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**Twenty-sixth Bi-annual Report:  
Developments in European Union  
Procedures and Practices  
Relevant to Parliamentary Scrutiny**

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## Background

This is the Twenty-sixth Bi-annual Report from the COSAC Secretariat.

### COSAC Bi-annual Reports

The XXX COSAC decided that the COSAC Secretariat should produce factual Bi-annual Reports, to be published ahead of each ordinary meeting of the Conference. The purpose of the Reports is to give an overview of the developments in procedures and practices in the European Union that are relevant to parliamentary scrutiny.

All the Bi-annual Reports are available on the COSAC website at:

<http://www.cosac.eu/documents/bi-annual-reports-of-cosac/>

The three chapters of this Bi-annual Report are based on information provided by the national Parliaments of the European Union Member States and the European Parliament. The deadline for submitting replies to the questionnaire for the 26th Bi-annual Report was 9 September 2016.

The outline of this Report was adopted by the meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC, held on 11 July 2016 in Bratislava.

As a general rule, the Report does not specify all Parliaments or Chambers of which the case is relevant for each point. Instead, illustrative examples are used.

Complete replies, received from 41 out of 41 national Parliaments/Chambers of 28 Member States and the European Parliament, can be found in the Annex on the COSAC website.

### Note on Numbers

Of the 28 Member States of the European Union, 15 have a unicameral Parliament and 13 have a bicameral Parliament. Due to this combination of unicameral and bicameral systems, there are 41 national parliamentary Chambers in the 28 Member States of the European Union.

Although they have bicameral systems, the national Parliaments of Austria, Ireland and Spain each submitted a single set of replies to the questionnaire.

## ABSTRACT

### **CHAPTER 1: THE TRANSANTLANTIC TRADE AND INVESTMENT PARTNERSHIP (TTIP) BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE UNITED STATES: PARLIAMENTARY SCRUTINY OF THE NEGOTIATION PROCESS**

The first chapter of the 26th Bi-annual Report of COSAC is dedicated to the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) under negotiation between the EU and the US and the parliamentary scrutiny of the negotiations. It concentrates mainly on the flow and quality of information provided to the Parliaments, on how these engage in public debates on the subject and on the specific issue of the reading rooms for access to the consolidated texts of the TTIP negotiations. The different questions aim at assessing the concrete capacities of the national Parliaments to exert a public oversight of the ongoing process of negotiations.

Concerning the flow of information from the European Commission, a majority of the responding Parliaments/Chambers considered that the transparency of the negotiation process had somewhat improved. Almost a third of the responding Parliaments/Chambers considered the amount and quality of information received from the European Commission sufficient, with slightly over a third of respondents not having any opinion on the matter.

Concerning who the Parliaments/Chambers invited more often to be informed about the negotiation process, over a third of the respondents indicated that representatives of their respective governments were regularly invited, while only few of the respondents were regularly inviting the European Commission. The latter on the other hand had been occasionally invited by a vast majority of respondents, as well as representatives of the European Parliament, NGOs and academics. Several debates had been organised by many of the respondents at plenary, committee level or in different a format like hearings. The scrutiny could also take the format of a fact-finding inquiry. In a few cases, representatives of the US had been invited to meetings of specific committees.

Concerning the engagement of the Parliaments/Chambers in public debates about the negotiations, a very small minority of the respondents had done it regularly or often by means of press releases, media interviews or conferences, while a vast majority either had occasionally or never engaged in such debates. Some of the respondents stressed that individual MPs could, if they wanted, engage in such public debate.

Concerning the instruments to express the positions about the negotiations, the political dialogue and resolutions by the plenary had been chosen by consistent numbers of responding Parliaments/Chambers although not representing a majority of them. Most of the respondents indicated different instruments and actions including statements, opinions, reports, questions, and public hearings.

Created in the vast majority of the Member States whose Parliaments/Chambers responded, and in most cases upon request of the Parliaments/Chambers, such reading rooms were in most cases set up by the governments, and, in a few cases, by the US Embassy.

According to a majority of the respondents, access to the reading rooms was granted to Government officials and to all MPs, and according a minority of the respondents to members of different specific Committees or other officials. The number of MPs who had visited the reading rooms and the frequency of visits varied among the respondents.

A majority of the respondents had no specific opinion about the conditions of access to the reading rooms, while over a third considered them limiting.

Among the limitations, the inability to be accompanied by assistants or parliamentary officials, designated experts and the language barrier were mostly stressed. A few less underlined the inability to use the Internet and the time arrangements.

## **CHAPTER 2: 2016: ENERGY UNION'S YEAR OF DELIVERY**

The second chapter of the 26th Bi-annual Report of COSAC focusses on the Parliaments'/Chambers' work on and appraisal of the Energy Union by determining which documents the Parliaments'/Chambers have discussed and by seeking their opinion on certain elements, dimensions and aspects of the Energy Union.

The majority of Parliaments'/Chambers indicated that they had discussed the respective documents, namely the Proposal for a Regulation concerning measures to safeguard the security of gas supply; the Proposal for a Decision on establishing an information exchange mechanism with regard to intergovernmental agreements and non-binding instruments between Member States and third countries in the field of energy; and the two Communications on an EU strategy for liquefied natural gas and gas storage; and on heating and cooling, respectively.

In each case, a minority of Parliaments'/Chambers indicated that they had engaged or planned to engage in the political dialogue with the European Commission.

According to the findings of the Report, most Parliaments'/Chambers considered the *ex ante* examination of agreements by the Commission very or somewhat contentious. "Solidarity" and "proportionality and subsidiarity issues" were also elements of concern for the majority of Parliaments'/Chambers, whereas "definitions" proved to be the element of least concern.

The vast majority of Parliaments'/Chambers had not issued any updated opinion or document on energy security or energy efficiency, nor had they started discussions on the revision of the directives on energy efficiency and on energy performance of buildings.

Asked how effective the current renewable energy Directive had been in improving renewable energy, industrial development and EU competitiveness in the energy sector, a considerable minority thought it was somewhat or significantly effective, whereas a very small minority thought the Directive somewhat ineffective. Half the respondents had no opinion to express.

As regards the question of which elements of the governance of the Energy Union would best ensure that the EU-level targets for renewables (binding at EU level) and energy efficiency (indicative at the EU level) were delivered, Parliaments'/Chambers' opinion varied, though nearly half considered regional cooperation to be very important.

The correct set up of the emissions trading system, solidarity among EU Member States, investments in low-carbon technologies, market regulation rules and monitoring of progress were among the other elements mentioned by Parliaments'/Chambers in connection to this question.

When asked to rate the importance of certain elements included in the Member States' national energy and climate plans with respect to renewable energy in achieving the objectives of at least

27% in 2030, a sizeable amount of Parliaments considered two elements to be very important, namely (i) measures to be taken for increasing the flexibility of the energy system with regard to renewable energy production; and (ii) plans for achieving electricity market coupling and integration, regional measures for balancing and reserves and how system adequacy was calculated in the context of renewable energy.

Asked which dimensions of the Energy Union were deemed most important, the majority of Parliaments indicated energy security, solidarity and trust, as well as research, innovation and competitiveness as very important.

Finally, the Report reveals that most of the responding Parliaments had not taken any action to support the idea of closer cooperation among the EU Parliaments/Chambers on any of the five Energy Union dimensions.

### **CHAPTER 3: IMPROVING THE ROLE OF NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS**

The third chapter focusses on how improvements in the context of the Juncker Commission's commitment to "forging a new partnership with national Parliaments" work in practice and Parliaments'/Chambers' evaluation of these. It also presents Parliaments'/Chambers' views on the response time of the European Commission to the reasoned opinions submitted by national Parliaments/Chambers, as well as on the quality and consistency of the Commission's replies. In addition, this chapter presents national Parliaments' ways of communicating their activities related to the European Affairs to their audience, both professional and general public, in an effort to encourage an exchange of practices in this field.

As far as relations to the European Commission were concerned, a majority of Parliaments/Chambers indicated the number of visits of Commissioners to Parliaments/Chambers had significantly, or somewhat, increased within the mandate of the current European Commission. The visits of officials (directors, general directors) of the European Commission had somewhat increased according to a majority of Parliaments/Chambers; an equal number had not observed any change in the number of visits. The number of visits of MPs or officials of Parliament/Chambers to the European Commission evolved less.

On the evolution of the European Commission's responses to the reasoned opinions issued by national Parliaments, the responses concentrated mostly on 'somewhat improved' or 'not changed'. The specificity of the responses, the time taken to respond and targeting concerns were most emphasised as the aspects somewhat improved.

The majority of those responding thought there was room for improvement when communicating and exchanging with the European Commission. Regarding improvement on the side of the European Commission, many Parliaments/Chambers stressed, for example, that the European Commission should pay more attention to the concerns expressed by Parliaments in their respective statements and/or reasoned opinions, or that the Commission's reply was very general. It was further supported that in subsidiarity checks, in particular when the threshold of the "yellow card" procedure was reached, the concerns raised by a significant number of national Parliaments should be analysed from all possible points of view by the European Commission.

On communicating EU affairs, Parliaments were asked which stakeholders should get further involved in communicating the EU affairs in order to increase the awareness of citizens and inform

them better about EU affairs. Most of those responding considered that it was the Parliaments/Chambers themselves who should be more active.

The majority of the respondents expressed their ambition to play a more vocal role in informing their citizens about the EU affairs in general. Out of those, many underlined hindrances/limitations to this function; a majority marked the complexity of the subject and its difficulty in terms of communication in achieving their ambition, half emphasised the lack of attention from journalists/media, while less than half underlined the lack of resources. Very few respondents mentioned the lack of strategy as a limitation.

Almost two thirds of those responding had no special strategy for communicating the EU affairs. The content related to the EU affairs communicated by the respondents was most frequently the discussions in EU Affairs committee meetings, followed by the plenary sessions when a relevant topic was raised. Less, but still more than half of the responding Parliaments/Chambers (very) often communicated the opinions within the political dialogue with the European Commission, reasoned opinions and proposed EU legislation. Almost half of the respondents indicated they only occasionally communicated with the public on implemented EU legislation.

More than half of the respondents did not adapt their communication according to the audience; their communication was general and prepared in only one version. One third did adapt their communication according to the audience by preparing more than one version of communication. More than half of the respondents adapted regularly the content when it came to communicating EU affairs, mainly for the public and for media/journalists. Less than half adapted their content for schools and universities and comparable frequency applied to adapting the content for young people.

All of the responding Parliaments/Chambers made use of their own website as the main communication channel for EU affairs. This was closely followed by other channels, i.e. meetings with media/journalists, and print publications; the least commonly used channel of communication was publishing articles on blogs or specialised platforms. Many had already explored the use of social media, though the frequency varied. However, there was a group of respondents who had admitted that they had never used this form of communication.

As far as involvement of members in communicating EU affairs, all but one Parliament/Chamber indicated their members had some kind of involvement. More than half declared that some members were actively engaged, less than one-third stated most of their members of respective committees dealing with EU affairs were actively engaged and only a minority indicated limited involvement of their members in this. On the format of the involvement, the most regularly explored forms were the participation in conferences/fora, followed by TV/radio debates and use of social media. Blogging was the form which had been used only occasionally by less than half of the respondents.

More than three quarters of Parliaments/Chambers declared that they had or planned to have their own Facebook and Twitter accounts, while a minority communicated having established Instagram and LinkedIn profiles. In addition, other media were mentioned, like YouTube channels, Google+ network and picture/photo online repository systems like Flickr and Pinterest, as well as new platforms like Snapchat.

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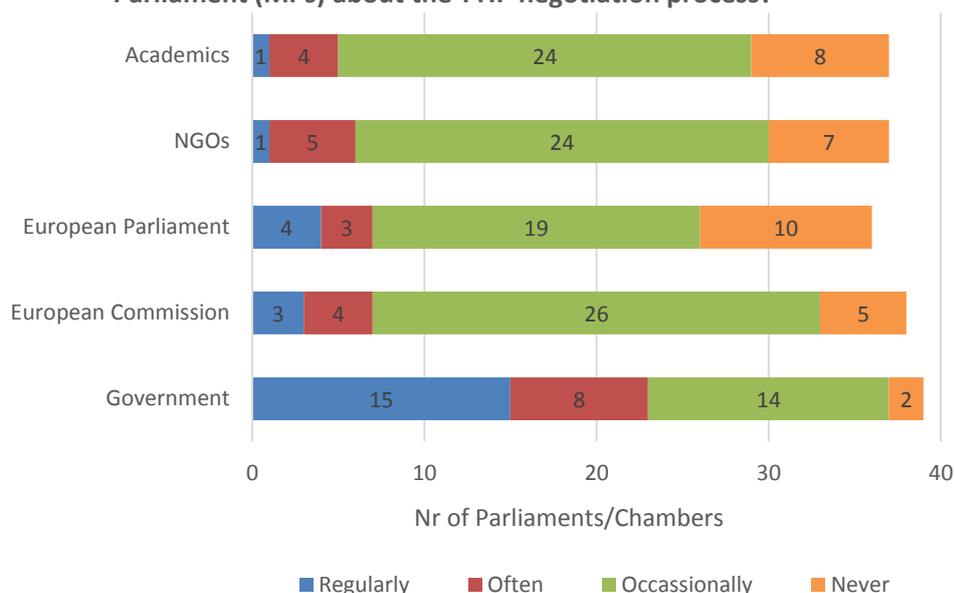
## CHAPTER 1: THE TRANSATLANTIC TRADE AND INVESTMENT PARTNERSHIP (TTIP) BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE UNITED STATES: PARLIAMENTARY SCRUTINY OF THE NEGOTIATION PROCESS

Chapter 1 focuses on parliamentary scrutiny of the negotiation process of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the EU and the US. In this context, it explores the issue of transparency in the negotiation process and Parliaments' role within that process by presenting Parliaments' practices as to the scrutiny of TTIP. It also explores the concrete possibilities for Members of Parliament (MPs) and representatives of other institutions and organs to have direct access to the documents on which the negotiations are based.

### Section A: TRANSPARENCY OF THE TTIP NEGOTIATION PROCESS

Parliaments/Chambers were asked if and how often they invited members of government, European Commission representatives and/or other specialists to inform MPs about the TTIP negotiation process. The replies showed that a majority of Parliaments/Chambers regularly or often invited members of the Government. A majority of Parliaments/Chambers occasionally invited the European Commission, NGOs and academics. Half of the responding Parliaments/Chambers occasionally invited the European Parliament.

**Question: Does your Parliament/Chamber invite members of government, European Commission representatives or other specialists to inform Members of Parliament (MPs) about the TTIP negotiation process?**



Parliaments/Chambers indicated they also invited others to inform MPs about the TTIP negotiation process. In a few cases (Czech *Senát*, Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna* and the European Parliament's Committee on International Trade (INTA)) meetings were held with the participation of the US Trade Representatives and the US ambassador to the EU. The INTA Committee also held meetings with the EU chief negotiator before and after each TTIP negotiation round.

Twelve Parliaments/Chambers<sup>1</sup> provided information on specific hearings/meetings in relation to the TTIP negotiation process for which several other/additional stakeholders were invited. Amongst them was the Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor*, which organised a meeting where amongst others US representatives, the Vice-Prime minister, the coordinator for trade between the EU and the US of the European Commission, representatives of the business community, journalists and diplomats were invited. The Italian *Camera dei deputati* explained that the Committee on Agriculture was conducting a fact-finding inquiry on the impact of TTIP on the Italian agro-food system. During the inquiry, representatives of government, regions and provinces, NGOs, Institute for International Economic Cooperation, agricultural organisations were heard.

The Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie* mentioned that public discussions were organised with the participation of representatives of the Bulgarian civil society, business, NGOs and academia, as well as of the European Commission.

Specific structures put in place for providing information and discussing the TTIP negotiation process were mentioned by some Parliaments/Chambers. For example, the Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon* set up a special committee to scrutinise the content and procedures of concluding transatlantic trade agreements, and the Latvian *Saeima* established a working group to deal with the issues of TTIP in a detailed manner. The Hungarian *Országgyűlés* referred to the National Council for Sustainable Development (NCS), which was chaired by the Speaker of the Hungarian National Assembly. It is a forum of the representatives of political parties, government, science, economy, churches and civil organisations, which debated the prospective impacts of the TTIP agreement, and adopted a resolution on the negotiations of TTIP in December 2015.

Asked how Parliaments/Chambers engaged in public discourse (the public debate outside Parliaments/Chambers) about TTIP and its negotiation process, a vast majority of them replied they were *never* or only *occasionally* engaged in the public discourse using means and fora like press releases, media interviews, press conferences, universities or conferences. Two Parliaments/Chambers *regularly used* press releases; one mentioned regular use of media interviews and conferences.

Among other means explored by the Parliaments/Chambers when engaging in the public discourse about TTIP and its negotiation process were publishing reports or making presentations available to the public (Slovenian *Državni zbor*, Slovenian *Državni svet*, Romanian *Senat*, European Parliament, UK *House of Lords*).

Seven Parliaments/Chambers<sup>2</sup> stressed that it was (also) up to individual MPs to participate in different kind of activities in public discourse. The Finnish *Eduskunta* stressed that as a Parliament they did not “engage in public discourse”, but rather organised public hearings and provided necessary support, encouraging its members to get involved in a debate.

On the changes in the transparency of the TTIP negotiation process since its beginning, the majority of Parliaments/Chambers (28 out of 37) evaluated the changes as significantly or somewhat improved. No changes in the process were seen by two Parliaments/Chambers, while seven respondents had no opinion about changes in the transparency of the TTIP negotiation process.

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<sup>1</sup> Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*, Belgian *Chambre des représentants*, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, Italian *Camera dei deputati*, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, European Parliament -ECON, Austrian *Nationalrat*, Swedish *Riksdag*, Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor*, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, Dutch *Tweede Kamer*, Latvian *Saeima*.

<sup>2</sup> Czech *Senát*, Belgian *Chambre des représentants*, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, European Parliament, Swedish *Riksdag*, Danish *Folketing* and Dutch *Tweede Kamer*.

In total, 13 out of 37 Parliaments/Chambers considered the amount and quality of information they received from the European Commission about the TTIP negotiation process to be sufficient, while 10 out of 37 Parliaments/Chambers considered it not to be sufficient. Around one third of the respondents had no opinion on the amount and quality of information received on this topic.<sup>3</sup>

Some further remarks and improvements that would be appreciated with regard to the TTIP negotiation process related to transparency and the role of the government and of other stakeholders. The Belgian *Chambre des représentants* had requested the Federal Government to take the necessary steps to ascertain that the TTIP negotiations were conducted with the appropriate transparency at national and European level. The French *Sénat* mentioned simplified access to documents and a translation into French as improvements. The Polish *Sejm* preferred to see an intensification of direct contacts between DG Trade and the *Sejm* as well as an increased availability of documents on TTIP in Polish.

Another improvement, as pointed out by the UK *House of Commons*, focussed on the role of the government in providing for more transparency in negotiations, including ensuring adequate stakeholders' involvement. Furthermore, the Finnish *Eduskunta* explained that, as their primary source for information was the government, the question remained whether the European Commission provided adequate information to all Member States.

On the provision of information, the European Parliament's INTA Committee remarked that on some occasions the information provided could be more specific and analytical and the information exchanged with Member States and the Council could be delivered in a more systematic way to the committee or/and its standing rapporteur on TTIP. Meanwhile, the Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon* requested more visits of European Commission representatives / experts on TTIP to national Parliaments in order to provide detailed information. It also suggested sharing the information between national Parliaments on a bilateral level and / or through an electronic platform.

All parties involved in the TTIP negotiation process should ensure more transparency, according to the Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, while the German *Bundesrat* asked for timely publication of all relevant documents and a comprehensible presentation of all guidelines, objectives and red lines of the negotiations for all interested citizens. The need for more transparency depended, in the case of the Dutch *Tweede Kamer*, mostly on the point of view of the different political parties. Some of them thought the reading rooms were sufficient or even had too much information, while others believed that all the documents in the reading room should be made public, so a public debate could be held about its content.

The Italian *Camera dei deputati* pointed out that the conclusions of the Conference of Speakers of the EU Parliaments in Luxembourg (22-24 May 2016) contained several suggestions for improvements. Amongst others, they mentioned the need for national Parliaments to have access to information relating to ongoing trade negotiations.

When Parliaments/Chambers were asked about their further actions concerning the TTIP negotiation process and its transparency, out of 35 responding Parliaments/Chambers, 14 replied they engaged in a political dialogue, 10 had adopted a resolution in Plenary and eight had adopted a resolution in a committee.

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<sup>3</sup> The Austrian *Nationalrat* added on this question that the NEOS indicated a somewhat improvement, TS indicated no changes and the Greens indicated somewhat deteriorated. The INTA Committee in the European Parliament indicated significant improvement, and the ECON Committee a somewhat improvement.

Explaining their actions taken, Parliaments/Chambers gave an extensive overview of resolutions adopted in Parliaments<sup>4</sup>. Besides mentioning the specific resolutions, meetings and hearings in Parliaments/Chambers mentioned above, some Parliaments/Chambers mentioned the use of specific letters as an action undertaken with regard to the TTIP negotiation process and its transparency. Among them, the Czech *Senát* and Portuguese *Assembleia da República* referred to the letter of the 25th of June 2014 in the framework of the political dialogue, on the initiative of the Dutch *Tweede Kamer* and co-signed by 19 Chairs of relevant committees of other Parliaments/Chambers, on the role of national Parliaments in free trade agreements. The Hungarian *Országgyűlés* pointed out that the Chair of the Committee on Sustainable Development sent two letters (in March 2015 and in July 2016) to the relevant committees in national Parliaments on issues related to TTIP. It asked for prompt examination of the overall impact of the agreement and analysis of its expected outcomes for the whole of society, environment and economy and for better information exchange on EU level, aided by national debate and social consultations.

## **Section B: TTIP READING ROOMS**

Out of 39 responding Parliaments/Chambers, 35 confirmed the creation of an *ad hoc* reading room by their Member State, with the exception of the Slovenian *Državni svet*, the Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie* and the UK *House of Commons* and *House of Lords*. In the case of the latter, the government had agreed in principle to set up a reading room, but this had not yet been implemented.

Only nine of the 34 responding Parliaments/Chambers replied that the reading rooms had been set upon their request. In the majority of the cases (28 respondents), the reading room was set up by the government; by the US embassy in the case of the Swedish *Riksdag* and the Lithuanian *Seimas*. The Croatian *Sabor* informed that the room had been set up by the Office of the National Security Council, while the Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna* and *Senát* indicated that the reading room was at first set up at the US embassy and later transferred at the Ministry of Industry and Trade. The European Parliament had set up the room itself and introduced structures meant to enable the European Parliament to exercise its responsibilities under the Common Commercial Policy (an exclusive EU competence).

Concerning access to the reading room, 19 national Parliaments/Chambers replied that access was possible for all MPs. Thirteen respondents indicated that access was possible for members of the EU Affairs committee, 11 respondents referred to members of the Economic Affairs Committee, seven respondents indicated the members of the Committee on Financial Affairs, and ten Parliaments/Chambers referred to members of other specific committees. Among these, the Lithuanian *Seimas*, the Belgian *Chambre des Représentants* and the Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon* indicated the members of the Foreign Affairs Committee. Thirteen Parliaments/Chambers indicated that all MPs had access upon request. Officials of seven responding Parliaments/Chambers had access to the room, while, according to the replies, access was not allowed to officials of 20 respondents. Government officials had access according to the reply of 24 Parliaments/Chambers. Six respondents indicated that access was allowed to other institutions/organisations. The reply of the Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna* and *Senát* referred to all public administration officials and MPs dealing with economic affairs. The Croatian *Sabor* replied that access was granted to civil servants with clearance certificate, and, according to the Croatian Law on Data Classification, automatically to MPs when such access was requested within the framework of their parliamentary duties. The

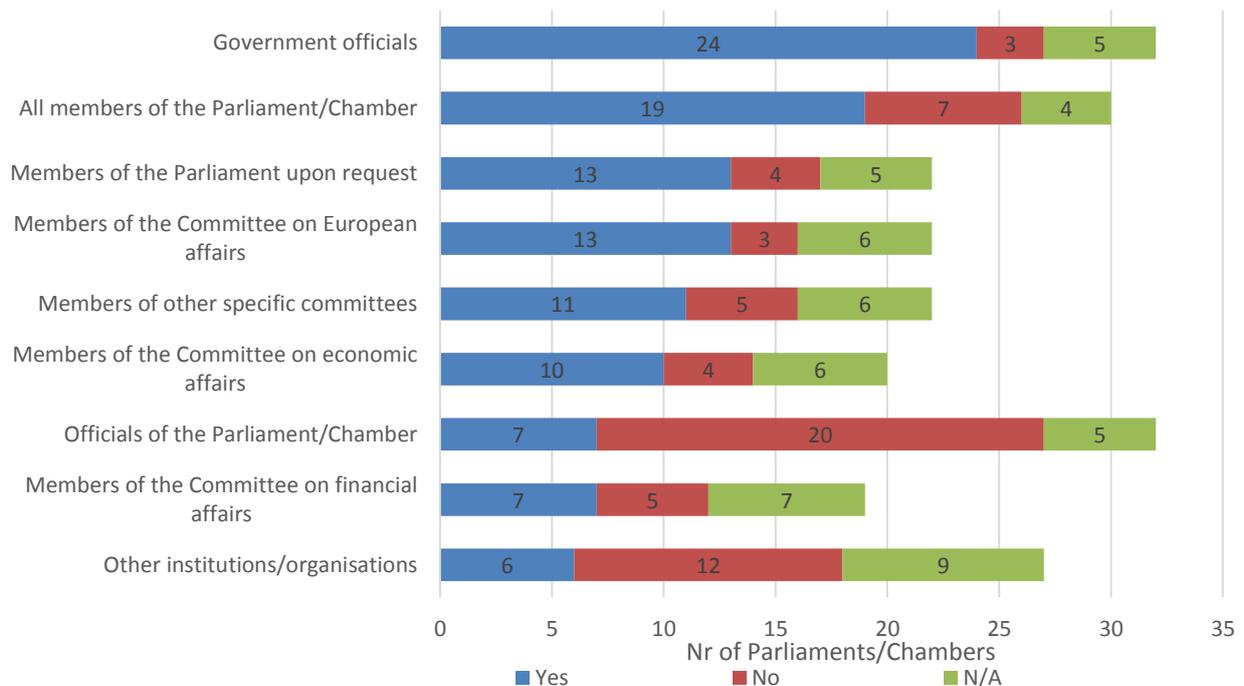
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<sup>4</sup> Parliaments'/Chambers' detailed replies including information on all specific resolutions can be found in the Annex to the 26th Bi-annual Report of COSAC on the COSAC website.

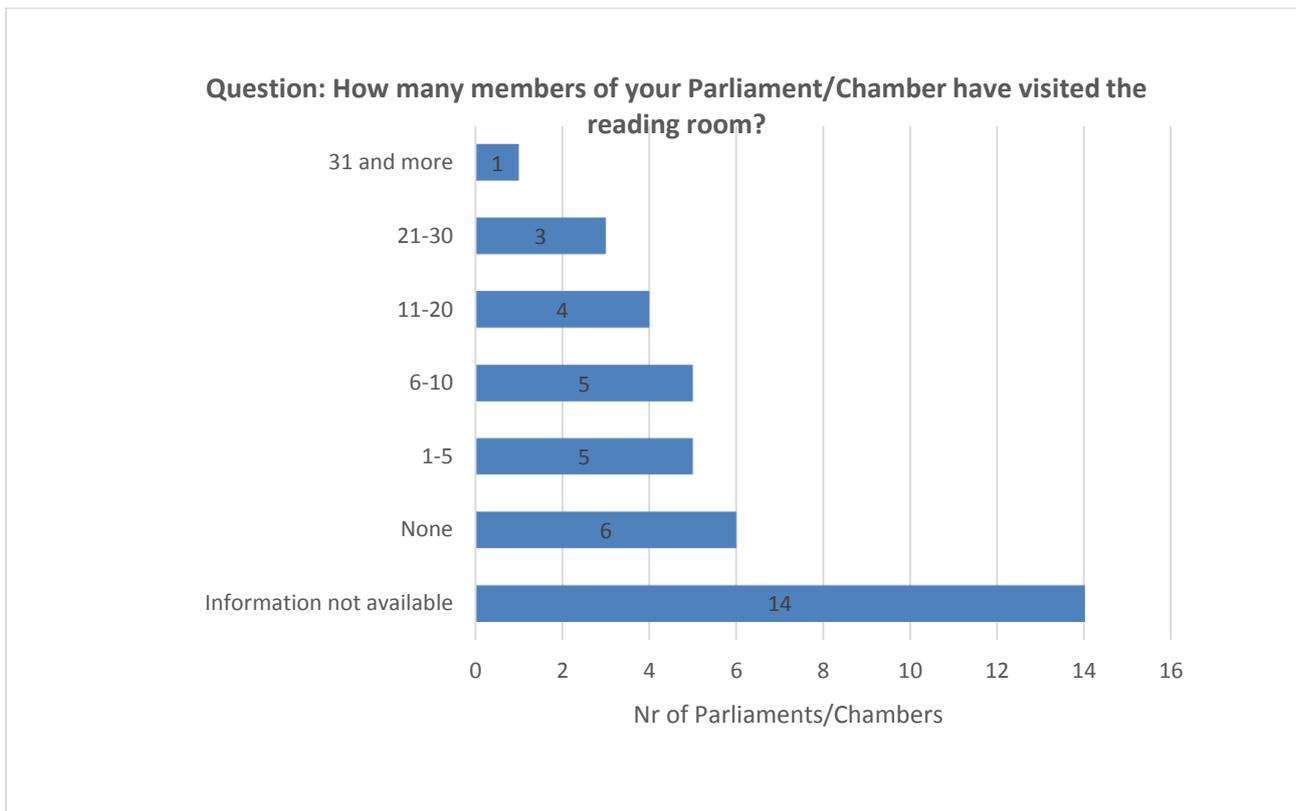
European Parliament indicated that, besides all MEPs and officials of the European Parliament, a limited number of political groups staff had access to the room. In the case of the Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, each political group of the House had one appointed MP with access to the reading room, as well as a representative (official) of the Speaker’s office. All of them participated in a Special Committee. In its reply, the Swedish *Riksdag* indicated that the reading room, set up at the US embassy, was accessible for officials at the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, as well as officials of certain Swedish public agencies. The *Riksdag* further informed that the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs had asked the US State Department whether Swedish MPs could access the reading room, but the request was rejected. Although the *Riksdag* did not have a reading room, it was receiving documents related to the negotiation process from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. According to the reply, these documents did not include the consolidated texts. The documents relating to the negotiation process could be consulted by members of the *Riksdag* in a reading room at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

The Belgian *Sénat* informed in its reply that the Ministry for Foreign Affairs had restricted access to the reading room to the members of the entities that would ratify the final TTIP agreement, that are the *Chambre des Représentants* as well as the different federated parliaments.

**Question: Who has access to the TTIP reading room?**



Of the 38 respondents answering the question concerning the number of MPs who had visited the reading room, 14 had no information available and six Parliaments/ Chambers each indicated none.. Only the German *Bundestag* replied that more than 31 MPs had visited the reading room.



On the frequency of visits of the reading room, 17 out of 35 Parliaments/Chambers indicated that no information was available, five respondents indicated that the members had visited the room once, 11 Parliaments/Chambers replied that the visits had occurred sometimes, while three (Luxembourg *Chambre des Députés*, German *Bundestag* and the European Parliament) referred to regular visits.

The conditions of the TTIP reading room were considered limiting by 13 of the 35 responding Parliaments/Chambers, while four others did not find them limiting. More than half (19) of the respondents had no opinion on the subject.

When specifying the kind of limitations perceived by the MPs, the 15 responding Parliaments/Chambers indicated the following reasons: inability to be accompanied by assistants, experts or parliamentary officials (nine respondents), language barrier (nine respondents), inability to use the internet (seven respondents), time arrangements to access/study the available documents (six respondents) and location of the reading room (three respondents). The Belgian *Chambre des représentants* regretted that only a limited number of MPs was allowed to access the reading room, while the Dutch *Tweede Kamer* emphasised the fact that none of the information could be shared in public or with experts, not being MPs. The Finnish *Eduskunta* did not formulate actual complaints, but considered the security arrangements exaggerated. In the case of the Austrian Parliament, the additional information referred to a different perception of the political groups about limitations. The SP/VP group considered that although the creation of TTIP reading rooms in Member States (Austria was among the first to set up such a reading room within the Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy) was widely acknowledged as a significant improvement, a number of parliamentarians still criticised access to negotiating documents as insufficient and the modalities of access to the TTIP reading room as overly restrictive. The Ministry had taken steps to further facilitate access, for example through more flexible opening hours. The Greens stressed that such reading room had to be in the Parliament's premises.

The Slovak *Národná rada* pointed out that the conditions to access the documents in the reading rooms were limiting, namely the fact that members could not be accompanied by their expert staff and take the records of the text for later use.

The Parliamentary Group AKEL- Left - New Forces of the Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon* considered as limitations the inability to be accompanied by assistants or parliamentary officials, designated experts, and the inability to use the internet. The Group also stressed that TTIP reading rooms should be accessible by all MPs because the TTIP influenced other House Standing Committees, like those on Labour, Agriculture and Environment.

## **CHAPTER 2: 2016: ENERGY UNION'S "YEAR OF DELIVERY"**

Building on the 23rd Bi-annual Report of COSAC finalised in May 2015 under the Latvian Presidency, the second chapter of the 26th Bi-annual Report of COSAC on Energy Union focuses on a number of proposals and communications and highlights Parliaments'/Chambers' views on energy security and energy efficiency, as well as renewables and other related dimensions. It also examines the current level of cooperation between Parliaments/Chambers on the relevant topic.

### **Section A: PARLIAMENTS'/CHAMBERS' POSITION ON THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S DOCUMENTS**

A vast majority of Parliaments/Chambers (32 out of 39 respondents) had discussed the Proposal for a Regulation concerning measures to safeguard the security of gas supply<sup>5</sup>. Of these, nine engaged in the political dialogue with the European Commission.

Amongst the latter, a couple of Parliaments/Chambers signalled a breach of subsidiarity and/or proportionality. The Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*, for instance, deemed the proposal complying with neither the principle of subsidiarity nor the principle of proportionality, and raised concern on the financial costs involved in building new infrastructure, adding that the right of the European Commission to initiate infringement proceedings against a Member State if a natural gas company did not comply with the obligation to notify was a measure that went beyond what was necessary to achieve the desired objective. The Estonian *Riigikogu* echoed this sentiment, stressing that the Member States should retain the flexibility in regards to the specific structure and content of intergovernmental agreements.

The Austrian *Bundesrat* argued that the proposal was to be rejected on grounds of subsidiarity, since the composition of the "regions" mentioned in the document interfered with the sovereignty of the Member States.

The Italian *Camera dei deputati* pointed out that, when defining regions, account must be taken both of the existing infrastructure situation and of projects currently underway in the context of TEN-E network provisions, and of interconnections through third countries (such as Switzerland).

The German *Bundesrat* considered the obligation to disclose commercial agreements as too far-reaching and potentially leading to competition distortions.

Some Parliaments/Chambers, such as the Portuguese *Assembleia da República* and the Swedish *Riksdag*, explicitly expressed the view that the proposal did not breach the subsidiarity principle.

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<sup>5</sup> Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council of the EU concerning measures to safeguard the security of gas supply and repealing Regulation (EU) No 994/2010 (COM (2016) 52).

Almost as many Parliaments/Chambers (29 out of 39 respondents) had discussed the Proposal for a Decision on establishing an information exchange mechanism with regard to intergovernmental agreements and non-binding instruments between Member States and third countries in the field of energy,<sup>6</sup> with seven Parliaments/Chambers engaging in the political dialogue with the European Commission.

The Czech *Senát* called for a review of proportionality of the proposed information exchange mechanism taking into account the real negotiating possibilities of the Member States.

The Maltese *Kamra tad-Deputati* disagreed that *ex ante* compatibility checks undertaken by the Commission were required, noting that in case of incompatibility with EU law, there were mechanisms already in place that could be applied as provided in the Treaties.

The French *Sénat* expressed a similar view, stating that the *ex ante* check impinges on the competences of the Member States.

The Finnish *Eduskunta* argued that the proposed obligations for governments to notify the Commission of its international agreements in this sector was incompatible with the Treaty's delineation of national/EU powers, a view also shared by the Austrian *Bundesrat*.

Once again, some Parliaments/Chambers, like the Romanian *Senat*, voiced their approval of the proposal, deeming it to be fully in compliance with the principle of subsidiarity and proportionality.

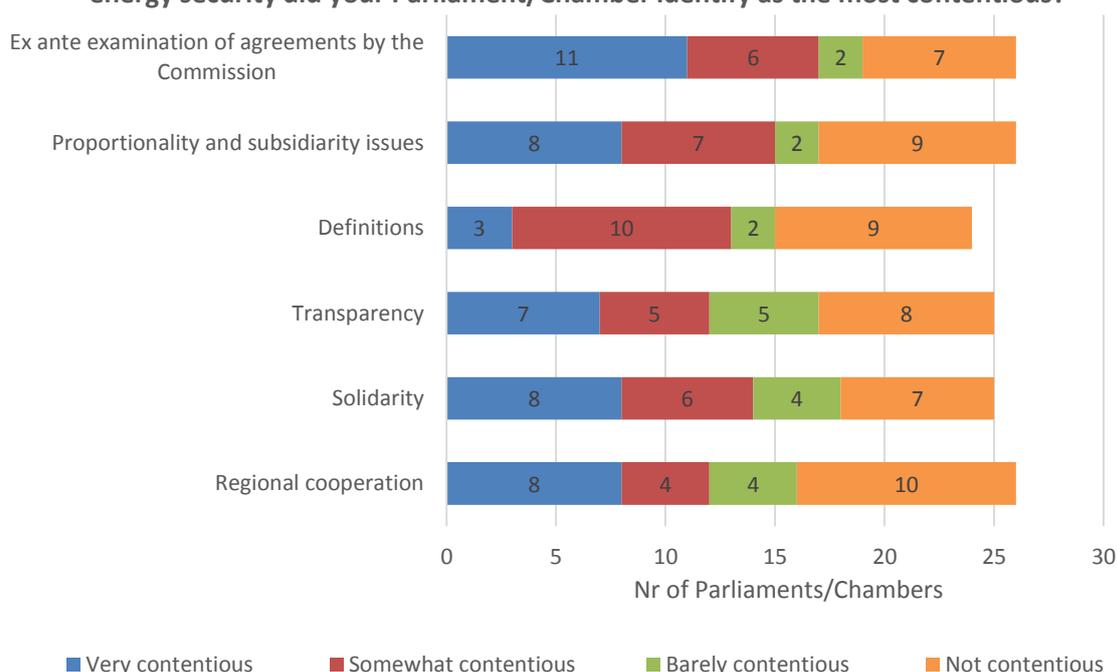
When asked which elements from the European Commission's "Winter Package" on energy security were deemed the most contentious, Parliaments/Chambers expressed mixed feelings. Almost half thought the *ex-ante* examination of agreements by the Commission very contentious, while a further six Parliaments/Chambers considered it somewhat contentious.

The other elements that proved to be of most concern to Parliaments/Chambers were "solidarity" and "proportionality and subsidiarity issues". Parliaments/Chambers were fairly divided when it came to "regional cooperation". "Definitions" was the element of least concern: only three Parliaments/Chambers found these very contentious.

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<sup>6</sup> Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council of the EU on establishing an information exchange mechanism with regard to intergovernmental agreements and non-binding instruments between Member States and third countries in the field of energy and repealing Decision No 994/2012/EU (COM (2016) 53).

**Question: Which elements from the European Commission’s “Winter package” on energy security did your Parliament/Chamber identify as the most contentious?**



Asked whether the communication on an EU strategy for liquefied natural gas and gas storage<sup>7</sup> had been discussed, the majority of respondents (22 Parliaments/Chambers) replied that they had indeed discussed this document. However, 17 Parliaments/Chambers out of 39 had not yet discussed the communication. Four Parliaments/Chambers had planned to engage in the political dialogue with the European Commission. The Italian *Camera dei deputati*, for instance, stressed that Member States must not be prohibited from taking preventive non-market measures, such as providing for strategic storage, either to make up for failures or shortfalls of imported supplies from outside the EU or to deal with the effects of exceptional climatic conditions.

The majority of Parliaments/Chambers (21 out of 39 respondents) had also discussed the communication outlining an EU strategy on heating and cooling<sup>8</sup>, though slightly less than half (18 out of 39 respondents) had not. Of the remaining Parliaments/Chambers, only three planned to engage in the political dialogue with the European Commission. Of these, the Czech *Senát* noted that the sectors involved must be regulated exclusively at the national level given the different context in individual Member States. The Italian *Camera dei deputati*, on the other hand, had a number of suggestions to make, noting, *inter alia*, the importance of addressing the situation of consumers whose income did not cover the associated costs of refitting. On the other side of the coin, the European Parliament urged that more consumer awareness be raised about the often low performance of their installed heating systems. The Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor* proposed the use of financial instruments by the European Commission, such as grants, in support of SMEs seeking to improve their energy efficiency.

The vast majority of Parliaments/Chambers did not issue any updated opinion or document on energy security or energy efficiency since the drafting of the 23rd Bi-annual Report of COSAC

<sup>7</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on an EU strategy for liquefied gas and gas storage (COM (2016) 49).

<sup>8</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – An EU Strategy on Heating and Cooling (COM (2016) 51).

under the Latvian Presidency. In fact, only ten out of 38 responding Parliaments/Chambers had issued an updated opinion or document on energy security, and nine Parliaments/Chambers (out of 39 respondents) had issued one on energy efficiency.

As for energy security, the Slovak *Národná rada* called for a well-functioning regional cooperation and increasing transparency. With regard to energy efficiency, the Czech *Senát* thought it questionable that the proposal for a Regulation should allow incentives only for products within the top class of energy efficiency, excluding products from lower classes, which may nonetheless contribute to increasing energy efficiency, and therefore proposed that such incentives be also applied to the latter.

The vast majority of Parliaments/Chambers had not started discussions on the revision of the directives on energy efficiency and on energy performance of buildings. Out of 39 respondents, only three had in fact done so, though 13 Parliaments/Chambers indicated their intention to do so.

When asked how effective the current renewable energy Directive had been in improving renewable energy industrial development and EU competitiveness in the energy sector, nearly half (19 out of 37 respondents) had no opinion to express. Of the other half, the majority (10 Parliaments/Chambers) considered the directive somewhat effective. Four Parliaments/Chambers thought the directive significantly effective, and as many thought it somewhat ineffective.

## **Section B: SELECTED ASPECTS OF THE ENERGY UNION FROM PARLIAMENTS'/CHAMBERS' POINT OF VIEW**

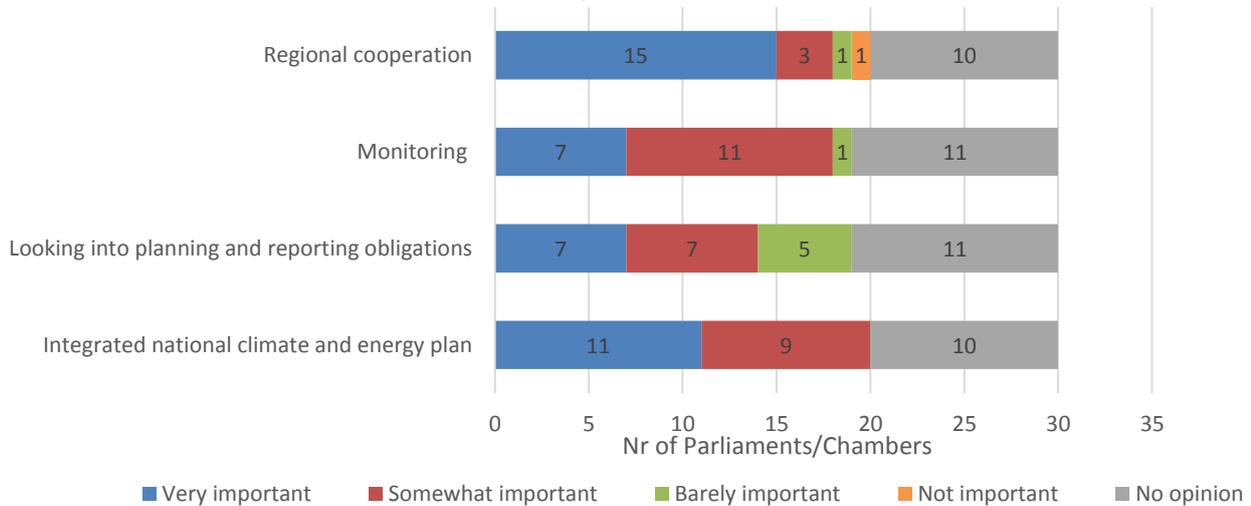
### **Elements of Energy Union governance**

As regards the elements of the governance of the Energy Union that would best ensure that the EU-level targets for renewables (binding at the EU level) and energy efficiency (indicative at the EU level) were delivered, Parliaments'/Chambers' opinion varied<sup>9</sup>. Regional cooperation was considered to be very important by half of the respondents (15 out of 30) and integrated national climate and energy plans were again considered to be very important by over a third of the respondents.

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<sup>9</sup> Please check the divergence of views of different political groups on questions 9-11 of the COSAC questionnaire in the Austrian *Nationalrat* and *Bundesrat* in its reply in the Annex to the 26th Bi-annual Report of COSAC found on the COSAC website.

**Question: In the opinion of your Parliament/Chamber what elements of the governance of the Energy Union will best ensure that the EU-level targets for renewables (binding at the EU level) and energy efficiency (indicative at the EU level) are delivered?**



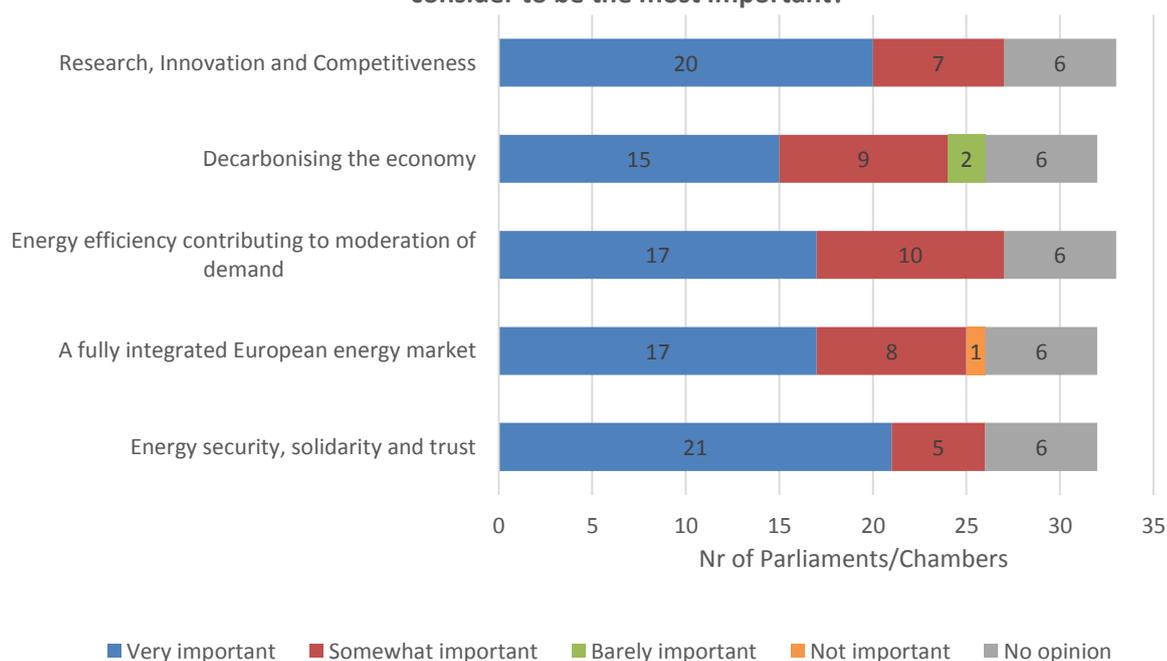
Other elements mentioned by Parliaments/Chambers, included the correct set up of the emissions trading system, investments in low-carbon technologies and solidarity among EU Member States deemed as very important (Slovak *Národná rada*), market regulation rules that would drive forward the move towards low greenhouse gas-emitting energy and production systems deemed to be somewhat important (Italian *Senato della Repubblica*), intermediate monitoring of the progress achieved (Romanian *Senat*).

Measures to be taken for increasing the flexibility of the energy system with regard to renewable energy production and plans for achieving electricity market coupling and integration, regional measures for balancing and reserves and how system adequacy was calculated in the context of renewable energy (15 out of 32 and 12 out of 32 respondents) were considered by Parliaments/Chambers to be very important elements (included in the Member States' national energy and climate plans with respect to renewable energy) in order to reach the objectives of at least 27 % in 2030. An overview of renewable energy trajectories and policies to 2050 to ensure that 2030 policies lie on the path to 2050 objectives were considered to be somewhat important by almost one third of the respondents (11 out of 32).

### **Important dimensions of the Energy Union and closer cooperation among EU Parliaments**

More than half of the respondents considered energy security, solidarity and trust, as well as research, innovation and competitiveness very important dimensions of the Energy Union.

**Question: Which dimensions of the Energy Union does your Parliament/Chamber consider to be the most important?**



Most of the responding Parliaments/Chambers (26 out of 35) had not taken any action to support the idea of closer cooperation among the EU Parliaments/Chambers on any of the five Energy Union dimensions.

However, those Parliaments/Chambers which chose to give information on action they had taken mentioned, among others, debates and meetings in which they had participated and/or organised.

The Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie* referred to its active participation in all debates concerning energy security and stability in the region and Europe. The Czech *Senát* mentioned a meeting of the EU Affairs Committees of the Visegrád Group countries hosted by the Senate itself in Prague in 2015 and its conclusions and the Hungarian *Országgyűlés* added the related meeting held in Warsaw on 1 February 2016. The Slovak *Národná rada* referred to two meetings planned under the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU where the Energy Union would be the key subject – plenary meeting of the LVI COSAC (13 – 15 November 2016) and Meeting of Chairpersons of the Economic Affairs Committees on Energy Union (1 – 2 December 2016). The French *Assemblée nationale* had organised a meeting in the context of the Weimar triangle meetings where it discussed with the Polish and German partners the national strategies on energy mix and the efforts required for reaching the objectives regarding the Energy Union. The French *Sénat* mentioned meetings with the Italian *Senato della Repubblica* and the German *Bundesrat*. The Dutch *Tweede Kamer* mentioned the organisation of the interparliamentary conference on Energy Union during the Dutch Presidency of the Council of the EU. The European Parliament said it had taken action in all dimensions and that the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE) remained open to all bilateral and multilateral dialogue with national Parliaments, giving the example of a meeting organised in Spring 2016 with the relevant Romanian *Senat* Committee on Energy Union.

In addition, the committees of the Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas* were generally supportive of cooperation among Parliaments of the Member States of the EU, while the Lithuanian *Seimas* supported all five dimensions of the Energy Union. It saw the dimension of energy security,

solidarity and trust dimension (implemented through the Baltic energy market interconnection plan (BEMIP)) and the dimension of a fully integrated European energy market (implemented through the BEMIP and the negotiation process with BRELL countries (Belarus, Russia, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) on synchronisation of the Baltic States' electricity system with the continental Europe networks) as the most important. The Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor* mentioned the dimensions of energy security, solidarity and trust; energy efficiency in support of moderating demand; research, innovation and competitiveness, emphasising the actions of diversification of supply, cooperation on security of supply, ensuring adequate transparency of commercial contracts for gas supply, empowering to choose the supplier, increasing buildings energy efficiency, reducing carbon emissions in the transport sector, and adapting energy markets and networks to renewables.

The French *Sénat* adopted a law regarding energy transition putting in place measures favouring renewable energy.

Certain Parliaments/Chambers, which had not taken action in any dimension of the Energy Union, stated nevertheless that they would support certain dimensions and actions. The Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna* mentioned solidarity, regional cooperation, information exchange; the Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon* would significantly support actions towards the increase of energy security, the diversification of routes and sources, the promotion of renewable energy and the moderation of energy demand; the Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon* would support dimensions 1 and 5; and the Polish *Sejm* underlined that the priority for Poland was security of supply and reduction of dependence on natural gas supplies.

Regarding selected aspects of the Energy Union and its dimensions, the Swedish *Riksdag* stated it had not rated the importance of the proposed measures, but that general priorities could be found in the records of the Government's deliberations with the Committee on Industry and Trade. The Committee on Industry and Trade supported the position of the Swedish Government supporting the conclusions on Governance of the Energy Union including the 2030 objectives. It also mentioned that the Swedish Government had consulted the Committee on EU Affairs regarding the Energy Union on several occasions ahead of meetings of both the Council and the European Council.

### **CHAPTER 3: IMPROVING THE ROLE OF NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS**

Chapter 3 on improving the role of national Parliaments focuses on how improvements in the context of the Juncker Commission's commitment to "forging a new partnership with national Parliaments" work in practice and Parliaments'/Chambers' evaluation of these. The chapter in question also presents Parliaments'/Chambers' views on the response time of the European Commission to the reasoned opinions submitted by national Parliaments/Chambers, as well as on the quality and consistency of the Commission's replies.

In addition, this chapter presents national Parliaments' ways of communicating their activities linked to the European Affairs to their audience, both professional and general public, in an effort to encourage an exchange of practices in this field.

#### **Section A: RELATIONS/COMMUNICATION WITH THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

##### **Visits of the European Commission**

A majority of Parliaments/Chambers indicated the number of visits of Commissioners to Parliaments/Chambers had significantly (11 out of 39) or somewhat (16 out of 39) increased within

the mandate of the current European Commission. The visits of officials (directors, general directors) of the European Commission had somewhat increased according to 17 out of 37 Parliaments/Chambers, but also 16 out of 39 Parliaments/Chambers had not observed any change in the number of visits.

The number of visits of MPs or officials of Parliament/Chambers to the European Commission evolved less. In total nine out of 38 Parliaments/Chambers noted a somewhat increased number of visits of MPs' delegation to the Commission, and eight out of 38 saw a somewhat increased number of visits of officials of Parliaments/Chambers to the European Commission within the mandate of the current Commission. The Swedish *Riksdag* explained that with regard to the number of visits to Brussels, generally an increase was noted during the year following a parliamentary election in Sweden, which however could not be linked to the mandate of the current European Commission.

To improve the relations with the European Commission in terms of organised visits both in their own countries and to the European Commission, the Austrian *Nationalrat*<sup>10</sup>, Swedish *Riksdag*, Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor*, UK *House of Lords* and Polish *Sejm* recommended good planning and cooperation on setting dates for visits of the European Commission, which should take into account the parliamentary work schedule. The Maltese *Kamra tad-Deputati* suggested the use of video conferencing to have a greater number of meetings between the national Parliaments and the European Commission.

On the number and frequency of visits, the Lithuanian *Seimas* and Austrian *Nationalrat*<sup>11</sup> suggested regular visits of representatives of the European Commission, as it would contribute to a more intensive and tangible inter-institutional political dialogue. Another suggestion came from the Italian *Senato della Repubblica*; each commissioner should visit at least once during his/her mandate. The Estonian *Riigikogu* added that meetings in Parliaments should always be part of Commissioners visit programmes to Member States, while Parliaments themselves should also invite Commissioners directly.

On the topics and issues to discuss during visits, the Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon* and Latvian *Saeima* suggested visits on targeted issues of interest and substantive topics. The Latvian *Saeima* stressed that, during these discussions openness, up-to-date information and expertise from the European Commissioners were expected.

The Belgian *Chambre des représentants* expressed the view that the European Commission should present its policies to the national Parliaments in a similar way as it did to the Council, i.e. through meetings with specialised MPs and/or with the national Parliaments' representatives. The Hungarian *Országgyűlés* suggested the European Commission could organise thematic seminars and study-trips on a regular basis for MPs as well as official, as these could contribute to the strengthening of the bilateral institutional relations and ensure a framework for direct exchange of views.

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<sup>10</sup> Answer provided by SP/VO in the Austrian *Nationalrat*.

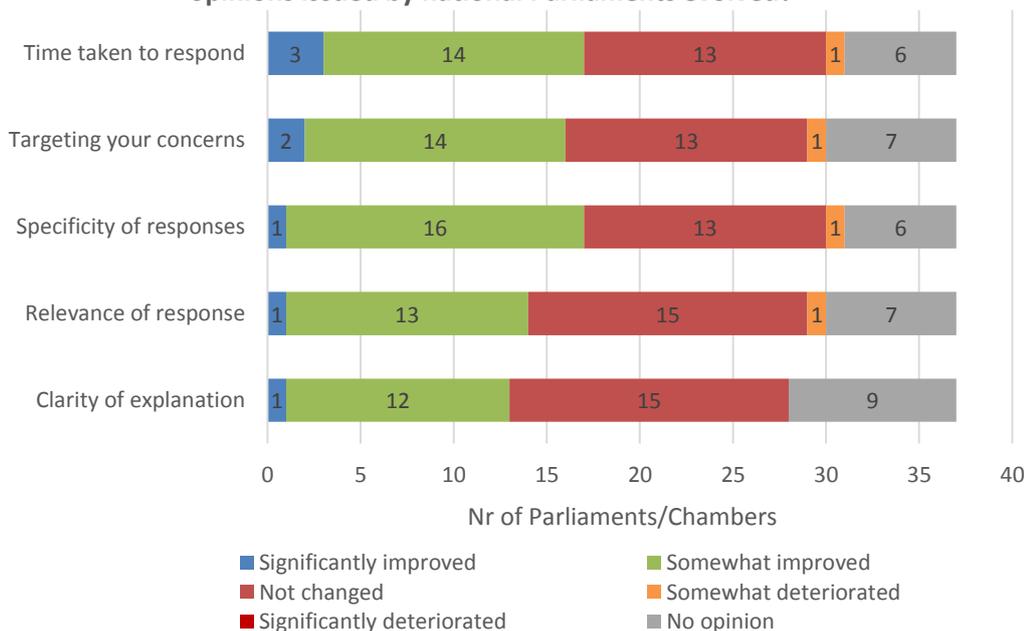
<sup>11</sup> Answer provided by SP/VO in the Austrian *Nationalrat*.

## Evolution of the current European Commission’s responses to the reasoned opinions issued by national Parliaments

Parliaments’/Chambers/ replies as to the evolution of the European Commission’s responses to the reasoned opinions issued by national Parliaments concentrated mostly on ‘somewhat improved’ or ‘not changed’<sup>12</sup>.

The specificity of the responses, the time taken to respond and targeting concerns were most emphasised by the respondents as the aspects somewhat improved. An almost equal number thought the clarity of explanation and the relevance of responses had not changed.

**Question: In the experience of your Parliament/Chamber, how have the following aspects of the current European Commission’s (2014 - ) responses to the reasoned opinions issued by national Parliaments evolved?**



## Communication and exchange with the European Commission

The majority of Parliaments/Chambers (27 out of 39) thought there was room for improvement when communicating and exchanging with the European Commission, 10 had no opinion on the matter, and only two thought there was no room for such improvement.

Regarding improvement on the side of the European Commission, many Parliaments/Chambers stressed that the European Commission should pay more attention to the concerns expressed by Parliaments in their respective statements and/or reasoned opinions (e.g. Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*, Latvian *Saeima*) and cover every issue raised (Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor*), that the Commission’s reply was very general (Czech *Senát*); that it should address the issues raised and give clearer explanation of its position (UK *House of Commons*); that the Commission should do more to meet the concerns of national Parliaments, particularly by more seriously considering amending proposals on the basis of the assessments of Parliaments (Dutch *Tweede Kamer*); that all

<sup>12</sup> Please check the divergence of views of different political groups on questions 3 and 4 of the COSAC questionnaire in the Austrian *Nationalrat* and *Bundesrat* in its reply in the Annex to the 26th Bi-annual Report of COSAC found on the COSAC website.

proposals must be accompanied by better justifications, in particular, as regards the application of the principle of subsidiarity (Swedish *Riksdag*); and that also the Commission's responses should be better targeted (Polish *Senat*); that it would be helpful for responses to reflect the role national Parliaments could play in policy development at EU level (UK *House of Lords*). It was further supported that in subsidiarity checks, in particular when the threshold of the "yellow card" procedure was reached, the concerns raised by a significant number of national Parliaments should be analysed from all possible points of view by the European Commission (Hungarian *Országgyűlés*).

More detailed suggestions were given by the Polish *Sejm*. With regard to national Parliaments' opinions and the Commission's replies, it was proposed to transform this register/collection into a database equipped with search functions: search by type of document, by Parliament/Chamber and date (of adoption or of transmission of a document by Parliament/Chamber), to make a distinction between reasoned opinions and opinions sent as a political dialogue, to apply a clear distinction between documents from different chambers of bicameral parliaments (on the results list the documents are mixed), to inform about the author of translation of the documents and to check whether the links were correct. With regard to subsidiarity scrutiny, it was proposed to indicate the deadlines for scrutiny, to publish the information on the web page about reaching the threshold for "yellow/orange" card and the next steps in the procedure and to inform Parliaments on how (and where) they could intervene, when there was no *lettre de saisine* accompanying an EU draft legislative act.

Parliaments/Chambers also commented on the time it took for the European Commission to respond to reasoned opinions sent to the European Commission. The Estonian *Riigikogu* said there should be a concrete agreed time for the European Commission to answer to letters and that Commissioners should directly ask Parliaments when and why they would like to meet and offer the opportunity for visits to Brussels. The Belgian *Sénat* said that the Commission's response should be sent as rapidly as possible.

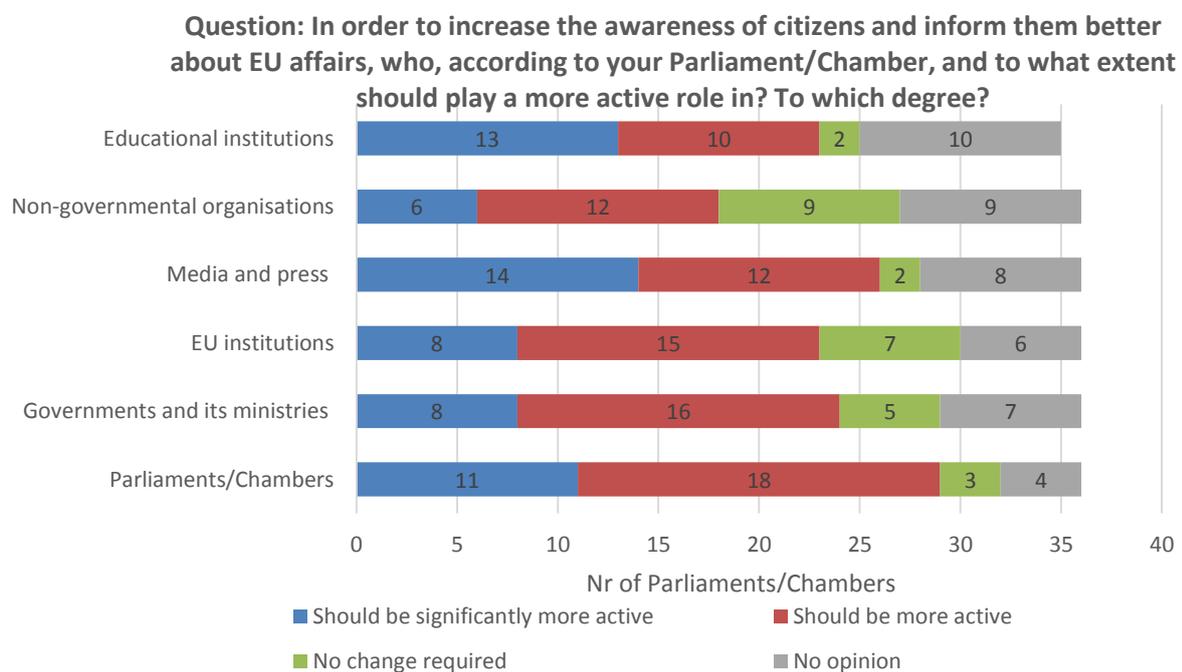
As to communication with the European Commission, it was supported that there should be more formalised channels and fora of communication between the Commission and Parliaments and that interparliamentary cooperation should be strengthened and improved and it should include Commission representatives (Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*). In addition, it was suggested that it would be useful to put in place a system of direct and regular dialogue, particularly at the stage of the conception and planning of the major EU initiatives in order to avoid divergences at a later stage; to this effect, IT tools could be used other than the regular meetings (Portuguese *Assembleia da República*). It was furthermore pointed out that the new exchange system of the European Commission for communicating EU proposals was found to be not very user-friendly (Dutch *Eerste Kamer*). The dialogue between the national Parliaments and the European Commission should take the form of a more tangible cooperation based on reciprocity. The European Commission should make every effort to maintain and strengthen this kind of cooperation (Lithuanian *Seimas*). The European Parliament's Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs (ECON) mentioned that an inter-institutional agreement, as foreseen in the Five Presidents' Report, would help streamline communication and involvement of the European Parliament as regards European Semester Procedures.

As regards improvements on the side of Parliaments, it was suggested that Parliaments should be more active in EU affairs and more involved in the EU legislation process (Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*); that they should stick more to the content in particular when drafting reasoned opinions (Maltese *Kamra tad-Deputati*); that they should increase their analysis capacity and better monitor

the dynamic of Commission's positioning (Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor*); and that they should exchange more with each other before sending out reasoned opinions (Dutch *Tweede Kamer*). It was further argued that the opinions adopted by the national Parliaments should be concise, sufficiently elaborated and well-structured (Hungarian *Országgyűlés*).

## Section B: COMMUNICATING EU AFFAIRS

National Parliaments were asked which stakeholders should get further involved in communicating the EU affairs in order to increase the awareness of citizens and inform them better about EU affairs. Most of those responding considered that it was the Parliaments/Chambers themselves who should be more active. The results showed that there was almost an equal room for improvement for all stakeholders in the domain of improving communication of EU affairs, with the exception for non-governmental organisations; only eighteen parliaments thought the latter should get more active.



Twenty-seven respondents out of 39 expressed their ambition to play a more vocal role in informing their citizens about the EU affairs in general, two said they did not have this goal and the rest, 10 Parliaments/Chambers, expressed no position on this question.

The Belgian *Chambre des représentants* thought that national Parliaments were not in position to tell third parties how to communicate, but this should not stop those Parliaments/Chambers from developing strategies and making them known to the general public. The Czech *Senát* remarked that the EU institutions, especially permanent representations, had the potential to communicate the EU affairs better, focusing on promoting and raising awareness rather than concentrating on high level debates or very general public debates. The European Parliament saw communicating with citizens as a primary concern of the EU institutions with the aim of fostering trust in the European project and allow citizens to exercise their right to participate in the democratic life of the Union. It thought important that the inter-institutional communication priorities were agreed between the EU institutions and, additionally, during these times it remained necessary to have a stronger focus on delivering results to EU citizens through more streamlined and democratic decision-making. In

some Parliaments (Austrian *Nationalrat* and Dutch *Eerste Kamer*) the opinions varied depending on the political group whether the Parliaments/Chambers should be more engaged in communicating EU affairs. According to the Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor*, it was the citizens too who should seek to acquire better knowledge on EU actions and decision-making mechanisms.

### **Perceived limitations**

Out of those Parliaments/Chambers who wanted to play a more vocal role in informing citizens about the EU affairs in general, 18 marked the complexity of the subject and its difficulty in terms of communication as the main limitation in achieving their ambition. This was followed by the lack of attention from journalists/media (14 Parliaments/Chambers) and from the general public (as pointed out by the Estonian *Riigikogu* and Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*). It was as well difficult to assess as to what extent the information reached the public despite the continuous effort to improve the communication, according to the Dutch *Eerste Kamer*. Media/journalists were often interested only in negative impacts of the EU legislation, which complicated conveying the information to the public by the Belgian *Sénat*. Additionally, 10 Parliaments/Chambers thought it was the lack of resources, which hindered them in communicating EU affairs. According to the European Parliament, the psychological and physical distance of 'EU institutions' was an important limitation; EU were affairs often considered as 'foreign affairs' without linkage to domestic politics. The busy agenda of members should not be forgotten, as pointed by the Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor* and often it was the politicians who defined their means and content of communication, complemented the Latvian *Saeima*. Only three Parliaments/Chambers mentioned the lack of strategy as a limitation in achieving the ambition to play a more vocal role in informing citizens about EU affairs in general.

To name some best practices to overcome the limitations, the Portuguese *Assembleia da República* established an online platform for informing their citizens about different stages of the legislation process and allowing them to send their commentaries, while the Swedish *Riksdag* had a plan to develop a new website in the near future to improve the availability of information to its citizens.

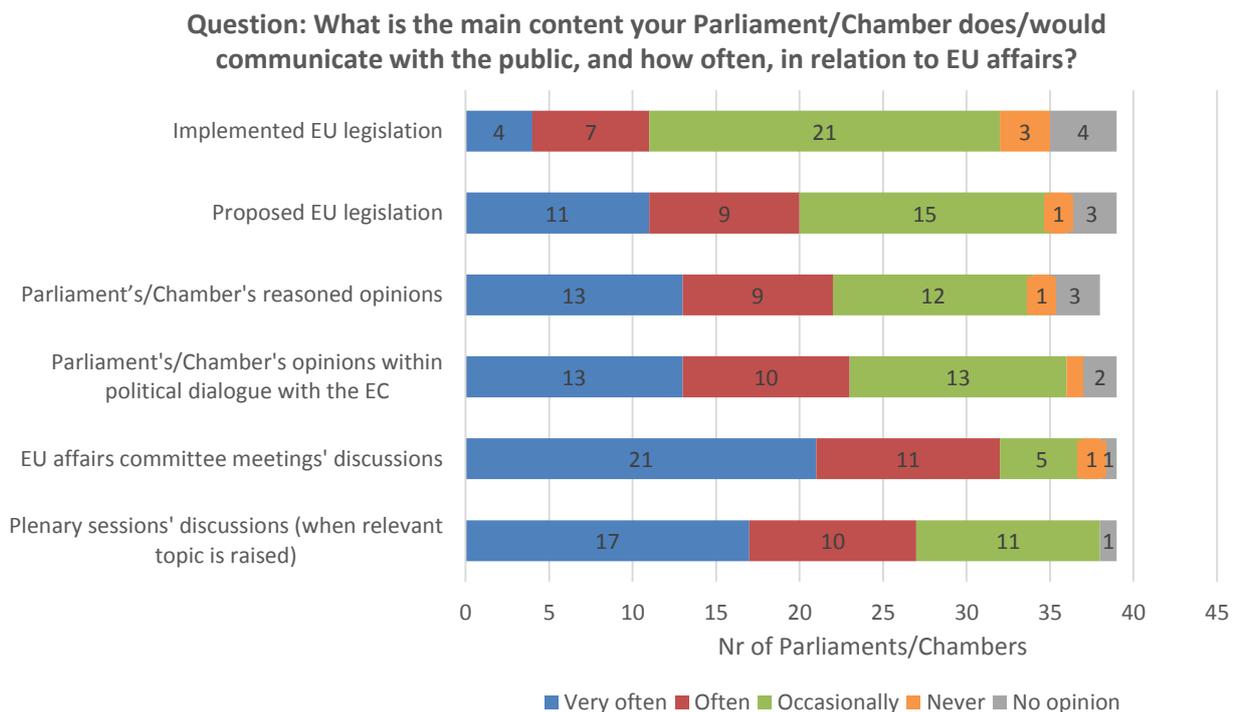
### **Communication strategy**

When asked about whether the Parliaments/Chambers had a special communication strategy for the EU affairs, almost two thirds (24) of those responding had no such strategy and 14 had one. Amongst the elements listed as part of their strategies, especially in direct communication, many Parliaments/Chambers (Romanian *Senat*, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, European Parliament, Swedish *Riksdag*, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, both Dutch *Eerste Kamer* and *Tweede Kamer*) established dedicated websites or sections on websites focusing on EU affairs, which were often targeted at different audience (young people, schools, etc.). Another online tool used by the Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, the Dutch *Eerste Kamer* and *Tweede Kamer* was a specialised EU affairs newsletter prepared and distributed regularly informing about the upcoming activities of the Parliaments/Chambers and those in Brussels in relation to EU affairs. The online communication was often complemented by using the social media (French *Sénat*, Dutch *Eerste Kamer* and *Tweede Kamer*), online streaming (Dutch *Tweede Kamer*, Swedish *Riksdag*) and in the case of the Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon* by a dedicated TV channel. Some of the Parliaments/Chambers organised meetings with the public, either in large (Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor*) or in a more targeted way (Swedish *Riksdag*) or through building a direct relationship between citizens and EU Affairs Committee (Romanian *Senat*). Among other channels, the Spanish *Cortes Generales* used its Congressional Transparency Portal for communicating the EU affairs and the European Parliament relied on a mix of direct (website, streaming, social media, organised visits of public to the

premises, visitors' centre, information campaigns, debates and events) and indirect communication (via providing information and supporting journalists) defined by its strategy. Similarly, the Swedish *Riksdag* had developed a strategy 'Administration's Communications Strategy' which identified the following major target groups for external communication: the public, the Government, public authorities, county councils, regions, municipalities, media, organisations, the business sector, schools, universities and colleges and international bodies. For the UK *House of Commons* the up-to-date online publications were an important channel in communicating the EU affairs even without any specific Parliamentary Strategy. The UK *House of Lords* EU Committee had a media strategy which included a dedicated social media account, news releases, website updates and a regular newsletter, the context for communicating EU affairs in the UK was different to that in all other Member States following the result of the referendum on UK membership of the EU.

### Content of communication

Taking into account the content related to the EU affairs communicated by the respondents, most frequently it was the discussions in EU Affairs committee meetings. This was followed by the plenary sessions when a relevant topic was raised. Less, but still more than half of the responding Parliaments/Chambers (very) often communicated the opinions within the political dialogue with the European Commission, reasoned opinions and proposed EU legislation. Around half of the respondents indicated they only occasionally communicated with the public on implemented EU legislation.



### Adapting the communication

Almost two thirds of the responding Parliaments/Chambers (23 out of 37) did not adapt their communication according to the audience; their communication was general and prepared in only one version. One third did adapt their communication according to the audience by preparing more

than one version of communication. Thirteen out of 19 Parliaments/Chambers adapted regularly the content when it came to communicating EU affairs mainly for the public and for media/journalists. Eleven out of 17 Parliaments/Chambers adapted their content for schools and universities (three had done regularly and eight sometimes) and comparable frequency applied to adapting the content for young people. To demonstrate the modification of the content, the German *Bundestag* mentioned its annual 'open day' including round tables on EU-issues, annual school day "Europe" and Youth Parliament. Similarly, the Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor* organised in their premises visits of college students and young graduates and provided traineeships, the Dutch *Eerste Kamer* adapted educational material on how the EU works for high school students and the Swedish *Riksdag* within its visitors programme for schoolchildren, highlighting the connection between national legislation and EU legislation where possible.

### **Established channels for communicating EU affairs**

All of the responding Parliaments/Chambers (39) made use of their own website as the main communication channel for the EU affairs. With regard to frequency, 36 of the respondents used this platform regularly, two used it sometimes and only one did occasionally. This way of communication was closely followed by other forms. First, meetings with media/journalists, where the vast majority (33 out of 38) of responding Parliaments/Chambers were involved with various frequencies (10 respondents communicated this way regularly, eleven sometimes and 12 occasionally). Second, it was the print publications, namely brochures, flyers, where 33 out of 39 Parliaments/Chambers used this form of communication. The least commonly used way of communicating declared was publishing articles on blogs or specialised platforms, where only two Parliaments/Chambers had been engaging in this activity regularly, nine Parliaments/Chambers sometimes and 16 respondents occasionally.

Many had already explored the use of social media, though the frequency varied. However, there was a group of respondents (seven) who had admitted that they had never used this form of communication. Some other examples included the Czech *Senát* which published weekly reports on topical EU issues and both monthly and annual reports on the EU agenda, complemented by the articles in the Senate bulletin, similar to the Sejm Chronicle published by the Polish *Sejm*. Likewise, the Belgian *Chambre des représentants* and the Latvian *Saeima* had developed a set of information sheets on topics of institutional interest including aspects of the EU (both available online and in paper form). The Swedish *Riksdag* had put in use the Riksdag Information Service which answered questions about the EU on a daily basis via e-mail or phone. A possibility to inform the public during the 'open day' and through the visits of members to schools and universities was pointed out by the German *Bundestag*. The latter added that it had made use of portals for youth and children, Parliament TV, mobile app and international students exchange program as well. The UK *House of Lords* worked in conjunction with a number of UK universities on a "Parliamentary Studies Module", which included a session on scrutiny of EU matters. Additionally, the European Parliament had provided the media with press and audio-visual materials.

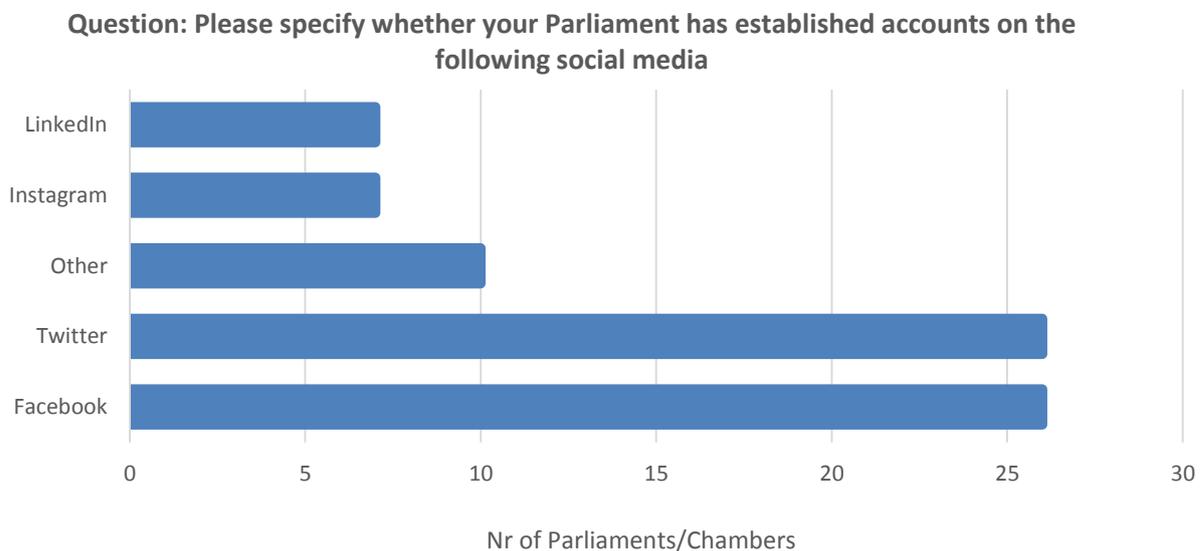
### **Involvement of members in communicating EU affairs**

As far as involvement of members in communicating EU affairs, all but one Parliament/Chamber indicated their members had some kind of involvement. More than half (21 out of 38) declared that some members in their Parliaments/Chambers were actively engaged, in 10 Parliaments/Chambers most of their members of respective committees dealing with EU affairs were actively engaged and six respondents indicated limited involvement of their members in communicating the EU affairs. On the format of the involvement, the most regularly explored forms were the participation in

conferences/fora with more than a half of respondents (19 out of 37) indicating this option, followed by TV/radio debates and use of social media (16 respondents out of 36 and 37 respectively). Blogging was the form which had been used rather occasionally by 16 out of 35 respondents. The Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas* pointed out that it was very difficult to monitor these activities and, according to the UK *House of Commons*, the German *Bundestag* and the Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, the members communicated in their own personal capacity as well, via, among others, their personal social media accounts, and individual blogs. The Hungarian *Országgyűlés* had made use of internal communication, informing members, advisors, staff members on current EU affairs and found this an important part of sharing the information together with publishing biannually a strategic plan concerning EU activities of the Parliament.

### Use of social media

Three quarters of Parliaments/Chambers (26 out of 34) declared that they had or planned to have their own Facebook and Twitter accounts, seven had communicated via Instagram and five via LinkedIn profiles.



In addition, some Parliaments/Chambers specified they also used their own YouTube channels (European Parliament, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, Romanian *Camera Deputaților*, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, Latvian *Saeima*, Dutch *Eerste Kamer*), Google+ network (French *Assemblée nationale*, Romanian *Camera Deputaților*) and picture/photo online repository systems like Flickr (Polish *Sejm*, European Parliament, Latvian *Saeima*) and Pinterest (European Parliament) and new platforms like Snapchat (European Parliament and envisaged by the Belgian *Sénat* to communicate better with the young audience). The German *Bundestag* did not have any official social media account established.