects of party politics. As Mouritzen (1997) argues, EU policy-formulation takes place somewhere in the limbo between traditional foreign and domestic policy. It resembles foreign policy as national governments negotiate agreements in the Council with other Member State governments. However, the issues dealt with often resemble domestic policy issues more than foreign policy issues. That is to say, the EU deals more often with economic issues including distribution and redistribution, than with issues of national (military) security. In typical policy-formulation processes, the Council negotiates in response to a legislative proposal from the European Commission and co-legislates together with the European Parliament. Thus, national parliaments are faced with dual agenda setters – the European Commission and the national government – in a policy-formulation process with multiple intergovernmental and supranational political actors dealing with topics that resonate with traditional left-right politics in the domestic political arena.

In light of this specific nature of EU policy-formulation, conflict as featured in parliamentary debate may either focus on *partisan* cleavages, where the main protagonists are national political parties, or it may focus on *intergovernmental* cleavages, where the main protagonists are Member State governments and supranational institutions.

In a 'partisan conflict', domestic differences of opinion on the issue predominate and we may expect very diverging substantive arguments in response to the Commission's proposal. To put it differently, domestic substantial disagreements in parliament may be large, with the original Commission's proposal lying somewhere in the middle of the spectrum of positions represented in parliament. Thus, in such debates, the Commission's preference is 'embedded' within the national political spectrum and national differences of opinion are relatively large. In 'intergovernmental conflict', policy preferences of domestic parties in parliament and national government rather differ substantially from the Commission proposal in a collective way. That is to say, positions and arguments in parliament have more in common with each other than with the Commission. Then, the position taken by the Commission is an 'outlier' with respect to the national political spectrum. Intergovernmental conflict may thus see national political parties 'rally behind the flag' in a common effort to defend 'the national interest'. Instead of featuring a substantive debate on the content of the policy in question, intergovernmental conflict would be characterized by domestic consensus on substantial policy goals and controversy would focus on how these goals could best be achieved. In particular, these debates tend to focus on whether or not government is doing a good job in defending the agreed upon national interest. Thus, the debate will be *framed* as primarily domestic political conflict in the case of partisan conflict, and international political conflict in case of intergovernmental conflict. To put it differently, in intergovernmental conflicts, domestic political parties in parliament and the national government will distance themselves more from other Member State governments and supranational institutions, then from each other.

Table 1: Conceptualization of the scope of conflict in parliamentary debates

	Partisan Debate	**Intergovernmental Debate**
Policy preferences	Commission proposal embedded in national political spectrum	Commission proposal outside national political spectrum
	Large differences between domestic parties	Small differences between domestic parties
Dominant issues	Content	Procedures or behavior
Dimension of conflict	Domestic party politics	Intergovernmental or supranational

Explaining Size and Scope of Conflict

By creating different control mechanisms through institutional design, national parliaments may affect the size and scope of conflict of parliamentary debates on EU policy-formulation processes both directly and indirectly. It is generally recognized that national factors – i.e. political culture, historical perspectives on European integration – as well as temporal contingencies have an effect on national debates on EU issues (Diez Medrano 2003). This study attempts to control for these factors in a comparative case study, thus isolating the effects of control mechanisms.

A main difference in control mechanisms created by national parliaments in different Member States is between ex ante control or ex post control. In the case of ex ante mechanisms in EU-policy formulation, parliament has an opportunity to influence government's behavior in Brussels before decisions are made. Like in the proto-typical Danish case, the government presents a negotiating strategy to the EAC,

which – if it doesn't face an opposing majority – will structure government's behavior during the rest of the policy-formulation process. On the other hand, ex post mechanisms focus on holding government accountable after decisions have been made. Thus, government will than have to explain its behavior after the Council has voted or otherwise reached a decision. At the danger of stating the obvious, these control mechanisms can clearly affect the timing of debates as ex ante mechanisms focus on early involvement of parliament including early debates, whereas ex post arrangements stimulate late involvement. Secondly, control mechanisms involving the plenary will yield larger public debates than control mechanisms in which committees behind closed doors are the central arena for controlling government.

Although parliamentary debates may be structured by control mechanisms, they remain a direct response to initiatives by the European Commission, the national government and other societal actors, both domestically and abroad. These preferences voiced in the *policy-formulation process* may affect parliamentary debates in several ways. First, the content of the original Commission proposal may affect the debate as the 'extremity' of its content in light of the national political spectrum greatly affects whether the Commission's position is embedded nationally or presents an outlier position. Secondly, during the course of the policy-formulation process, the reactions and positions of other Member State governments and the European Parliament may affect national debates. Finally, the policy-formulation process may also affect the scope of conflict in terms of what issues are debated. EU policy-formulation processes generally start with detailed 'technical' discussions on the Commission's proposal in Council Working Groups and specialized EP committees. More sensitive 'political' issues are discussed later on in the Council itself and in negotiations between the Council and EP (Christiansen 1997; Fouilleux et al. 2005). Thus, topics discussed in Brussels to which national parliaments may respond tend to become more political and general over time. They will also tend to become more contested, with the toughest political battles being fought at the very end of policy-formulation. Thus, we may expect an increasingly intergovernmental scope of conflict in parliamentary debates as the policy-formulation process nears conclusion.

To fully account of the effects of control mechanisms on parliamentary debates, we need to understand how these mechanisms, through affecting the timing of debates, interact with media coverage to create significant variation in the size – and particularly the scope of conflict – of parliamentary debates. Political communication between representatives and voters has increasingly become reliant on mass media. This has been referred to as the 'mediatization' of democracy (Altheide 2004; Trenz 2008: 340). As a result of this, politicians in national parliaments have become sensitive to media coverage, both in informing their actions and as vehicles for reaching out to voters. It is generally acknowledged that media coverage is able to influence the political agenda and vice versa (Kleinnijenhuis and Rietberg 1995; McCombs and Shaw 1972; Walgrave et al. 2008). However, we also know that in covering EU issues, media are generally focused on the proceedings at EU level – particularly the European Council – and are well able to pick out powerful actors at the European level and report on them (Koopmans and Erbe 2004: 109). If media coverage is more structured by the proceedings and political conflicts at European level, rather than at domestic level, we would expect it to stress intergovernmental conflict. To the extent that media coverage affects parliamentary debates, we would then expect the scope of conflict in parliamentary debates to become more intergovernmental as they coincide more with media coverage cycles.

EU Budget Debates in the Netherlands and Denmark

The EU budget provides a rich case for studying variations in parliamentary debates as they comprise of package deals on a range of different topics that recur in more or less the same form every seven years. Large expenditure posts include the Common Agricultural Policy and the Structural Funds, but EU money is also spent on research and development, EU's foreign policy, nature preservation and administrative costs. Issues on the revenue side include the total size of the budget, the British rebate, and a possible EU tax competency. The European Commission has right of initiative and its proposals enter a long period of negotiation among member states. These negotiations start with informative technical debates in a range of Council working groups and end in highly salient political conflicts in the European Council. After the European Council has reached agreement, a Codecision procedure leads up to an Inter Institutional Agreement between the Council, the EP and the Commission (Laffan 1997; Lindner 2006). Consecutive multiannual budget package deals – referred to as 'financial perspectives' – have structured the EU's redistributive politics since 1988, and are generally known as 'Delors I' (1988-1992), 'Delors II' (1993-1999), 'Agenda 2000' (2000-2006) and 'Financial Perspectives 2007-2013' (FP07-13) (2007-2013). As a case of EU policy-formulation clearly located in the 'limbo' between foreign and domestic policy, the budget provides a rich case as the potential for both partisan and intergovernmental conflict is large.

Denmark and the Netherlands differ strongly in the control mechanisms their respective parliaments have adopted, but are otherwise relatively similar. In terms of control mechanisms, Denmark is generally viewed as the prototypical case of ex ante control. Its EAC has strong mandating powers, which are exercised – at least in the period of research – behind closed doors (Laursen 2001; Møller Sousa 2008). The Netherlands, on the other hand, has a rather weak EAC but has added institutionalized ex post public debates in plenary, following European Council meetings (Hoetjes 2001; Van Schendelen 1996). Otherwise, both countries are small and rich countries with limited influence on the policy-formulation process and relatively few benefits from the budget. They are also both 'old democracies', more or less unitary countries, with a multi-party parliamentary democracy and a predominantly protestant culture providing more or less similar party systems and cleavages. Although they traditionally differ in terms of their attitude towards European integration, these differences largely concern other targets. That is to say, Danish 'Euroscepticism' has principally targeted issues with negligible relevance to the EU budget, like EU foreign policy and the powers of the EP (Lauring Knudsen 2008). Also, the pro-European Dutch have markedly become more skeptical, whereas Danish Euroscepticism has 'softened' (Raunio 2007; Vollaard and Boer 2005).

Data, method and operationalization

To study parliamentary debates on these three EU budgets, this study employs claims-making analysis (Koopmans 2002; 2007; Koopmans and Statham 1999). The periods under research range from the month in which the Commission formally launched its budget proposal to the month in which the European Council reached agreement: 1 February 1992 – 31 December 1992 (Delors II), 1 July 1997 – 31 March 1999 (Agenda 2000) and 1 February 2004 – 31 December 2005 (Financial Perspectives 2007-2013).

Claims-making analysis is very suitable for measuring the size and scope of conflict of debates as it takes a very small unit of analysis – a 'claim' – and measures relevant variables at that level, allowing for both aggregation towards the level of political actor as well as the level of debate as a whole. A claim is defined as a unit of strategic or communicative action in the public sphere:

> [...] which articulate[s] political demands, decisions, implementations, calls to action, proposals, criticisms, or physical attacks, which, actually or potentially, affect the interests or integrity of the claimants and/or other collective actors in a policy field.
>
> (Statham 2005: 12)

Coded variables of claims include WHERE and WHEN, WHO makes a claim, on WHAT, HOW, addressing WHOM, for/against WHOSE interests and WHY. The 'why' variable here refers to how the EU budget is 'framed'. In other words, how claimants organize '*[...] an apparently diverse array of symbols, images and arguments, linking them through an underlying organizing idea that suggests what is at stake on the issue*' (Gamson 2004: 245). The archetypical claim would be a verbal speech act concerning some political good that could be loosely translated as: 'I (do not) want […]'. For the purposes of this study, a codebook was developed including the above named variables. A sample of parliamentary debates was coded using ATLAS.ti software, which were consequently exported to SPSS for quantitative analysis[1]. The original dataset constructed this way also include claims in the media, which are used to position EU institutions and other Member States (see also De Wilde 2008).

This method provides us with rich data on the six cases including the total amount of claims (size) and when in the policy-formulation process these claims were made (timing). Scope of conflict is operationalized through the average position of claimants on a range of issues related to the budget and what kind of issues (content or procedure) and conflict 'frames' (domestic or intergovernmental) dominate the debate. To measure the policy preference of European and domestic political actors, claims on substantive issues, i.e. concerning the content of the budget as opposed to the policy-formulation process as such or the behavior of key actors, are loaded onto a pro-anti European dimension and a left-right dimension. The pro-anti dimension is operationalized as claims in favor of an increase of the size of the budget or total revenues (pro-European) vs. decrease in size of the budget (Anti-European) (De Wilde 2009: 4-5). Left–right is operationalized as claims in favor of more redistribution from winners to losers in the internal market (left), to claims in favor of more investment in competitiveness and growth of the EU economy as a whole (right) (Dullien and Schwarzer 2009)[2].

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[1] Newspaper articles and plenary debates were sampled from digitalized archives using the search string: 'European budget' OR 'EC / EU budget' OR 'Delors II / Agenda 2000 / financial perspectives', with the exception of plenary debates from 1992, which were manually selected from the physical archives of the *Tweede Kamer* and *Folketinget*. Every fourth newspaper article in chronological order and all plenary debates were selected for coding. The newspapers included in the study are *NRC Handelsblad*, *Trouw* and *Algemeen Dagblad* for the Dutch cases and *Berlingske Tidene*, *Politikken* and *B.T.* for the Danish cases. The codebook, the heuristic ATLAS.ti files and the SPSS database can be obtained from the author upon request.

[2] It should be noted here that a major part of the budget concerns the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Claims in favor of more spending on CAP are loaded on the left-right scale as 'left', whereas claims in favor of a decrease of CAP spending are interpreted as belonging to the economic right. This interpretation is debatable, since farmers often use competitiveness arguments rather than solidarity

Quantity, timing and quality

This section will describe the size, timing and scope of conflict of the parliamentary debates on the three EU budgets under investigation in Denmark and the Netherlands. The primary focus is on a comparison between these six cases of parliamentary debate, but attention will also be paid to how debates evolved within each policy-formulation process.

Size and Timing

Figure 1 provides an overview of the amount of claims made in parliamentary debates the Netherlands and Denmark per budget period.
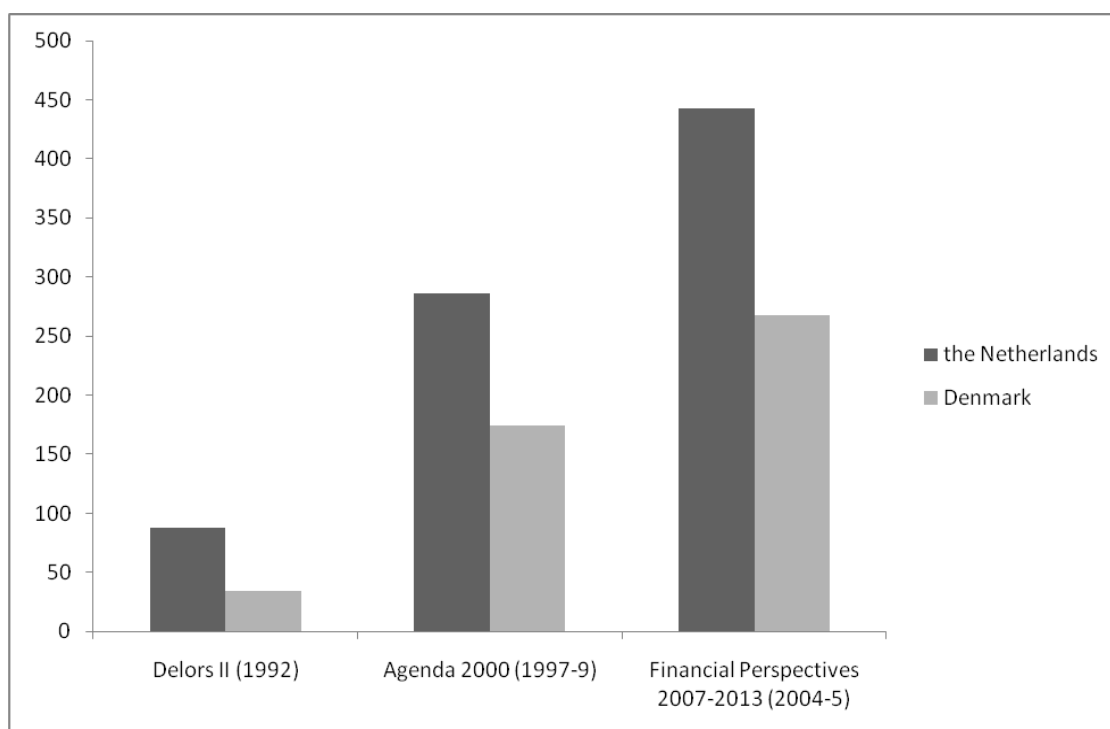
Figure 1: Size of parliamentary debates (total amount of claims made)

The figure clearly shows several similarities between the two countries. First, size of the debates clearly increases over time in both countries, even taking into account that the policy-formulation process on Delors II lasted only 11 months, compared to 21 month for Agenda 2000 and 23 months for FP 07-13. Secondly, the quantity of parliamentary debate in Denmark is consistently and substantially lower than that in the Netherlands.

In order to describe the timing of parliamentary debates we provide the number of claims made per month in each of the three budgets, per country. The resulting graph is provided in Figure 2.

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arguments to support their claims for more funds and farmers are often considered a constituency of the political right, rather than the left. However, the predominant argument to support CAP spending is to safeguard standards of living in rural areas and protecting the sector from global market forces. As such, CAP spending clearly is a form of redistribution, rather than investment.

The timing of parliamentary debates in Denmark and the Netherlands is very different. Peaks in parliamentary debate in the Netherlands center around European Council meetings. The majority of claims are made in ex post debates, held shortly after summits. In contrast, Danish plenary debates take place in the first half of the policy-formulation process. The only exception to this is the more even distribution of claims over time during Agenda 2000.
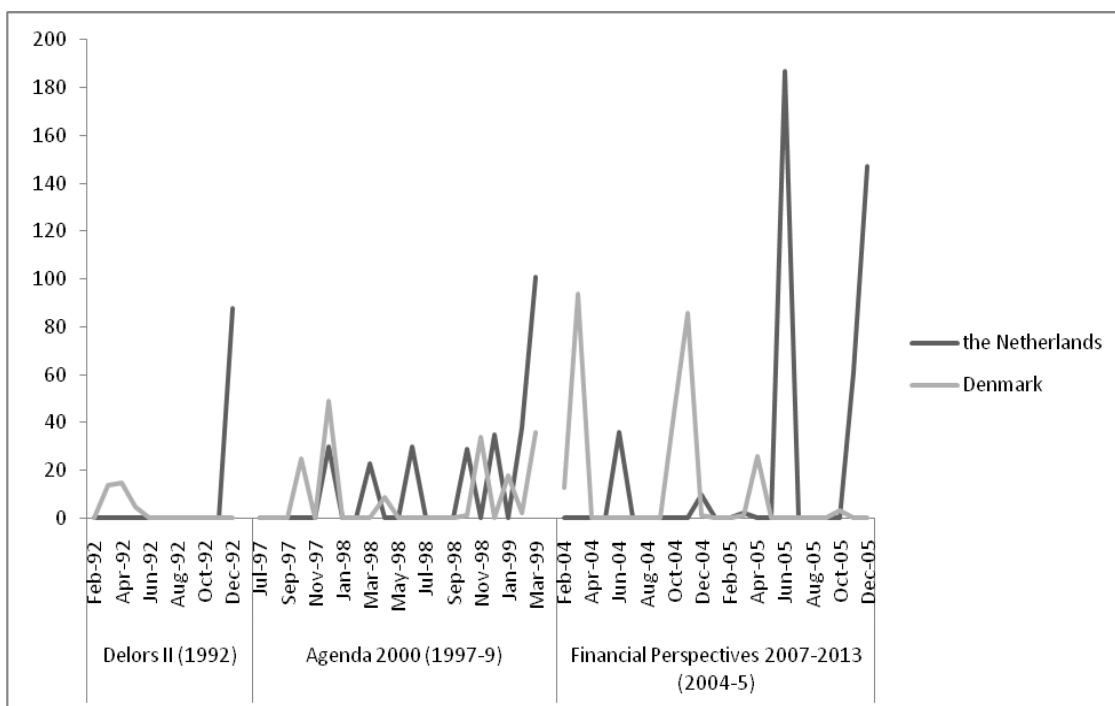

Figure 2: Timing of parliamentary debates (amount of claims per month)

Scope of Conflict

Figure 3 presents the policy preferences of the European Commission, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, the Dutch and Danish national governments and party groups in the Folketing and Tweede Kamer.

These figures show us graphically whether the European Commission's preference – and those of the most influential Member States – presents and outlying or embedded position, compared to the two-dimensional political space of preferences defended by national parties. In the first budget period, Figure 4 shows that the European Commission defended a more pro-European position than any Dutch or Danish political party, although *Socialdemocratiet* (Danish social democrats) comes close. The Danish political landscape is characterized by much larger differences in preferences than the Dutch political landscape. Thus, in terms of policy preferences, neither the Dutch nor the Danish parliamentary debate represent a pure form of either partisan or intergovernmental debates, although the Danish debate approximates partisan conflict more than the Dutch debate does. In the negotiations on Agenda 2000 we see more partisan debates in both the Netherlands and Denmark as the Commission defends an embedded position in the Dutch case and falls only marginally outside the Danish political landscape. However, the Danish political landscape covers much wider ranging positions in both dimensions than the Dutch one. Thus, both the Dutch and Danish debates are more partisan than they were during Delors II, with Denmark

approaching the partisan ideal type most. Finally, FP 07-13 sees more intergovernmental debates in terms of policy preferences, as the Commission presents a clear outlying position: much more pro-European than Dutch and Danish political parties. Now, the Dutch debate is more partisan than the Danish one, with the Danish debate being more intergovernmental. Based on policy-preferences as indicators for the quality of debates, we would thus conclude that debates on Agenda 2000 were the most partisan in both countries and Dutch debates tended to be more intergovernmental than Danish debates, with the exception of the debate on FP 07-13. These conclusions, as well as the other indicators for the quality of debates are given in Table 2.
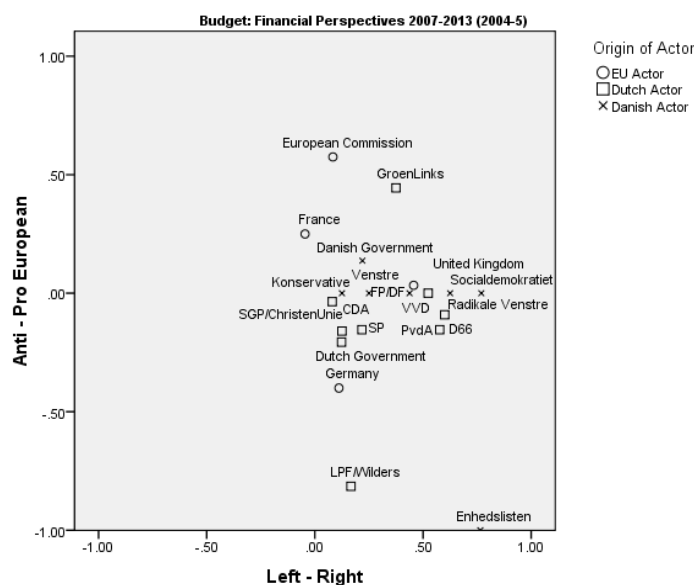
Budget: Delors II (1992)

Budget: Agenda 2000 (1997-9)
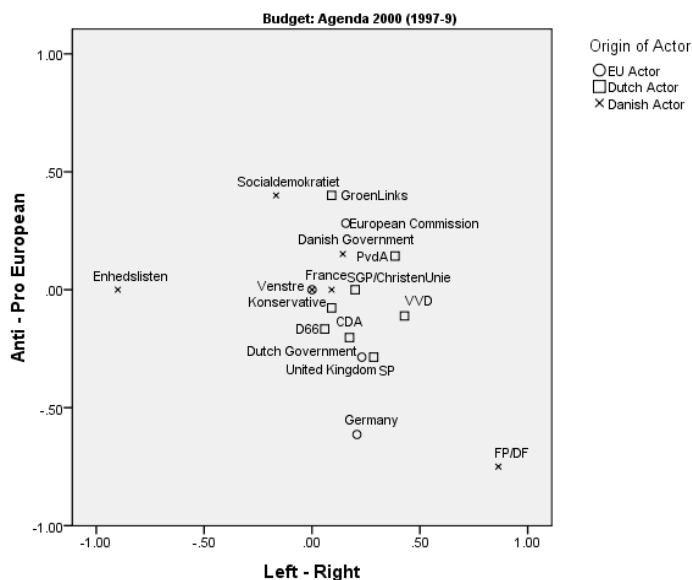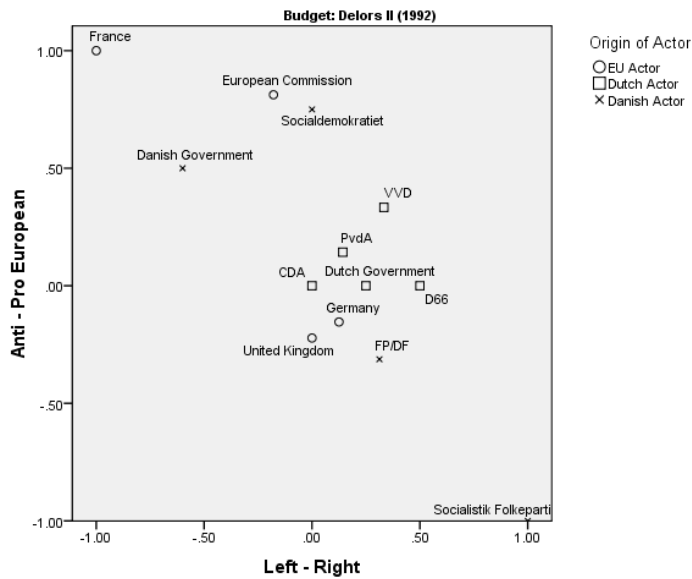
Figure 3: Mapped positions of main political actors at European, Dutch and Danish level[3]

Table 2: Indicators of scope of conflict in all six parliamentary debates

		Delors II		Agenda 2000		Financial Perspectives 2007-13	
		Netherlands	Denmark	Netherlands	Denmark	Netherlands	Denmark
Policy preference	Commission preference	Outlier	Outlier	Embedded	Outlier	Outlier	Outlier
	Political landscape	Small	Large	Small	Large	Large	Small
Issues	Content issues	65,9%	91,2%	48,3%	75,3%	58,7%	66,8%
	Procedural issues	34,1%	5,9%	48,3%	21,3%	40,4%	26,5%
Conflict Framing	Domestic	8,0%	17,6%	7,7%	12,1%	10,4%	21,3%
	Intergovern-mental	20,4%	23,6%	22,3%	10,9%	28,5%	6,0%

When we look at the issues dominating the debates, we see that claims made in parliamentary debates feature a majority of substantive issues in all but one of the six debates. However, the extent of that majority greatly fluctuates between the debates with the Dutch debate on Agenda 2000 seeing an equal amount of substantial and procedural issues in claims. As such, the issues dominating the parliamentary debates indicate partisan, rather than intergovernmental debates. However, Danish debates feature a much larger percentage of substantial issues than Dutch debates. In other words, Danish debates are largely about the content of the next budget, whereas Dutch debates also feature a discussion on the process of policy-formulation and the behavior of key actors therein. In terms of issues, Dutch debates are more intergovernmental – or less partisan – than Danish debates. Finally, debates on the latter two budgets are more intergovernmental in both countries than the debate on Delors II.

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[3] Claims in both media and parliament are used to calculate positions. This means in practice that positions of European actors are largely determined by their claims in the media, whereas Dutch and Danish domestic party positions are largely determined by their claims in parliamentary debates. Positions of Dutch and Danish governments are based more equally on claims in both media and parliament.

All of the Dutch debates feature a larger percentage of intergovernmental conflict framing than domestic conflict. With the exception of the debate on Delors II, the Danish debates feature an opposite relationship. Thus, in terms of framing, all Dutch debates and the Danish debate on Delors II resemble intergovernmental debates, whereas the Danish debates on Agenda 2000 and FP 07-13 are more partisan. To put it differently, claims made by Dutch MPs and government during parliamentary debates emphasize the need to defend the Dutch national interest against other Member States, the European Commission and/or the European Parliament. In contrast, Danish MPs challenged other parties and government on whether their position made sense. They would confront each other when parties failed to present a clear and coherent preference on the budget.

Thus, we find elements of both partisan and intergovernmental scopes of conflict in all six cases, with none of them providing a text book case of either debate. The use of three different indicators for the quality of debate provides a rich understanding of its different dimensions, but also creates mixed pictures. In general, however, we find that the Dutch and Danish debates on the three EU budgets in question are more intergovernmental than partisan. Furthermore, Danish debates are generally less intergovernmental – or more partisan – than Dutch debates. Finally, we see a trend towards more intergovernmental debates over time in both countries. Particularly, there is a difference between the debates on Delors II on the one hand, and the debates on Agenda 2000 and FP 07-13 on the other hand, with the latter two budgets featuring much more intergovernmental debates.

Ex Ante vs. Ex Post: Explaining quantity, timing and quality

We find that these six debates differ substantially from each other in terms of size and scope of conflict, despite relatively similar political systems and stable – though different – control mechanisms. Differences between countries might be explained by control mechanisms, but differences over time are unlikely to be explained by the effects of control mechanisms alone.

In terms of size, parliamentary debates on the budget are structurally more extensive in the Netherlands than in Denmark. This can largely be explained by the institutional arrangements in national parliaments. Dutch control mechanisms emphasize plenary activity. Finding larger public debates in the Netherlands is therefore not surprising. However, control mechanisms cannot account for the increasing size of debates over time in both countries. This may partially be explained by the growing controversy over the EU budget at EU level and the 'misfit' between Commission proposals and the interests of both the Netherlands and Denmark as they turn from net beneficiaries of EU funds to net contributors. Additionally, the difference in quantity between Delors II on the one hand and Agenda 2000 and FP 07-13 on the other hand can be explained by the increased media coverage of the EU budget (e.g. De Wilde 2008), stimulating parliamentary debates. The explanatory power of media coverage is especially significant when the timing of media coverage and parliamentary debates coincide, as in the Dutch case, where both are geared towards European Council meetings. In this case, MPs use media coverage to challenge government (De Wilde 2008; Holzhacker 2002), but they rarely refer to media stories of more than a few days old. However, the explanatory framework adopted in this paper is unable to account

for the quantitative difference between Agenda 2000 and FP-07-13. The quantitative increase in parliamentary debate here in both countries may be the result of the simple fact that the first serious attempt to reach agreement in the Council failed, leading to a second attempt and a second parliamentary debate (in the Dutch case). Or it may be the result of a more general politicization of European integration, where EU issues have become more controversial and more salient throughout the EU since the early 1990s and this general contestation 'spills over' into contestation over the EU budget (Hooghe and Marks 2009).

Finally, the scope of conflict in the debates requires the most complex explanation. Whether a debate can be characterized as partisan or intergovernmental depends on several different indicators and the pictures these indicators provide are mixed. Ex ante or ex post control mechanisms have negligible direct effect on this. The observation that the debates generally approximate the intergovernmental ideal type more than the partisan ideal type may be explained by the relatively pro-European position taken up by the Commission. The Commission's arguments for a bigger EU budget did not fit with either Danish or Dutch preferences and thus stimulated more intergovernmental debates. As the Dutch are higher pro-capita net contributors to the EU budget than the Danes, the Commission's preference may also contribute to the fact that debates in the Netherlands were more intergovernmental than in Denmark. Finally, the high controversiality of Agenda 2000 and FP 07-13 in relation to Delors II accounts for more intergovernmental debates on the latter two budgets. Conflict between Member States and supranational institutions stimulates the defense of 'the national interest' against outsiders and encourages government to take a stand in relation to other European actors.

The effects of characteristics of the policy-formulation process on the scope of conflict in parliamentary debates are, however, mediated by control mechanisms through timing and by media coverage. Early debates – as in Denmark – are more partisan as intergovernmental conflict is not so prominent in the early stages of policy-formulation. Also, parties' positions are less pronounced in the early stages as they still explore all the facets of the Commission's proposal and their possible consequences, thus focusing more on the content of the budget than on procedures or national government behavior.

Media coverage on the EU budgets is much more intergovernmental than parliamentary debates as it frames the policy-formulation process as intergovernmental conflict (De Wilde 2008). Furthermore, this intergovernmental scope of conflict in media coverage increases with the quantity of media coverage. As media coverage increases and framing in the media becomes more intergovernmental, so does parliamentary debate. Additionally, there is more evidence that media coverage influences parliamentary debate than vice versa. Whereas media coverage often provides an incentive for MPs to make claims on the EU budget and stimulates them to frame the process as intergovernmental conflict, media coverage is hardly influenced by parliamentary debate and much more by policy-formulation in Brussels. The amount of claims made in the media by governments and supranational institutions far exceeds the amount of claims made by domestic parliamentary actors (De Wilde 2008). If MPs feature in the media, they feature as outside commentators on events in Brussels, rather than as important political actors in their own right.

Thus, institutional arrangements have clear direct and indirect effects on debates in parliament. Whether emphasis is on public or behind the scenes scrutiny clearly affects the quantity of public debate, with Dutch public scrutiny resulting in a significantly larger debate than Danish secretive scrutiny.

Very clearly, whether parliaments opt for ex ante or ex post control mechanisms has effect on the timing of debates. It is especially through this difference in timing that indirect effects play a role. Early debates – as in Denmark – are linked to the early stages of policy-formulation and decoupled from media attention cycles, which both stimulate more partisan debates. Late debates – as in the Netherlands – coincide with the final intergovernmental stages of policy-formulation and strong media coverage, stimulating intergovernmental debates.

Although this explains the nature of debates in the Dutch Tweede Kamer and Danish Folketing on EU budgets to a large extent, there remain several observations unaccounted for. Two contextual factors – the specific resonance of Agenda 2000 in Denmark as a necessary requirement for eastern enlargement and the failure of the European Council to reach agreement on FP 07-13 in June 2005 affected the parliamentary debate in Denmark and the Netherlands respectively. Furthermore, contingencies at national and European level affected the debates, as the policy-formulation on the EU budget coincided with referenda on the Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties in Denmark and on the Constitutional Treaty in the Netherlands, but also the fall of the Santer Commission, turmoil in former Yugoslavia and so on. Finally, the question of whether a general politicization of European integration has spilled over into contention on the EU budget has been raised, as there is a strong increase in the quantity of debate over time in both countries. In spite of these contextual and external factors, this paper shows that ex ante or ex post control mechanisms – especially in light of their interaction with the policy-formulation process and media coverage – have significant effects on the size and scope of conflict of parliamentary debates on the EU budgets.

Discussion

This study focused on plenary parliamentary debates on the policy-formulation process of three EU multiannual budgets – Delors II (1992), Agenda 2000 (1997-1999) and Financial Perspectives 2007-2013 (2004-2005) – in the Netherlands and Denmark. These cases provide interesting insight into the effects of ex ante and ex post control mechanisms of national parliaments on debates held in these 'strong publics' (Eriksen and Fossum 2002). This study shows that these six parliamentary debates differ significantly in terms of size and scope of conflict. The Danish ex ante control in its European Affairs Committee leads to earlier and smaller debates than Dutch ex post control mechanisms with institutionalized plenary debates. Thus, the size and especially the timing of debates are clearly structured by control mechanisms. As the Dutch debate links up in timing to the tough negotiations between Member States in the European Council and the main bulk of media coverage surrounding these Council meetings, the Netherlands feature more intergovernmental debates than Denmark. That is to say, Dutch national political parties 'rally behind the flag' and present a common 'national interest' to the outside world. As the budget has become more controversial and media coverage has become increasingly focused on

European Council meetings over time, so have debates in the Dutch Tweede Kamer and Danish Folketing become more intergovernmental.

The findings of this study beg two questions. Answering them falls outside the scope of this paper, but they will be briefly raised in this final discussion. First, there is a normative question: which size and scope of conflict in national parliamentary debates should we prefer with the aim to alleviate the democratic deficit of the European Union? Secondly, there is the question of institutional design following directly from this normative question: how might we organize the involvement of national parliaments in EU policy-formulation, in order to stimulate good debates? If one understands parliamentary debates as important in providing cues to citizens about the positions of parties and a meaningful choice in the next election, one would value high quantity and partisan debates (Mair 2001). This combination features well-articulated substantive debates, where parties significantly differ in terms of policy preferences. However, as this paper has shown, there is a trade-off between the size of a parliamentary debate and its partisan conflict.

Institutional design – if successful – may have significant effects on the size and timing of debates. Although the scope of conflict cannot be engineered directly by changing the control mechanisms of national parliaments, it may be affected indirectly as debates connect to or disconnect from different phases of the policy-formulation process and the cycle of media coverage.

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