

The domain of the right?

Explaining national parliamentary preferences on EU-related self-empowerment

Karolina Borońska-Hryniewiecka

University of Wrocław

kboronska@hotmail.com

Guillaume Sacriste

Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne

gsacriste@hotmail.fr

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Abstract

In the academic debate about the deficits of representative democracy in the European Union the views of members of parliaments about their EU-oriented roles remain largely unknown. Against this background, we exploit a novel dataset from an author-designed survey conducted in seven national parliaments to unravel MPs' preferences with regard to their EU-oriented empowerment. Our findings allow to identify the dominant cognitive schemas mobilized among parliamentarians which attribute particular legitimacy-related meanings to proposed institutional reforms. They point to a stronger explanatory power of party ideological position over national constitutional orientations, with right wing parties being more supportive towards parliamentary empowerment than their centre and centre-left counterparts, and mainstream parties being more sceptical of it than radical groups on both sides of the spectrum

Introduction

It has been widely recognized in the literature that the European Union's (EU) suffers from a deficit of representative democracy (Mair, 2013; Vauchez, 2014; Lindseth, 2017) while parliamentarization at the EU level through the creation of the supranational European Parliament (EP) is not sufficient to legitimize European integration (Crum and Fossum, 2009; Bellamy and Kröger, 2014). One of the ways to address this shortcoming was the attempt to strengthen the position of national parliaments (NPs) in European affairs. In this regard, the Lisbon Treaty (2009) recognized for the first time the formal role of national legislators in the EU's political architecture, considering them as institutions "actively contributing to the good functioning of the Union" (Article 12 TEU) and granting them a role in the EU legislative process as guardians of the subsidiarity principle. Over a decade later, the Lisbon provisions have not only proved administratively demanding and politically limited in their effects (Cooper, 2018), but most of all they have assigned NPs a somehow frustrating position of veto players in the process of further integration.

In this context, one of the recommendations of the recently concluded Conference on the Future of Europe is to endow NPs with the right to present proposals for legislative initiatives to the European Commission (the so-called "green card")¹ thus granting them a constructive

role in the EU governance architecture. While scholars remain divided as to whether NPs should have the right to co-create policy solutions at the EU level (Neyer, 2014; Hennette et al., 2017 *inter alia*) or rather focus on scrutinizing their executives (De Wilde and Raunio, 2018 *inter alia*), we know very little about preferences of the primary stakeholders - national parliamentarians - as to their institutions' European roles. It remains a puzzle how the file and rank MPs envisage their own EU-oriented empowerment, what sort of mechanisms aimed at strengthening their position in EU affairs they prefer, and how these choices are related to MPs' national and ideological affiliations.

In this paper, we exploit a novel dataset from an author-designed survey conducted between 2021 and 2022 among members of seven national parliaments in Germany, France, Poland, Italy, Spain, Denmark and Belgium to address the above-mentioned questions. Specifically, we intend to identify how, on the one hand, MPs' national constitutional orientations and, on the other, party ideology affect their preferences as to the need for, and the shape of, potential reforms aimed at strengthening NPs in the current EU institutional framework. In doing this, we undertake the first attempt to probe the actual parliamentary support for the creation of a European transnational assembly composed of national MPs - the idea proposed by a group of researchers around Thomas Piketty and aimed at increasing the accountability and legitimacy of EU economic governance (Hennette et al., 2017; 2019). Of interest here is also which of these factors better explain parliamentary stances in this respect.

We believe that adopting the perspective "from within" by exploring the actual preferences of the core actors is important for several reasons. First, it will shed light on MPs' self-perceptions as role-takers in the EU multi-level political system and reveal to what extent parliamentary views are homogeneous or divergent across Europe. Second, it will allow to reassess the sense and feasibility of potential institutional reforms strengthening the powers of NPs postulated by some politicians and experts as a way to reduce the EU's democratic deficit. The latter one has been compounded by the recent COVID-19 pandemic which increased marginalization of parliamentary actors *vis-à-vis* the executives (Borońska-Hryniewiecka and Fromage, 2022; Sacriste, 2020). Third, it will reveal what kind of transnational coalitions, if any, can be built across parties or member states to further increase parliamentary leverage in European affairs. Finally, by identifying cognitive schemas which MPs use to evaluate the proposed mechanisms, our analysis allows us to assess to what extent strengthening of NPs within the EU policy-making is considered by MPs as a boost to European democracy, or a threat to EU integration.

Our findings reveal that while the national constitutional orientations (Winzen, 2015) do influence MPs' preferences towards reforms aimed at strengthening NPs in the EU affairs, the party ideological position is a stronger predictor of these attitudes. In this respect, the right wing parties tend to be more supportive towards parliamentary empowerment than their centre and centre-left counterparts, and moderate mainstream parties tend to be more sceptical of it than radical parties on both sides of the spectrum. The conducted analysis reveals that to evaluate the proposed reforms, parliamentary respondents use two cognitive schemas of interpretation which attribute particular legitimacy-related meanings to EU institutional reforms. When guided by national constitutional orientations, they confront an intergovernmental understanding of the EU legitimacy construction - placing the locus of control within national governments - with a federalist one which foresees a stronger role for the supranational EP. Following the partisan ideological line, they choose between a more conservative and sovereignist understanding of the appropriate EU governance model and a more liberal and cosmopolitan one. However, faced with an institutional solution that defies these bi-polar patterns, such as the transnational parliamentary assembly, national

parliamentarians have the difficulty to classify it according to their dominant cognitive schemas, which effectively hampers their choices.

The paper begins by revisiting the state of the art and highlighting its main shortcomings. We then outline theoretical proposals and hypotheses regarding the two variables of interest. The next section presents this research methodology, including the survey design and analytical model. We then turn to the presentation of the results in view of our theoretical expectations. The article concludes with a discussion of the results and setting avenues for future research.

State of the art and its shortcomings

The literature on national parliaments in the EU is undoubtedly abundant. Much has been written about national parliaments' formal standing in the EU (inter alia Maurer, 2002; Winzen, 2012; Karlas, 2012; Auel et al., 2015), the actual parliamentary use of the various mechanism at hand (inter alia Cooper 2018; Fromage and Fasone, 2016) as well as how recent crises have affected parliaments' position in the EU governance architecture (inter alia Jancic, 2017; Borońska-Hryniewiecka and Fromage, 2022). Scholars and experts have also come up with new conceptualizations of the post-Lisbon roles of NPs (Auel and Neuhold, 2017; de Wilde and Raunio, 2018) and issued recommendations on how to strengthen their position in EU affairs (COSAC, 2022). Yet, this rich state of the art largely lacks analyses "from within" which would provide us with core actors' perspective on the abovementioned issues (cf. Winzen, 2022). While some valuable comparative studies of parliamentary EU-related preferences are based on pre-2000 data (Wessels, 2005), the latest attempts are limited to role-orientations of the members of EU committees (Kinski, 2021), or to the area of EU monetary and fiscal reforms (Blesse et al. 2019; 2022).

Some feedback with respect to parliamentary stances on broader institutional reforms can be tracked in the COSAC² bi-annual reports. However, these studies are conducted on the basis of questionnaires addressed at the level of parliamentary administrations or committee chairs, and reflect the general institutional position of the chambers. The hitherto findings of these reports reveal that many NPs do not possess official opinions on particular constitutional issues or present a rather self-restraining attitude with regard to EU affairs and potential institutional reforms. For example, according to the 29th COSAC report (2018) while 22 out of 40 chambers of NPs did not have any opinion on whether they would support a treaty change granting them a stronger role in the European legislative process, four were clearly against it. The latest, 38th COSAC report (2022) conducted in an aftermath of the CoFoE, reveals that majority of chambers have no official opinion with respect to citizens' recommendations issued as a result of the Conference with respect to EU institutional changes. We believe that at the time when the EU is reflecting on how to increase its democratic legitimacy and institutional sovereignty such results call for a more in-depth analysis identifying the actual stances of national democratic representatives with respect to their roles in the EU.

Theoretical expectations

The literature on parliamentary adaptation to EU integration offers various explanations with regard to the factors influencing parliamentary reforms. Some of them point to contextual variables such as the formal powers of NPs, or the level of public euroscepticism (Benz, 2004; Raunio, 2005; Karlas, 2012). Others take a more actor-oriented perspective assuming that MPs hold beliefs about the appropriate and democratic design of the EU (cf. Jachtenfuchs et al., 1998; Wessels, 2005). They all however point to the heterogeneity of national contexts as one of the main obstacles to further empowerment of NP's in EU affairs. Since the focus of

this work is on MPs' preferences with regard to their self-empowerment in the EU, we employ the latter approach by focusing on two dimensions of parliamentary identification - the national and party ideological one. We assume that in both of these dimensions MPs undergo processes of socialization that shape their cognitive schemas about appropriate organization of political systems which in turn determine their preferences as to EU reforms and the EU-oriented roles of parliaments.

National constitutional orientations

We depart from the premise, that while the most pronounced dividing line among politicians goes along party political orientations, MPs from various parties of the same country share a common historical, national and institutional cognitive schema of the appropriate design of a constitutional system (Diez Medrano, 2003; Risse, 2004). In line with Wessels (2005) and Winzen (2017) we further agree that these understandings, varying across the countries, have a strong impact on MPs' beliefs about the proper mechanisms of legitimacy and the construction of accountability in the EU. In this vein, we follow Hooghe and Marks in assuming that MPs from federal countries tend to be more supportive of multi-level governance and sharing of sovereignty across different territorial levels within the EU than those from less decentralised states (2001: 151). The latter ones are expected to defend a more intergovernmental Europe where member states act as key pillars of effective and legitimate governance. Consequently, depending on whether MPs come from states whose socialization schemas tend toward intergovernmental or federal conceptions of the ideal political organization of the EU (Jachtenfuchs et al., 1998; Rittberger, 2005), they either opt for strengthening NPs, or for empowering the supranational institution of the EP as a means of increasing the democratic legitimacy of the EU. Therefore, we assume that (H1): *MPs with more intergovernmental national constitutional orientations will show stronger support for strengthening NPs in the EU than those with federalist national orientations.*

Following the same logic, with respect to the type of reforms preferred by MPs, we assume that (H2): *MPs with more intergovernmental national constitutional orientations will show stronger support for mechanisms aimed at increasing the leverage of NPs vis-à-vis EU institutions while those with federalist orientations will support mechanisms involving cooperation with the EP.*

While these EU-oriented preferences surely depend on MPs' partisan identity (with conservative parties tending towards more intergovernmental models and culturally liberal parties towards federal models), for the sake of testing the national constitutional variable we assume after Jachtenfuchs et al. (1998) and Winzen et al. (2015) that the common national context of parties in the same member state has a specific effect compared to ideological differences among parties. That is why in our operationalization of MPs' national constitutional orientations we account for the constitutional structure of the state (see methodology section below).

Party ideology

The literature agrees that political parties' attitudes to EU integration are conditioned by a combination of their positioning on the economic left/right axis and their cultural orientations according to the GAL-TAN scale (Hooghe et al., 2002; Winzen, 2017). For the purpose of the following inquiry we broadly classify right wing parties as culturally conservative and economically liberal, centre parties as culturally and economically liberal, and left as culturally liberal and economically interventionist. Authors agree that conservative parties,

who in general are associated with more nationalist and sovereignist attitude defending national culture and sovereignty against the external pressures of international organizations, tend to argue for rebalancing of power between the EU and its Member States (Hooghe et al., 2002). At the same time, liberal centrist and liberal left-wing parties are much more supportive towards further EU integration (Chapel Hill, 2019). The study of the recent political manifestos of the French and German Liberals, or the German, Italian and French Social Democrats illustrate this position. Taking into account that European integration - understood as a further transfer of competences to the EU level - inevitably weakens the legislative and oversight capacities of NPs, we assume that parties' stances on EU integration will be inversely related to their preferences on empowering NPs. While the conservative, right wing parties view NPs as legitimate locus of sovereignty and democratic control with regard to EU policy of their member states, centre and left wing MPs might perceive them as potential veto players who might weaken the integration process in order to safeguard their national competences.

Therefore we assume that (H3): *Right and centre-right MPs will show stronger support towards strengthening NPs in the EU than their left and centre-left counterparts.*

As regards the specific mechanisms to strengthen NPs in EU affairs, we further hypothesize that (H4): *Right-wing MPs will (H4A): show stronger support towards mechanisms safeguarding national competences rather than pro-integration mechanisms and (H4B): show stronger support towards direct empowerment of NPs vis-a-vis EU institutions than towards any sort of enhancement involving the EP.*

More specifically, the empirical literature shows that the party political spectrum of EU support is well illustrated by an inverted-U where mainstream parties including Liberals, Greens, Social or Christian Democrats are generally supportive of European integration, while opposition to the EU is usually situated at the extremes (Hooghe et.al, 2002; Kriesi et al., 2006). While on the far left end of the spectrum it is dictated by economic antipathy to capitalism, on the far right it expresses the cultural defence of a national community. Again, taking into account that more integration inevitably weakens control and legislative capacities of NPs, we assume that extreme parties' stances on EU integration will be inversely related to their preferences on empowering NPs.

We therefore predict that (H5): *Radical parties on both sides of the spectrum will show stronger support towards increasing the powers on NPs in the EU than mainstream parties and opt for mechanisms which directly empower NPs vis-a-vis EU institutions.*

Methodology

To test our hypotheses, we exploit novel data from the authors-designed survey conducted between November 2021 and January 2022 among MPs from seven national parliaments (French Assemblée Nationale, German Bundestag, Belgium Chambre des Représentants, Danish Folketing, Polish Sejm, Italian Camera and the Spanish Congreso)³. While those chambers cannot pretend to be fully representative of the mother population being the whole body of national MPs in all EU member states, our sample was selected to meet the criteria of geographical and geopolitical representativeness. It includes larger and smaller Member States, eurozone and non eurozone members, founding and more recent EU members, as well as parliaments possessing various levels of formal strength in EU affairs. In case of bicameral parliaments, we focused on the lower chambers due to their more prominent formal position in EU affairs.

Our questionnaire was sent simultaneously by e-mail via the Limesurvey platform to 3018 parliamentarians of the seven states, in their original language (6 versions). Fifteen days after the initial mailing, we re-launched the questionnaire and then contacted the MPs directly by phone thus fulfilling the highest standards identified for this type of survey (Bailer, 2014). Of the 3018 MPs to whom the questionnaire was sent, we received 369 questionnaires back, a result which is above those empirically identified for survey in general populations usually reached by computer-assisted web interviewing (CAWI). However, upon closer scrutiny we have decided to remove 206 questionnaires that were not properly filled, i.e. leaving most of the questions unanswered or containing only biographical information. Our final sample therefore consists of 163 fully filled questionnaires.⁴ Though the response rate is barely meaningful in itself (Bailer, 2014), it is a good illustration of the increasing difficulty of obtaining high responsiveness in online surveys among political elites whose mother population is not large and consists of individuals whose day-to-day priorities leave little room for academic questionnaires (Vis and Stolwijk, 2020).

While the size of our sample is adequate (Sapra, 2021), we have taken precautions to ensure its representativeness of the mother population. First, in line with other studies of this type (i.e. Blesse et al., 2020), we conducted a non-response analysis on the selected final sample which revealed certain distortions in the population interrogated.⁵ To remedy this and ensure reliability of our findings, we have conducted sample adjustment with respect to both nationality and political group affiliation for each of the seven chambers under study.⁶ In line with the accepted practice (Carey, 2009; Bailer, 2014), we assigned weights to correct for differential response rates in the two categories of interest and thus obtained results which can be treated as robust predictors of a transnational MPs' public opinion on EU affairs.⁷

Survey design

Our questionnaire entitled “The role of national parliaments in the post-pandemic EU policy-making” consisted of questions related to EU institutional and economic governance reforms. This article accounts only for the former ones.⁸ The following four questions represent the dependent variables of our inquiry:

Q1) Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: National parliaments should play a stronger role in the EU policy-making?

Q2) Which mechanism(s) do you consider most appropriate to strengthen the position of national parliaments in the EU policy-making?

This question was formulated in the form of a multiple choice and presented the respondents with four options: 1) endowing NPs with a formal mandate to bind the position of the national executive at EU level; 2) allowing half of national chambers to block the adoption of the draft legislative proposal on the basis of a subsidiarity breach; 3) enabling one quarter of national chambers to present a legislative proposal to the Commission (green card); 4) proposing joint strategic orientations of the EU together with members of the European Parliament once every two years, and 5) enabling majority of the chambers to propose a joint legislative initiative with the EP to the Commission. Such selection of choices allowed us to test MPs' preferences with regard to a wide range of tools from domestic empowerment, through enhancing parliamentary veto-playing capacity at the EU level, to a constructive co-creation of EU agenda and inter-parliamentary cooperation with the EP.

Q3) Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: A European Assembly composed of national parliamentarians from the 27 Member States should be created in order to increase the democratic legitimacy of the EU.

While the previous question follows the generally familiar menu of possible institutional reforms, this one refers to a rather innovative proposal. It foresees a collective role for NPs at the EU level and not individually at the national level. It should be therefore understood as a transnational solution with a strong European dimension but relying on national MPs. In this sense, it can be perceived as an alternative to the intergovernmental and federalist schemas for evaluating the EU constitutional order, proposing instead a third category of a transnational logic (Hennette et. al, 2019). The latter one would entail taking decisions on the basis of transnational political majorities of national MPs from different Member States.

Q4) If there is no consensus among the 27 Member States in favour of a European assembly, should we start by bringing together the assemblies of those Member States that wish to do so - following the example of the Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly - in order to strengthen the EU legitimacy?

This question is aimed at probing to what extent MPs are favourable to advancing the current state of inter-parliamentary cooperation, whether they perceive it as a viable option of strengthening of NPs' role in EU affairs, and to what extent they accept the scenario of a differentiated cooperation in this respect.

Analytical model

The first independent variable – national constitutional orientations – is operationalized through a combination of two components: party leadership support for the EP (Winzen, 2017) and member state institutional structure. While the previous one reflects dynamic parliamentary orientations, the latter one refers to the rather stable structural socializing context. In case of the first component, using Chapel Hill Expert Survey indicators of individual national parties' leadership position on the powers of the EP, we calculated an average weighted indicator of parliamentary support for the EP for each national chamber under study to reflect its actual political composition at the time of the survey. Following Chapel Hill methodology, we developed an aggregate indicator organized around a 7-point scale (1 - least supportive of increasing EP's powers, 7 - most supportive) for each country under study, i.e.: Belgium 6,23; Spain 5,70; Germany 5,16; France 5,66; Denmark 4,9; Poland 4,71 and Italy 4,13. In order to better account for national structural tendencies and socialization schemes that favour federalism (Delreux and Randour, 2015; Wessels, 2005, Rittberger, 2005) we combined the obtained scores with indicators of constitutional federalism as developed by Hooghe and Marks (2001) assigning coefficients of +4 in case of federal states, i.e. Belgium and Germany, +3 in case of strongly decentralised states, i.e. Spain and Italy, and +2 in case of France.⁹ As a result, we have obtained the following final indicators of national constitutional orientations: Belgium 9,23; Germany 8,16; Spain 7,70; France 6,66; Italy 6,13; Denmark, 4,93; and Poland 4,71, where Belgian MPs are classified as most federalist and Polish MPs as most intergovernmental.

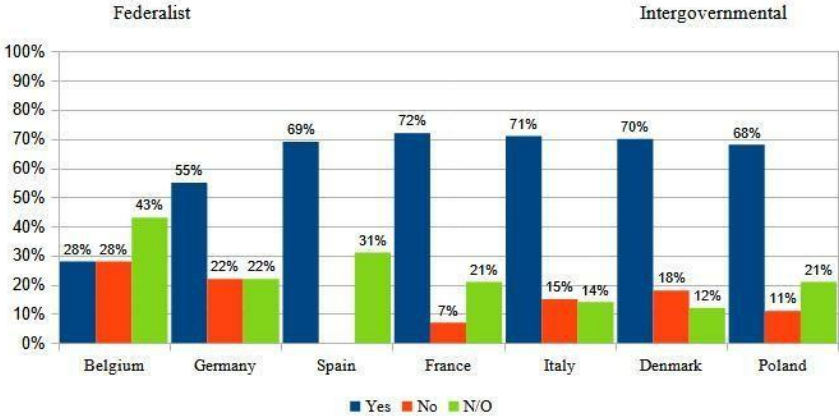
The second variable – party ideological orientations – was operationalized taking into account partisan affiliation of the respondents, regardless of nationality. We used the Chapel Hill classification of political parties to determine the ideological orientation on the left-centre-right scale of each respondent. In order to further test our party-ideological hypothesis, we recoded national party affiliations of the respondents into European political groups. Although the survey was addressed to national MPs, respondents were also asked to indicate their party

affiliation at the EU level. In cases where the individual response did not indicate EU affiliation, it was attributed manually by the authors. Consequently, for example: German CDU MPs were recoded as EPP, Polish PiS MPs as ECR and French LFI as GUE. This allowed us to compare and even aggregate the national responses of parliamentarians from different countries “as if” they participated in one European political space. For a more adequate representation of the right-wing eurosceptic parties, whose responses are the most difficult to obtain, we merged the results coded for MPs from the national parties affiliated to ECR and ID.

National parliamentary preferences unpacked

With respect to the question whether NPs should play a stronger role in the EU policy-making our data reveal that a large majority of our respondents (65%) are in favour, 21 % have no opinion and 14% declare to be against. On the one hand, such results confirm parliamentary recognition of the need of a reform, but on the other they reveal that over 1/3rd of MPs is sceptical of their own self-empowerment, or is against it. This only confirms the stance of Wessels (2005) that national parliaments are not a homogeneous block and the assumption that they should be “naturally” in favour of increasing their own role at the expense of supranational institutions is not as unequivocal as expected.

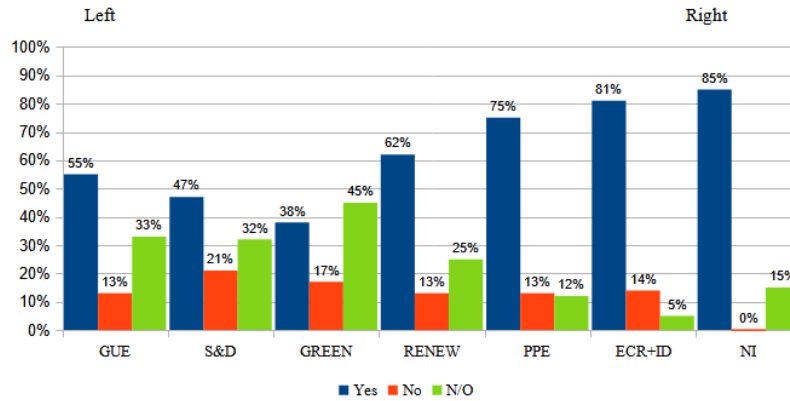
Figure 1
National parliaments should play a stronger role in EU policy-making:
support by country



The distribution of MPs’ preferences along national lines (Figure 1), reveals a very similar and high level of support among Polish, Danish, Italian, French and Spanish MPs, relatively lower in case of German MPs and considerably lower in terms of Belgian MPs. Such results tend to confirm hypothesis H1 whereas MPs with federalist orientations are more skeptical of strengthening NPs in the EU than those of more intergovernmental stances. The findings also resonate with the literature claiming that historical experience of federalism has influenced the support of political elites for the federal model of the European integration and granting a stronger position to the EP as a supranational source of EU legitimacy (Hooghe and Marks, 2001; Delreux and Randour, 2015).

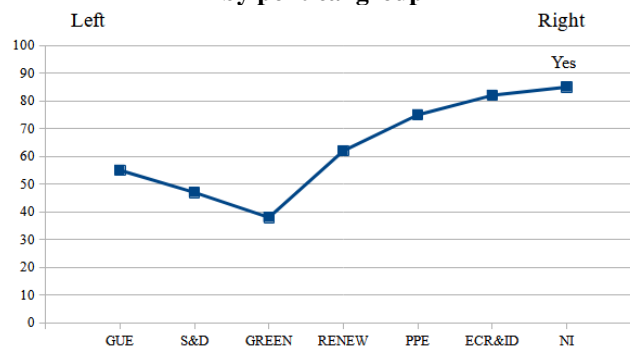
With respect to party ideology, the results show stronger support towards strengthening of NPs in case of the right-wing respondents (ECR+ID at 82% followed by EPP at 75%), decreasing towards the centre (RENEW 62%) and left-wing groups (S&D 47%) thus confirming hypothesis H3.

Figure 2
National parliaments should play a stronger role in EU policy-making:
support by political groups



A the same time, the relatively higher support for NPs from extreme left GUE than from S&D on the left-side of the spectrum, and a higher support from extreme right (ECR +ID) than EPP on the right side of the spectrum tends to confirm the inverted U hypothesis H5 and is illustrated by the U-curve (Figure 2.1). While in case of GUE the explanation can be looked for in its socio-economic orientation opting for rebalancing the power relations between EU institutions and the national level in order to change EU policy directions from neoliberal into more socially progressive course, the motivations of ECR and ID respondents lie in their culturally nationalist and sovereigntist orientations.

Figure 2.1
National parliaments should play a stronger role in EU policy-making:
by political group



In order to compare relative explanatory power of party ideology and national constitutional orientation with regard to MPs' preferences on strengthening national parliaments in the EU General Linear Model (GLM) has been applied. The constructed least squares regression model proved statistically significant ($F=4.81$, $p<.001$, $R^2=0.28$, $adjR^2=0.22$, $n^2p=0.278$) implying notable tendency. To test and compare which of two factors had higher contribution

in shaping prediction trend line likelihood-ratio chi-square test has been applied. LR test scores indicated significantly higher contribution of party ideology (F=8.02, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 p = 0.243$) to the variation of the model.

Table 1 MPs' preferences on strengthening national parliaments in the EU

ANOVA Omnibus test

	SS	df	F	P	$\eta^2 p$
Model	464.4	12	4.81	<.001	0.278
Party ideology	387.4	6	8.02	<.001	0.243
Nationality	52.6	6	1.09	0.372	0.042
Residuals	1208.2	150			
Total	1672.6	162			

To sum up, while our findings point to a combination of the two variables in explaining MPs attitude towards strengthening of NPs in EU, the conducted statistical analysis implies that there is a significant effect of party ideology on the question whether national parliaments should play a stronger role in EU policy-making. Concerning the role of national constitutional orientations, its effect is not evident.

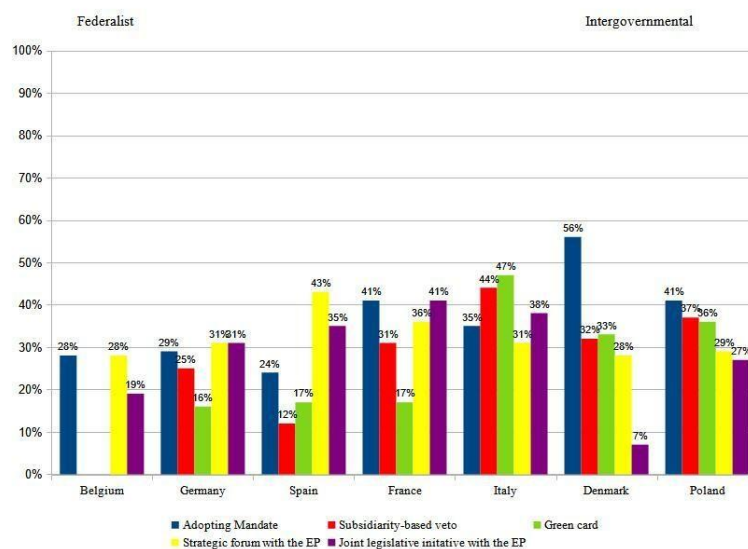
Strengthening yes, but how?

With respect to the question about concrete instruments to strengthen NPs in the EU policy-making, the highest general support was gained by the option of equipping parliaments with a mandate defining the position of their national government within the EU (36%) as practiced by some Nordic countries, followed by proposing joint strategic orientations of the EU together with the EP (33%); presenting joint legislative proposals with the EP (32%); blocking the adoption of the draft legislative proposal on the basis of subsidiarity breach (30%) and indirect legislative initiative only for the NPs (green card) (26%). The strongest preference for a mandate illustrates a rather pragmatic approach of MPs and the fact that according to them domestic empowerment might be the most realistic solution as it lies within constitutional settlements of the Member States and doesn't require EU level changes (cf. Kinski, 2021). The other two most preferred options show that MPs are more, albeit moderately, inclined towards a joint cooperation with the EP rather than only empowering NPs at the expense of the EP.

With regard to the first explanatory variable, our findings allow us to partially validate the hypothesis related to national constitutional orientations. This can be illustrated by the relatively higher support for the subsidiarity-based veto by more intergovernmental Danish, Polish and Italian MPs and much lower from more federalist Belgian, German and Spanish MPs (Figure 3). The green card which grants NPs the power of indirect legislative initiative at the EU level has also much higher support among MPs of more intergovernmental orientations like Poles, Danes and Italians.

Figure 3

MPs' support for particular strengthening mechanisms: by country

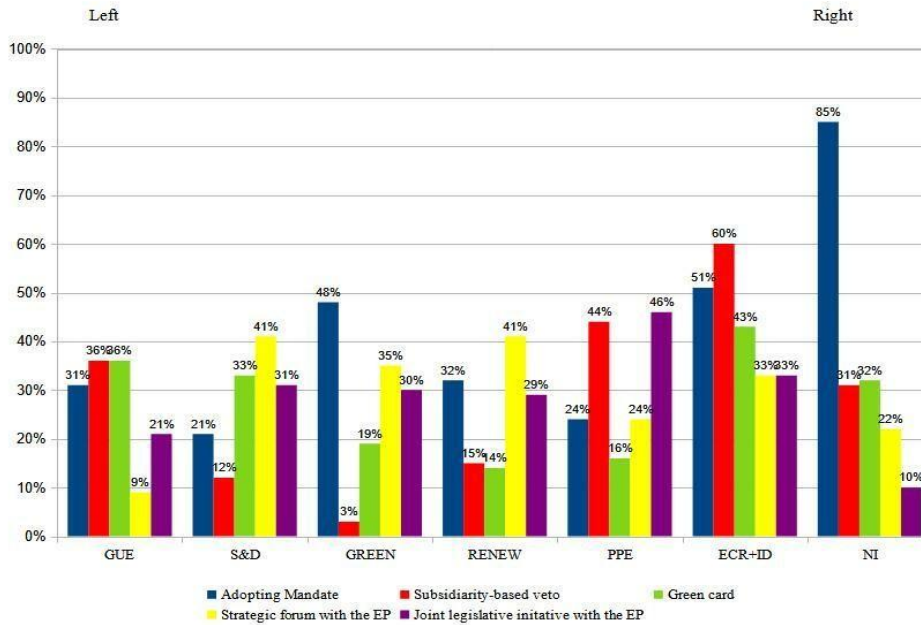


It's interesting to observe how these preferences change if we now turn to the variant of the joint legislative initiative with the EP. MPs of more federalist orientations who are sceptical about the green card for national parliaments alone are more favourable to the joint mechanism with the EP, with +19 percentage points (p.p.) for Belgium, +15 for Germany, +18 for Spain and +24 for France respectively. Conversely, the most pro-green card MPs - from the most intergovernmental states - are much more sceptical of the joint legislative initiative, namely: Poles and Danes, the Italians, with respectively -11 p.p. and -26 p.p. -9 p.p. difference. In other words, it seems as if these two proposed solutions - the green card and the joint legislative initiative - were negatively correlated in respondents' perceptions.

As regards the ideological variable (Figure 4), only respondents affiliated with the right-wing groups (ECR and ID) overwhelmingly support the subsidiarity-based veto mechanism (60%), followed by the centre-right EPP (44%). In contrast, the centre, centre-left and green parties - appear to be much less favourable of this option which goes in line with their more cosmopolitan and pro-integrationist orientations of these parties. For its part, the extreme-left GUE is relatively more supportive towards this option (36%) than centre left parties. This could be explained by far left MPs' more economically sovereignist attitude within the EU which translates into viewing this instrument as a safeguard of national leverage to correct certain neoliberal bias of European policies (cf. Mélenchon, 2020; Hooghe et al 2002).

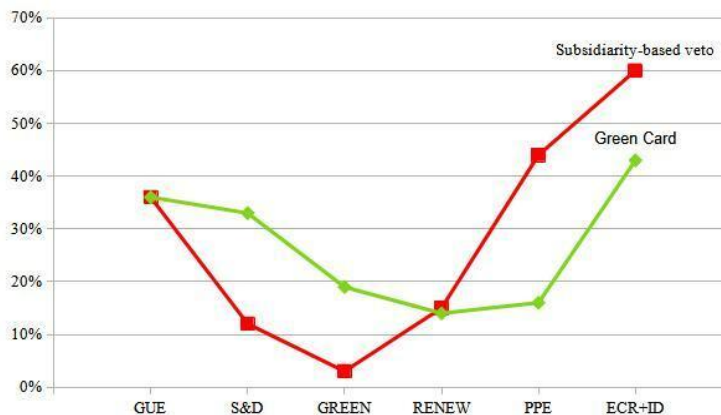
Figure 4

MPs’ support for particular strengthening mechanisms: by political group



The overall distribution of parliamentary preferences with regard to the subsidiarity-based veto mechanism takes shape of a U-curve (Figure 4.1) confirming both hypothesis H4A with respect to ideological positioning of the right-wing parties with regard to mechanisms safeguarding national competences as well as hypothesis H5 whereas MPs from extreme ends of the spectrum express higher support for such solutions.

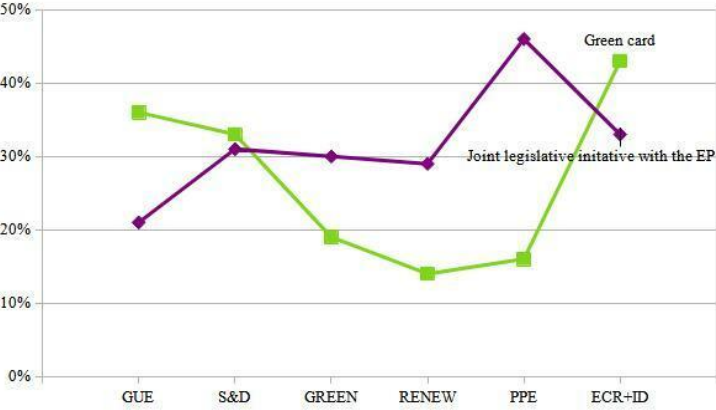
Figure 4.1
MPs’ support for “subsidiarity-based veto” and “green card” by political group



The distribution of preferences related to the “green card” mechanism follow a similar logic finding its main supporters on the extremes (Figure 4.1). While the ECR+ID are less enthusiastic about this solution than about subsidiarity-based veto, their support is still the

highest among the MPs because this mechanism enforces NPs as a collective platform vis-à-vis EU institutions, including the EP. On the other hand, the relatively high support of this option by GUE could be explained as economically driven whereas a certain correcting power of national proposals could counter-balance the neo-liberal tendencies of the EU (cf. European Left, 2019). With regard to moderate MPs, we observe that the green card U-curve is slightly shifted to the right from the previous one due to the fact that centre-right MPs (EPP) are more supportive of the mechanism safeguarding national competences against the EU and less of the pro-integrationist and constructive green card, whereas S&D inversely, in line with hypothesis H4A. At this point, it is interesting to compare parliamentary preferences regarding the green card for NPs only with those related to a joint legislative initiative with the EP (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2
MPs’ support for the “green card”
and “joint legislative initiative with the EP” by political group



The comparison indicates that parliamentarians from the extremes – the right wing ECR+ID and the left wing GUE - tend to be relatively more supportive for the green card than for the joint legislative initiative with the EP. The numbers at hand allow us to consider our hypothesis H5 as realistic, thus indicating that political mainstream prefers to collaborate with the EP, whereas the extreme political forces opt for the NPs’ ‘go-it-alone’ approach. Confirming this trend, however, requires further investigation.

In order to compare explanatory power of party ideology and national constitutional orientations with regard to MPs’ preferences logistic regression models were applied for each of the strengthening mechanisms. The conducted statistical tests indicate that party ideology is a stronger predictor in case of the mandate ($X^2=20.2$, $p<.01$) and green card mechanisms ($X^2=18.92$, $p<.01$). Thus based on the obtained results we may assume that in regard to preferred solution party affiliation has more diversifying impact than nationality.

Table 2 MPs' preferences on strengthening mechanisms

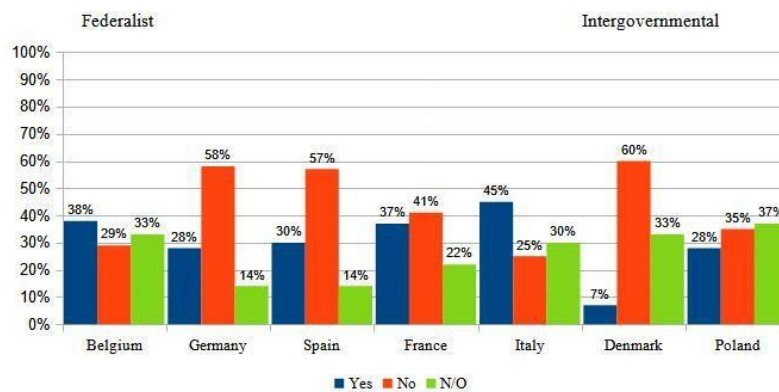
Model fit measures and Likelihood Ratio Test

	Mandate	Subsidiarity Veto	Green card	Strategic forum	Joint initiative with EP
R^2_{McF}	0.13	0.17	0.14	0.06	0.07
R^2_{CS}	0.15	0.16	0.14	0.07	0.08
R^2_N	0.21	0.25	0.22	0.10	0.11
X^2	27.0**	27.7**	24.8*	11.7	13.6
Nationality (X^2)	11.3	5.69	6.43	6.90	9.30
Party ideology (X^2)	20.2**	6.14	18.92**	5.04	4.07

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

With respect to the question about the creation of a European assembly composed of MPs from the 27 Member States, although globally more respondents were against this solution (42%), it is worth noting that over one third of them expressed support for this idea (31%). Taking into account that it is a far-reaching proposal, rather unlikely to be supported by national executives, the level of parliamentary support – close to that of the subsidiarity veto mechanism, strategic forum with the EP or a joint legislative initiative with the EP - might be surprising.

Figure 5
MPs support for the creation of a European Assembly composed of MPs from the 27 MS:
by country



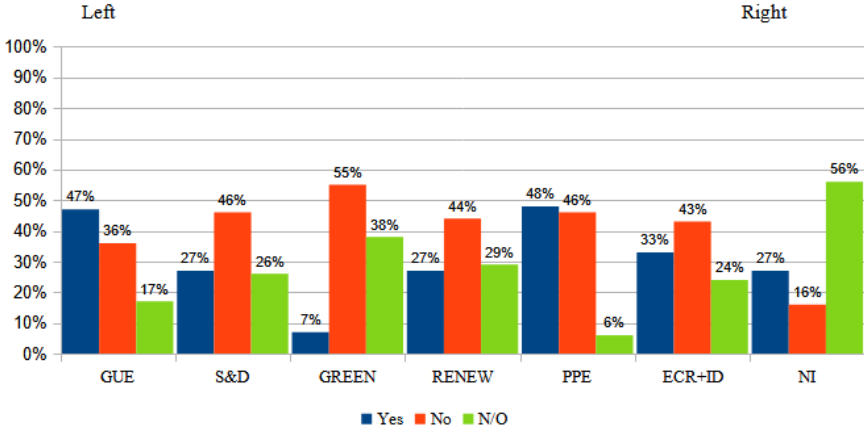
As far as national constitutional orientations are concerned, the obtained results do not follow any consistent pattern in line our hypotheses. On the one hand, German and Spanish respondents with more federalist orientations are rather sceptical of this solution, probably because - as in the case of the green card - they perceive it as a direct competition to the EP which they view as a legitimate representative body at the supranational level. On the other hand, similarly federalist Belgian MPs are more in favour of this solution. On the intergovernmental side of the spectrum we observe similar inconsistencies with Italian MPs being the most supportive of the creation of such assembly while Poles and, to a greater extent, Danes are very skeptical. This may be because, as mentioned above, the proposal of

the European Assembly blurs the established frameworks of understanding and evaluation of EU legitimacy. On the one hand, it can be viewed as an additional, constructive element of accountability and legitimization of the EU policy decisions, corresponding to the pro-European and federalist logic, while at the same time it can also be understood as a way of increasing the power of NPs vis-à-vis the EU institutions in competition to the EP, thus feeding into the more intergovernmental logic. At the same time, a large number of "no opinions" indicates the general confusion among the respondents regarding the character of the proposed solution, again pointing to inadequacy of the cognitive schemes mobilized by MPs to characterize and evaluate this reform.

With respect to party ideology (Figure 6), the numbers tend to confirm hypothesis H3 relating to the LCR orientations with respect to the mainstream parties, with relatively stronger support for the creation of a European Assembly on the centre-right (PPE 48%) than on the centre (Renew 27%) and centre-left (S&D 27%, Greens 7%). Further interviews would be required to verify whether such preference distribution pertains to the fact that centre-right MPs interpret this solution as a way to better represent and defend the interests of their nation states in the integration process.

Figure 6

MPs support for the creation of a European Assembly composed of MPs from the 27 MS: by political group



With regard to hypothesis H5, the two extreme ends of the spectrum do not follow the U-curve logic - only GUE is more supportive of the creation of the Assembly than its more moderate counterparts, while the ECR+ID remains less enthusiastic than the centre right EPP. In the case of the far-left MPs, the explanation might lie in the understanding of the Assembly as means to rebalance and correct the neoliberal excesses of EU institutions and to ensure better parliamentary control over the supranationalist bureaucratic agenda. Political programs of *La France Insoumise*, *Syriza* or *die Linke* reflect this position. It is, however, more difficult to explain the relative scepticism of the far right towards this solution. While further semi-structured interviews would prove helpful, we can only speculate that far-right parties, such as the AfD, are sceptical of any sorts of mechanisms increasing the democratic legitimacy of the EU – which very existence they question - even if this could be achieved by strengthening the role of the NPs that they essentially support.

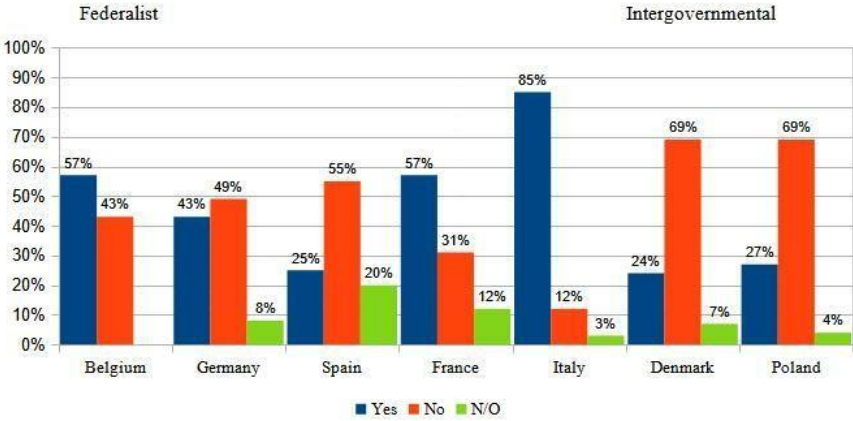
Our last question inquired whether, in the absence of a consensus among the 27 member states in favour of a European Assembly, MPs would support the idea of bringing together the chambers of those member states that so wished, following the model of the Franco-German Assembly. In contrast to the previous question, the majority of our respondents are in favour

of this solution, with a 16 points higher support than for the creation of an Assembly of 27 MS (49% to 33%). This indicates that there is a fair share of MPs who support transnational parliamentarism in the form of enhanced cooperation among those “willing”. The stronger support it receives from MPs could be partly explained by its more realistic character as it would not require unanimity of MS.

With respect to our first variable, we find no correlation between national constitutional preferences of MPs and their support for this solution (Figure 7). On the one hand, we can see that both, MPs of more intergovernmental and federalist orientations are similarly skeptical of this option (cf. Danes and Spaniards respectively), on the other, we see that majority of more intergovernmental Italian MPs and more federalist Belgian MPs are in favour of this solution. Such distribution of preferences can be most likely explained by the fact that this form of enhanced parliamentary cooperation – similarly to the creation of the European Assembly of 27– blurs the division lines between the intergovernmental vs. federalist logic of EU legitimacy and does not provide MPs with a clear choice between these two options.

Figure 7

MPs support for the creation of a European Assembly of the willing MS: by country

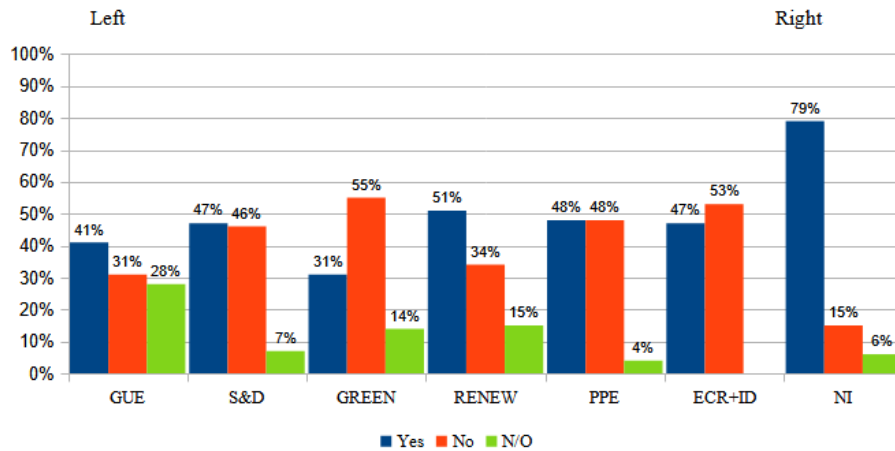


The obtained results, however, point to a different possible explanation. We can observe stronger support for this solution among MPs from parliamentary chambers who already participate in advanced formats of interparliamentary cooperation: Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly in case of France and Germany, the Montecitorio format in case of Italy, or the Benelux Parliamentary Assembly in case of Belgium. Moreover, the fact that higher support for enhanced cooperation comes from MPs of the EU founding states might illustrate their ambition to play an avant-garde role in further EU-oriented parliamentary integration, without concerns over being potentially marginalized. These two interpretations however call for further empirical inquiry.

With respect to party ideological orientation, it is equally difficult to detect any clear patterns of support of this option (Figure 8). Neither the left-centre-right, nor the inverted-U hypothesis finds its confirmation in our findings.

Figure 8

**MPs support for the creation of a European Assembly of the willing Member States:
by political group**



We also see strong internal divisions in all of the parties with respect to this solution, even stronger than in the case of creation of the European Assembly of 27. This might point to the fact that the usual party ideological evaluation schemes built along socio-economic or value-related terms do not seem to work in this case. At the same time, such differentiated format of parliamentary cooperation enjoys a relatively higher support from the centre and centre-left parties, who were the most resistant to the creation of European Assembly of 27 (RENEW +26, GREEN +24, S&D +20 points). These more pro-integrationist parties might favour a more flexible mode of enhanced parliamentary cooperation over an all-encompassing body, possibly perceiving it as a more feasible way to enhance EU democratic legitimacy.

Conclusions and discussion

In light of the shortage of actor-oriented studies of national parliamentary activity in EU affairs, the goal of this article was to examine the preferences of MPs, as primary role takers, towards institutional reforms aimed at strengthening the role of national parliaments in European politics. We have built our inquiry on the premise that these preferences are rooted in MPs' cognitive schemas of the appropriate design of the EU governance and its legitimacy. On the basis of a new survey of parliamentarians from seven national parliaments, we intended to test in what way MPs' national constitutional orientations measured on the intergovernmental-federal spectrum; and their party ideology measured on the left-centre-right spectrum, affect their preferences with regard to the need for, and the shape of, potential reforms.

The overall finding is that while generally parliamentarians share a commitment to strengthening NPs in EU affairs as means to increase the EU democratic legitimacy, there are observable cross-country and cross-party differences in the level of their support. The obtained results have largely confirmed hypothesis 1 that MPs with more intergovernmental national constitutional orientations show stronger support for strengthening NPs in the EU than those with federalist orientations. With respect to party ideological variable, our results indicate that right wing MPs are significantly more supportive of empowering NPs in EU affairs than their centre and the left-wing counterparts, thus confirming hypothesis 3. The findings also confirm the inverted U hypothesis (Hooghe et al., 2002) whereas radical parties

on both ends of the spectrum are more supportive towards strengthening of NPs than the mainstream parties. With respect to the question which variable is a better predictor of parliamentary preferences, the conducted analysis indicates that there is a significant effect of party ideology regarding the question whether national parliaments should play a stronger role in EU policy-making. While this result stays in contrast to the findings of Winzen (2017) who argued that constitutional preferences prevail over party differences, it resonates with the recent studies of Blesse et al. (2019; 2020) who point to a higher explanatory power of party ideologies with respect to MPs' preferences on Eurozone and fiscal reforms.

The conducted analysis has also revealed that MPs largely disagree over the shape of appropriate reforms. First, none of the five proposed reforms obtained more than 36% of support among our respondents, revealing large variations in parliamentary preferences and an evident lack of critical mass behind a concrete reform agenda. Our hypothesis 2 with respect to national level variable has been largely confirmed showing that MPs with more intergovernmental constitutional orientations tend to be more supportive towards mechanisms aimed at increasing the leverage of NPs vis-à-vis EU institutions, while those with federalist orientations favour mechanisms involving cooperation with the EP. In a similar vein, we found that right-wing MPs favour mechanisms safeguarding national competences rather than pro-integration mechanisms and show stronger support for direct empowerment of national parliaments vis-a-vis EU institutions than for mechanisms involving the EP. With respect to the two flagship instruments, i.e. subsidiarity-based veto and the green card, our findings confirm the inverted-U hypothesis where radical parties on both sides of the spectrum are more supportive towards mechanisms which directly empower NPs vis-a-vis EU institutions. We also find that in case of the mandate and the green card option there is a significant effect of party ideology on MPs' preferences. These findings indicate that these proposals are now more congruent with the party ideological, value-based frameworks of identification of MPs rather than national constitutional frameworks. This can be considered an important precondition for the emergence of transnational political coalitions in favour of these solutions.

Our hypotheses however have not found confirmation with respect to the question related to the creation of a European transnational Assembly composed of the 27 MS. While over one third of our respondents expressed support for this idea, the obtained results do provide a clear pattern of preference distribution with respect to both party ideological and national constitutional variable, revealing significant intra-national and intra-party divisions. We assume that in this case, the available cognitive schemes along national-constitutional or party-ideological axes which parliamentary respondents mobilized with respect to the more conventional reform proposals, were not appropriate to evaluate this novel solution and its potential repercussions with respect to both parliamentary empowerment and EU legitimacy.

Overall, while our findings indicate that political parties are becoming increasingly relevant actors for understanding and evaluating the proposed EU reforms, these results do not provide an optimistic perspective with regard to potential and meaningful parliamentary empowerment in EU affairs. The latter seem to be understood today mainly as a brake on further integration and finds its major support among radical parties on both sides of the political spectrum, albeit for different reasons. Mainstream parties express a rather pragmatic, if not self-restraining, scepticism, even towards mechanisms assigning constructive role for NPs in the EU decision-making process such as the green card. This state of affairs renders the emergence of any significant transnational political coalition rather unlikely. In this context, advocates of a greater parliamentary involvement in the EU policy-making have an uneasy, educational task to perform, that is to convince not only the public opinion, but also

primary stakeholders - MPs - that national parliaments, rather than being obstacles to integration, could be legitimate drivers of it.

We however observe one noteworthy evidence stemming from our analysis. In contrast to other proposed solutions, a fair share of MPs (49%) favour the idea of transnational parliamentary cooperation in the EU, in some sort of a flexible arrangement among the willing assemblies, as a sensible way to increase the democratic legitimacy of the EU. In this regard, the existing inter-parliamentary formats such as the Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly, or the slowly expanding Montecitorio triangle, could serve as an inspiration for other MPs willing to exercise transnational political accountability within the EU multi-level system of governance (cf. Borońska-Hryniewiecka and Kinski, 2022).

While our study has cast some new light on parliamentary preferences with respect to seven national chambers, the obtained results call for further comparative exploration, most possibly through in-depth, semi-structured interviews in order to identify deeper motivations behind particular parliamentary choices. These efforts could help to better explain what cognitive schemas MPs attach to particular EU reforms, also beyond parliamentary self-empowerment, and indicate areas of inter-parliamentary cooperation which MPs view as still unexploited.

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¹ Proposal 40.2 of the final report on the Conference on the Future of Europe

² Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs which brings together the EU affairs committees of national parliaments, as well as members of the EP.

³ The survey was conducted after the German parliamentary elections of 2021 and reflects preferences of the current members of the Bundestag.

⁴ See online Appendix 1 for the internal sample composition.

⁵ See online Appendix 1 for the non-response analysis.

⁶ See online Appendix 2 for the adjustment method.

⁷ Most p-value considered were at 0.15 rather than 0.05 as conventionally accepted. Considering the size of the sample and the absence of comparable dataset, we consider this level of risk acceptable.

⁸ See online Appendix 3 for more information on the questionnaire.

⁹ See online Appendix 4 for more information on constructing this indicator.

Appendix 1 Internal composition of the sample and non-response analysis

Table 1 Composition of the sample by nationality

COUNTRY	NON ANSWER (N)	ANSWER (N)	NON ANSWER (%)	ANSWER (%)
GERMANY	691	43	94,1%	5,9%
BELGIUM	142	6	95,9%	4,1%
DENMARK	165	14	92,2%	7,8%
SPAIN	282	22	92,8%	7,2%
FRANCE	531	39	93,2%	6,8%
ITALY	612	17	97,3%	2,7%
POLAND	438	22	95,2%	4,8%

Table 2 Composition of the sample by political groups

EUROPEAN POLITICAL GROUP	NON ANSWER (N)	ANSWER (N)	NON ANSWER (%)	ANSWER (%)
GUE	132	9	93,6%	6,4%
S&D	550	50	91,7%	8,3%
GREEN	197	18	91,6%	8,4%
RENEW	567	43	93,0%	7,0%
PPE	617	24	96,3%	3,7%
ECR	333	6	98,2%	1,8%
ID	264	5	98,1%	1,9%
NI	201	8	96,2%	3,8%

Table 1 above shows that the response rate for Belgian, Italian and Polish MPs was lower than for other nationalities. Similar distortion was observed with regard to party affiliation. Table 2 shows that the response rate for MPs affiliated with the right or centre-right political groups is lower than for the other groups. A non-weighted sample would therefore be biased by, for instance, under-representing Italian MPs or ECR-affiliated MPs. To remedy this we have conducted a sample adjustment (see online appendix 2).

Appendix 2 Adjustment method

Formula and elements of the adjustment method:

Weighted number of MPs = Raw number of MPs * Weight (Percentage of MPs in reality / Percentage of MPS in the sample)

At the time of conducting the survey, the body of national MPs of the seven chambers considered in this study is as below:

	GUE	GREEN	S&D	RENEW	EPP	ECR	ID	NI	Total
Germany	1,3% n=39	3,9% n=118	6,8% n=206	3,0% n=91	6,5% n=196	0,0% n=0	2,7% n=82	0,1% n=2	24,3% n=734
Belgium	0,4% n=12	0,7% n=21	0,9% n=28	0,9% n=27	0,6% n=17	0,8% n=24	0,6% n=17	0,1% n=2	4,9% n=148
Danemark	0,4% n=13	0,5% n=15	1,6% n=49	1,9% n=56	0,4% n=13	0,0% n=0	0,7% n=20	0,4% n=13	5,9% n=179
Spain	1,2% n=36	0,1% n=3	4,1% n=123	0,6% n=19	2,4% n=74	1,3% n=38	0,0% n=0	0,4% n=11	10,1% n=304
France	1,1% n=32	0,3% n=10	1,0% n=29	12,0% n=363	3,5% n=107	0,1% n=3	0,2% n=6	0,7% n=20	18,8% n=570
Italy	0,3% n=9	1,5% n=45	3,7% n=113	1,4% n=41	3,3% n=101	1,2% n=37	4,4% n=132	5,0% n=151	20,8% n=629
Poland	0,0% n=0	0,1% n=3	1,7% n=52	0,4% n=13	4,4% n=133	7,8% n=237	0,4% n=12	0,3% n=10	15,2% n=460
Total	4,7% n=141	7,1% n=215	19,8% n=600	20,2% n=610	21,2% n=641	11,2% n=339	8,9% n=269	6,9% n=209	100,0% n=3024

Before adjustment, the structure of our sample was as below:

	GUE	GREEN	S&D	RENEW	EPP	ECR	ID	NI	Total
Germany	0,6% n=1	6,7% n=11	11,0% n=18	4,3% n=7	2,5% n=4	0,0% n=0	1,2% n=2	0,0% n=0	26,4% n=43
Belgium	0,0% n=0	1,8% n=3	0,0% n=0	1,2% n=2	0,0% n=0	0,6% n=1	0,0% n=0	0,0% n=0	3,7% n=6
Danemark	1,8% n=3	1,2% n=2	1,2% n=2	3,1% n=5	0,6% n=1	0,0% n=0	0,0% n=0	0,6% n=1	8,6% n=14
Spain	1,2% n=2	0,0% n=0	6,7% n=11	0,0% n=0	4,9% n=8	0,0% n=0	0,0% n=0	0,6% n=1	13,5% n=22
France	1,8% n=3	1,2% n=2	4,3% n=7	14,7% n=24	1,2% n=2	0,0% n=0	0,0% n=0	0,6% n=1	23,9% n=39
Italy	0,0% n=0	0,0% n=0	2,5% n=4	3,1% n=5	0,6% n=1	0,0% n=0	1,2% n=2	3,1% n=5	10,4% n=17
Poland	0,0% n=0	0,0% n=0	4,9% n=8	0,0% n=0	4,9% n=8	3,1% n=5	0,6% n=1	0,0% n=0	13,5% n=22
Total	5,5% n=9	11,0% n=18	30,7% n=50	26,4% n=43	14,7% n=24	3,7% n=6	3,1% n=5	4,9% n=8	100,0% n=163

Hence a discrepancy between reality and the sample as below:

	GUE	GREEN	S&D	RENEW	EPP	ECR	ID	NI	Total
Germany	5%	7%	-3%	-1%	-6%	0%	-2%	1%	2%
Belgium	1%	-1%	0%	-1%	-1%	0%	-1%	0%	-1%
Danemark	1%	1%	1%	-1%	0%	0%	1%	0%	3%
Spain	-1%	7%	-4%	4%	-2%	-1%	1%	0%	3%
France	0%	4%	14%	-11%	-3%	0%	2%	-1%	5%
Italy	0%	1%	-1%	-1%	0%	-1%	-4%	-4%	-10%
Poland	0%	5%	-2%	4%	-4%	-5%	0%	0%	-2%
Total	6%	24%	7%	-5%	-16%	-8%	-3%	-4%	0%

After adjustment on nationality and partisanship, the sample structure is as below:

	GUE	GREEN	S&D	RENEW	EPP	ECR	ID	NI	Total
Germany	1,4% n=2	4,3% n=6	7,5% n=11	3,3% n=5	7,2% n=11	0,0% n=0	3,0% n=4	0,0% n=0	26,7% n=39
Belgium	0,0% n=0	0,8% n=1	0,0% n=0	1,0% n=1	0,0% n=0	0,9% n=1	0,0% n=0	0,0% n=0	2,6% n=4
Danemark	0,5% n=1	0,5% n=1	1,8% n=3	2,0% n=3	0,5% n=1	0,0% n=0	0,0% n=0	0,5% n=1	5,8% n=9
Spain	1,3% n=2	0,0% n=0	4,5% n=7	0,0% n=0	2,7% n=4	0,0% n=0	0,0% n=0	0,4% n=1	8,9% n=13
France	1,2% n=2	0,4% n=1	1,1% n=2	13,2% n=20	3,9% n=6	0,0% n=0	0,0% n=0	0,7% n=1	20,5% n=30
Italy	0,0% n=0	0,0% n=0	4,1% n=6	1,5% n=2	3,7% n=5	0,0% n=0	4,8% n=7	5,5% n=8	19,6% n=29
Poland	0,0% n=0	0,0% n=0	1,9% n=3	0,0% n=0	4,9% n=7	8,6% n=13	0,4% n=1	0,0% n=0	15,8% n=23
Total	4,4% n=6	6,0% n=9	20,9% n=31	21,1% n=31	22,8% n=34	9,5% n=14	8,2% n=12	7,1% n=11	100,0% n=148

The sample representativeness was improved, the discrepancy between the adjusted sample and reality being minored:

	GUE	GREEN	S&D	RENEW	EPP	ECR	ID	NI	Total
Germany	0%	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	2%
Belgium	0%	0%	-1%	0%	-1%	0%	-1%	0%	-2%
Danemark	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	-1%	0%	0%
Spain	0%	0%	0%	-1%	0%	-1%	0%	0%	-1%
France	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%
Italy	0%	-1%	0%	0%	0%	-1%	0%	1%	-1%
Poland	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	1%
Total	0%	-1%	1%	1%	2%	-2%	-1%	0%	0%