



FUNCTIONING OF EU COMMITTEES IN THE PARLIAMENTS OF EU MEMBER STATES: RELEVANCE FOR UKRAINE

Introduction

This paper outlines the role of European Affairs Committees in the national legislatures of EU member States. It also makes a number of suggestions of best practice that might be adopted by the European Integration Committee in the Rada of Ukraine.

Fifteen of the 28 member States of the EU have a unicameral Parliament and 13 have a bicameral Parliament. Because of this combination of unicameral and bicameral systems, there are no fewer than 41 Chambers of national Parliaments in the EU that need to consider EU matters, though some use a Joint Committee consisting of Members of both Chambers. Each Committee has its own characteristics, reflecting a range of factors – the size of the country and its Parliament, the nature of the mandate of the relevant Chamber, the role Committees in general play in the Parliament, and the wider parliamentary tradition and history of the country concerned.

The short descriptions of the European Committees in each member State which follow outline their functions, size and relationship with Government. In general terms, all Committees broadly represent the political make-up of their Parliament, though the exactness of the correlation varies.

Historically, there have been two distinct ways in which European Committees have approached their work. The first is known as the “documents-based system”. Under this system, Committees examine legislative proposals and other documents emanating from the EU institutions. They do not focus on proceedings at individual Council meetings and do not normally mandate Ministers formally or informally. The second system is “mandate-based”. Under this, scrutiny is concentrated on the government’s position in the EU Council, with Committees being able to advise, or sometimes mandate, the Minister in his or her approach to draft EU legislation. Increasingly Parliaments have developed a mixed system of scrutiny of documents and giving of mandates, together with other elements, such as promoting general debates on cross-cutting issues. Many Parliaments also operate a “scrutiny reserve” under which the Government concerned is obliged (or has given an undertaking) that it will not agree to draft EU policies or laws until the European Committee has completed its *scrutiny*. Although most Parliaments use one or other method or a combination of them to scrutinise European matters methodically, there remain some Parliaments that have an unsystematic approach to EU legislation.

As well as European Committees, all member State Parliaments have a system of sectoral scrutiny committees. The relationship between the European Committee and other sectoral scrutiny Committees varies in the Parliaments. In some, there is a requirement for consultation, or a formal mechanism for one Committee to exert influence on the other. In others, members of the sectoral Committees are nominated to the European Committee. In yet other Parliaments, links are through the Committees’ staffs. Federal States usually also have

European Committees in their sub-national legislatures, but these are not described in this paper.

In the case of the newer member States, many of their European Affairs Committees have grown out of their pre-accession European Integration Committees. However, it is worth noting that whereas an Integration Committee is naturally focused on ensuring that a candidate State becomes compliant with the EU *acquis*, European Affairs Committees in member States are often equally concerned with the protection of the national interest in EU matters – and in several member States there are political groupings represented on the Committees that are hostile to integration, and even to the EU altogether. For this reason, it would be wrong to see national Parliaments' European Committees as uncritically supportive of EU integration.

Austria

The Main Committee on EU Affairs of the *Nationalrat* has 26 Members. It has a Permanent Subcommittee on EU Affairs of 16 Members. The Main Committee is primarily responsible for considering the position of the Austrian Government prior to meetings of the EU Council. It has the power to mandate the Government, though this power is seldom exercised. The Main Committee or the Permanent Subcommittee may also issue communications to the EU institutions and issue reasoned opinions on subsidiarity issues. Sectoral committees may organise debates on EU matters. The *Bundesrat* has a Committee of 14 Members whose purpose is to safeguard the right of the Bundesrat (which represents the Austrian *Länder*) to play a role in EU matters. Like the Nationalrat committee, it may also issue communications and reasoned opinions. The Government is obliged to keep both Houses informed about EU proposals. Five staff work on EU matters for the two Houses.

Belgium

A Joint Federal Committee on European Affairs consists of 10 Members of the House of Representatives, 10 Senators and 10 Belgian MEPs. Its main tasks are to coordinate and promote parliamentary scrutiny of the European decision-making procedures; to draw up reports and adopt opinions on European questions at the request of either the President or a standing committee of the House of Representatives or the Senate; to question the Government before and after all meetings of the European Council; to be informed and submit opinions on all revisions of the Treaties of the European Communities; and to draw up an annual report to the Government on the implementation of the treaties of the EU and on progress in transposition of European law into Belgian national legislation. Sectoral Committees may organise hearings on European affairs or ask the Government to provide information on EU issues. Eleven staff in the two Chambers work on EU matters.

Bulgaria

The 18 Member Committee on European Affairs and Oversight of the European Funds of the National Assembly was originally established in 2001 as a Committee on European Integration with the main goal of formulating and executing the European integration policy of Bulgaria. The Committee is supported by 10 staff. The Committee discusses the draft position of the Bulgarian Government on EU matters and, having taken into consideration the views of relevant committees, produces a report which is sent to the Government and, if appropriate, to EU institutions. The decision to scrutinise an individual proposal is taken on the basis of the Assembly's Annual Work Programme on EU issues.

Croatia

The European Affairs Committee has 17 MPs as Members, but representatives of civil society and the social partners are also regarded as Committee Members, though without the right to vote. There are five staff. The Committee produces an annual Work Programme listing draft European legislation that is to be scrutinised. Sectoral committees may propose drafts from within their field to be included in the Work Programme. Once the draft legislation, along with the corresponding position of the Croatian Government, is delivered to the Parliament, it is debated in the relevant sectoral Committee, which then transmits its opinion to the European Affairs Committee. The European Affairs Committee then reports on the Position of the Republic of Croatia. This forms the basis of Croatian Government action in the European institutions. Subsidiarity checks are also conducted in the European Affairs Committee but the process may be initiated by any Member of Parliament. The Committee also monitors the alignment of the legal system of the Republic of Croatia with the EU *acquis*.

Cyprus

The Committee on Foreign and European Affairs in the Cyprus House of Representatives has 10 Members and seven staff. In its EU role, it was originally concerned with the harmonisation of Cyprus's laws with the *acquis*. Since Cyprus became an EU member state, its focus has moved towards the monitoring and influencing of the decision-making process of the EU. Sectoral Committees can themselves decide to take up EU matters.

Czech Republic

The Committee for European Affairs of the *Chamber of Deputies* is the successor to the former Committee on EU Integration. It has 15 Members, all of whom are Members of other Committees and can therefore bring their expertise to the EU Committee. It considers draft EU legislation and may refer drafts (together with its opinion) to other Committees or (in the case of the most important documents) to plenary. Relevant Government Ministers attend the

Committee meeting prior to Council meetings and must provide information on the position that the Czech Republic intends to adopt. Committee opinions are not binding on the Government, although the Government must take them into account – and the Government must not adopt a position before the parliamentary process has been completed. The *Senate* has two 9 Member Committees concerned with EU matters: the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Security considers common foreign and security policy matters, while other EU proposals come within the remit of the Committee on EU Affairs. These Committees select EU documents for scrutiny on a weekly basis, and may seek advice from other Committees in this process. Seven staff in the Senate work on EU matters. There is a Directive that covers cooperation between Parliament and Government on EU affairs.

Denmark

The European Affairs Committee of the Folketing has 29 Members and is considered one of the most powerful of the parliamentary committees monitoring EU Affairs in Member States, though it only has seven staff. Ever since Denmark first considered joining the Common Market there has been a political emphasis in Denmark on ensuring that that Folketing has control over the participation of the Danish Government in the EU's law-making process in the Council of Ministers. In addition to the general scrutiny on all EU matters, the Committee's responsibilities include mandating the Government before Council votes on all directives as well as on the more important regulations. This generally happens on the Friday before Council meetings, with the Minister making an oral presentation and being questioned by Committee Members. Sectoral Committees are encouraged to be involved systematically and at an early stage of the decision-making process – they are empowered to call Ministers before them or to issue opinions on EU proposals.

Estonia

The EU Affairs Committee of the Estonian Parliament has at least 15 Members and six staff. It grew out of the pre-accession European Affairs Committee which had the role of monitoring the Estonian Government's actions in the pre-accession phase as well as the accession negotiations. The present Committee is responsible for mandating the Government on the basis of opinions of the Parliament's sectoral Committees. EU draft legislative acts are forwarded by the Board of the *Parliament* to the EU Affairs Committee and one or more specialised Committees who then must deliver their opinion to the EU Affairs Committee. After receiving the opinion of the sectoral Committee, the EU Affairs Committee discusses the draft and gives its opinion to the Government. The Government must either follow the opinion of the Parliament or, if it fails to do so, must provide a justification to the EU Affairs Committee at the earliest opportunity. The EU Affairs Committee also initiates, at least annually, a plenary debate on the Estonian Government's EU policy. In Common Foreign and Security Policy matters, the Foreign Affairs Committee performs the role of the EU Affairs Committee.

Finland

The Finnish Constitution guarantees an important role for Parliament in EU matters, and the Grand Committee of the Finnish Parliament, which consists of 25 titular Members and 13 substitutes, is often considered the most powerful Committee monitoring EU Affairs in member States. Membership includes several chairpersons of parliamentary groups and of sectoral Committees. The Government is required to communicate to the Grand Committee all EU proposals that fall within the competence of the Parliament as soon as possible to enable early scrutiny and parliamentary input, and Ministers are required to appear before the Grand Committee - normally on Fridays - prior to meetings of the EU Council. The Grand Committee deliberates on EU matters on the basis of opinions from the sectoral Committees. The Government must send any proposals for EU law to these sectoral committees as well as to the Grand Committee – and the Grand Committee has the power to require sectoral Committees to report on issues within the field of their remit. The Grand Committee’s opinion is politically (if not legally) binding upon the Government – and the Government must, if necessary, delay negotiations in the Council until the Committee has carried out its scrutiny. Ministers are also required to report to the Committee after Council meetings. The Grand Committee may also require information regarding EU matters outside Parliament's competence, in the form of documentation or hearings with relevant Ministers.

France

Each House of the French Parliament must under the French Constitution have a Committee concerned with European Affairs. The Committee on European Affairs of the *National Assembly* consists of 48 Members, supported by 28 staff. French MEPs can be invited to its meetings. It monitors the work of the EU institutions as well as considering European legislative proposals before they are adopted in the EU Council. There are provisions in the Assembly’s Rules of Procedure governing the way in which the European Affairs Committee should cooperate with other Committees. All permanent Committees have equal status in European matters and the Committee on European Affairs may refer proposals for resolutions on EU draft legislative acts to one of these sectoral Committees. The Rapporteur of the Committee on European Affairs can attend meetings of the sectoral Committee when the proposal is being considered. The sectoral Committees have a month to decide on the resolutions, and will normally appoint a Rapporteur on the issue. The report will recommend approval, amendment or rejection of the resolution. Within eight days after the report from the sectoral Committee, the resolution may be put on the agenda of the Assembly for adoption. If no such request is made, the resolution is considered to be approved as adopted by the sectoral Committee. The main task of the Committee for the EU of the *Senate* is also systematically to review EU texts before they are adopted by the EU institutions. The Committee’s 36 Members are also members of other Senate sectoral Committees. Senate Committees can examine matters referred to them by the Committee for the EU. Fifteen staff work on EU matters for the Senate. France has a scrutiny reserve system.

Germany

Under the Basic Law of Germany, the *Bundestag* and, through the *Bundesrat*, the *Länder*, have a constitutional right to participate in EU matters, and the Federal Government has a duty to keep both Houses informed about these matters, comprehensively and at the earliest possible time. **The Committee on the Affairs of the EU** consists of 33 Members of the *Bundestag* (16 German Members of the European Parliament appointed by the President of the *Bundestag* may participate in the meetings without voting rights). The Committee is the central forum for the decision-making process on European policy, dealing with general matters relating to the EU and with cross cutting issues. The Committee can adopt decisions that have the status of *Bundestag* decisions, and, though Germany has no “scrutiny reserve”, the Federal Government must, under the Basic Law, give the *Bundestag* the opportunity to state its opinion, and must take that opinion into account, before participating in the legislative process in the EU. But, in Germany, rather than a central European Committee, it is the sectoral Committees that are central to scrutiny of European matters in the *Bundestag*. The appropriate Committee decides which EU documents should be items for discussion, informing the chairperson of the Committee on the Affairs of the European Union of their decision. Reference of documents is then decided by the President of the *Bundestag*, in consultation with the relevant chairpersons. One Committee may be appointed as lead Committee, with other Committees asked for their opinion. German MEPs can be invited to attend sectoral Committee meetings. Sectoral Committees must deal promptly with affairs of the EU of relevance to their area of competence, independently of whether such matters have been referred to them. Liaison is regarded as important in the *Bundestag*, with exchange of experience at the level of rapporteurs between the Committee on the Affairs of the EU and sectoral committees, and formal and informal meetings at the level of all parliamentary groups. Just under 60 staff support German Committees on EU business – by far the largest staff complement among member State Parliaments. The Committee on Questions of the EU of the *Bundesrat* consists of one member from each of the 17 German *Länder* and considers legislative proposals from this perspective. It has six staff.

Greece

The Committee on European Affairs of the Greek Parliament examines EU related issues, European policy issues, the actions of EU institutions, and cooperation between the Greek Parliament, the European Parliament and other national parliaments on EU matters. The Committee consists of a President, who is one of the Parliament’s Deputy Speakers, and 30 other MPs, supported by 10 staff. The Committee may express an advisory opinion on any issue within its field of competence, and submit that opinion to plenary and to the Government. Though Committee’s opinions are not binding (it has no legislative competence), the Government is obliged to respond to them. Sectoral committees also have the power to discuss EU issues within their field of competence and to adopt advisory opinions on them.

Hungary

The Committee on European Affairs of the Hungarian Parliament has 21 Members and seven staff. Originally the Committee was concerned with the integration of Hungary in the EU, but it now performs a scrutiny function. It has powers to examine most draft proposals that are to be adopted by the EU Council, though it is selective in what it chooses to examine. The Committee has decision-making authority in the scrutiny procedure, and thus the Committee, rather than plenary, makes decisions in these areas. In this way the Committee has considerable influence over the Government's position on decisions to be taken in the EU. Sectoral Committees may consider relevant EU issues, passing their opinions to the Committee on European Affairs. There is also a EU Consultation Body, chaired by the Parliament's Speaker, and leaders of parliamentary factions, the Chairs of the Constitutional Affairs Committee and the Foreign Affairs Committee, as well as the Members of the European affairs Committee. This meets the Prime Minister before European Council meetings.

Ireland

The Joint Committee on European Union Affairs, a Committee consisting of nine Members of the lower House and five Members of the upper House, carries out oversight and monitoring of broad EU policies and programmes, including the objectives of EU policy development, at the pre-legislative stage of the policy-making process. Following its examination of the issues, the Committee prepares reports, setting out its opinions and observations and including recommendations, to the two Houses and to the European Commission. The Committee also has the opportunity to make its views known in advance of Irish Ministers' participation in meetings of the EU Council. Detailed scrutiny of EU legislative proposals presented by the European Commission is, however, performed by the appropriate sectoral Committee 'downstream' in the policy-making process. The relevant government department must provide an Information Note to the Parliament on each proposal which sets out certain specific information including the policy implications of the proposal, its consequences for Irish legislation and the likely impact of implementation on Ireland. Both Houses of the Parliament and their Committees may make recommendations to Ministers on EU proposals which Ministers are legally obliged to take into consideration, though they are not formally binding.

Italy

Italian law provides that Parliament should take part in EU decision-making, and the Italian Government proactively shares information with the two Houses and briefs them consistently. The Committee on EU Policies of the *Chamber of Deputies* has 43 Members, supported by 16 staff. It may issue opinions on EU draft legislation (which is usually also submitted to the relevant sectoral Committee), and can ask that the opinion be forwarded (together with the final document adopted by the sectoral Committee) to the relevant EU Institution within the framework of the political dialogue. The Committee also checks whether EU draft legislation complies with the subsidiarity principle. A fifth of the Members of the Committee can

requisition a debate in plenary on its opinion. The Committee on EU Policies of the *Senate* has 29 Members, supported by 18 staff. It examines draft EU legislation, information reports issued by the government on relevant EU processes, and the compliance of national legislation with proposed EU legislation. It may refer matters to sectoral Committees for opinion. A scrutiny reserve system operates in Italy, though, if the Parliament does not express an opinion within 20 days, the reserve lapses.

Latvia

The European Affairs Committee in Latvia has 19 Members and six staff. It must contain at least one representative of each parliamentary group. The Latvian Parliament scrutinises EU matters by examining the position of the Latvian Government before this is communicated to the relevant EU institution. The Committee is able to mandate the Latvian Government on EU matters. It is the only parliamentary body with the competence to do this: sectoral Committees do not involve themselves in European legislation.

Lithuania

The Committee on European Affairs of the *Seimas* has between 15 and 25 Members and can act on behalf of the *Seimas* in EU matters, including expressing the opinion of the *Seimas* to the Lithuanian Government on EU proposals. The Committee contains senior representatives of the party groups and the sectoral Committees. The Committee may examine and present conclusions on all EU proposals - except proposals within the domain of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, which are dealt with by the Committee on Foreign Affairs. The Committee on European Affairs also evaluates the Government's presentation of its position in the institutions of the EU. The scrutiny made by the Committee is to a large extent based on the recommendations of the sectoral Committees of the *Seimas*. They advise the Committee on European Affairs on the importance of the various proposals. Lithuania has a scrutiny reserve system that is politically binding, and the Committee on European Affairs (or the Committee on Foreign Affairs) may oblige Ministers to express the parliamentary reservation in Council on issues designated by the committee as "very relevant" or "relevant". Twenty-three staff work for the *Seimas* on EU issues.

Luxembourg

Draft European proposals are examined by the relevant sectoral Committee, one of which is the 12 Member Committee for Foreign and European Affairs, for Defence, for Cooperation and for Immigration. Six staff work on EU matters.

Malta

The Standing Committee on Foreign and European Affairs consists of nine members, including the Minister for Foreign Affairs. There are four staff. MEPs from Malta have the right to participate in the work of the Committee, but not to vote. The Committee, through four working groups, examines any proposals for EU legislation, any other document published by a European institution, or any document relating to EU matters presented to the House by a Minister. Working Group 1 carries out the preliminary scrutiny of documents, deciding which require further scrutiny. It either does this scrutiny itself or forwards the document to one of the other Working Groups, depending on the policy area. The Working Groups can ask the Minister who drafted the memorandum referred to it to appear before them. The Chairperson of the Committee reports to the House after every meeting on documents that have been cleared from scrutiny and tables all relevant documentation. Sectoral committees do not have an EU competence.

Netherlands

Every sectoral standing committee is responsible for the European affairs in its own policy area. This means that European policy forms an integral part of the business of every standing committee, and, consequently, of all its members. Ministers are expected to discuss the position of the Netherlands with the appropriate sectoral committee before s/he attends the Council of Ministers. The *lower House's* 24 Member Committee on European Affairs (11 staff) has primarily therefore a cross-cutting and coordinating role since detailed scrutiny of individual legislative proposals is the primary responsibility of each sectoral committee. It is part of the Committee's function to alert other Committees to European developments, and to advise them on these developments. However, the Committee also holds Government to account on broader, more general and horizontal developments in Europe. The 24 Member *Senate* Committee on European Affairs lost its "gate-keeping" role in 2009 and now plays a coordinating role in scrutinising cross-committee proposals. Each of the Senate's sectoral committees decides which EU proposals to scrutinise, though the sectoral committees may request the Committee on European Affairs to scrutinise a specific proposal. The coordinating activities include preparing for the Parliamentary Debate on European Affairs, maintaining interparliamentary contacts, assessing the institutional developments and providing the impetus for debate on European affairs in the Senate. It has 14 staff.

Poland

The European Affairs Committee of the *Sejm* contains 46 Members, supported by 10 staff. It has the power to express opinions on behalf of the Chamber on EU legislative proposals to be adopted by the Council of Ministers and on the negotiating positions of the Polish Government in relation to these. The opinions of the Committee must constitute the basis for the position of the Government. If the Government decides to deviate from the opinion of the Committee, it is

obliged to explain the reason why. The Committee is the successor to the previous European Integration Committee. Sectoral Committees are not involved in EU matters. In the *Senate*, the 17 Member European Affairs Committee has power to express opinions to the government on its negotiating positions in the Council. The Government is obliged to seek the opinion of the Committee, and to present its negotiation position to it, before it can start negotiating in the Council of Ministers, but it is not obliged to follow the Committee's opinion. The Committee does its work in cooperation with sectoral Committees.

Portugal

The 21 Member European Affairs Committee has responsibility for monitoring all European subjects of interest to Portugal, as well as those that are pending decision at EU bodies. It has a particular responsibility to oversee the performance of the Government on European matters. It is empowered to submit draft resolutions to plenary within its area of responsibility. EU matters may also be considered by sectoral Committees and their opinion can be sought by the European Affairs Committee. The European Affairs Committee has a staff of five.

Romania

Before accession, Romania had a special joint Committee of both Houses to oversee the accession process. Since 2011, both the *Chamber of Deputies* and the *Senate* have had their own Committees on European affairs with 25 and 11 Members respectively. European affairs are dealt with by all sectoral Committees in line with their fields of interest and specialised area of responsibilities, as well as by the European Affairs Committees. The Act on cooperation between the Parliament and the Government in the field of European affairs makes little mention of the functions of Committees, instead stressing the responsibilities of the Government to the Chambers as a whole. Forty-six staff work for the two Houses on European matters.

Slovakia

The 15 Member European Affairs Committee of the Slovak National Council has the power to approve the positions of the Slovak Republic on proposals for EU legislation. Its decisions are binding. Ministers must submit for approval the positions of the Slovak Republic before they agree upon them in the EU Council. All new proposals for legislative and non-legislative acts of the EU are referred to the Committee which may decide to take note of the respective EU proposal, to adopt it, to amend it or to refuse it. The Committee may also ask a sectoral Committee(s) for its (their) position toward the proposal. The European Affairs Committee has nine staff.

Slovenia

The European Affairs Committee of the *National Assembly* has 14 Members (seven staff) and is responsible for discussing and formulating the position of the Assembly on EU legislative proposals and other EU-related matters. The Committee also scrutinises the Government's negotiating positions before Council meetings and gives the Government a mandate. There is no scrutiny reserve system. The International Relations and European Affairs Commission of the *National Council* has 11 Members. It is exceptional in just having a single staff member. It can present opinions to the EU or Foreign Policy Committees of the National Assembly. It is not obliged to discuss every EU legislative proposal.

Spain

Forty-three Members drawn from the Congress of Deputies and the Senate constitute the Joint Committee for the EU. The Committee has power to report on any matters relating to the activities of the EU that it may consider of interest, including legislative proposals of the European Commission. It pays particular attention to issues of subsidiarity. The Committee may also organise debates on a specific proposal for legislation and request the Speaker of either or both Chambers to debate the proposal in Plenary of the respective Chamber, with the Government's participation in both cases. The Committee, which is very selective in the areas of EU policy that it decides to examine, has six staff.

Sweden

The Riksdag prides itself on its control of EU matters. Sectoral committees have responsibility for EU matters within their fields of responsibility, and examine and write statements on the EU's Green and White Papers and other EU documents. The Government confers with the Committees at the early stage of the parliamentary process. The Committee on EU Affairs is currently composed of 17 Members, but there are also 42 deputy Members in the Committee to cover all areas of EU policy. All sectoral Committees are represented in the Committee. Dialogue between the Committee on EU Affairs and the sectoral Committees is good. The primary role of the Committee is to formulate a mandate on the basis of the Government's proposed position for negotiation in the Council. It is the Government's duty to take that mandate into account. Though the mandate is only politically binding, it is normally observed by the Government.

United Kingdom

The European Scrutiny Committee of the *House of Commons* has 16 Members, supported by 15 staff. Its role is to report to the House on the legal or political importance of each EU document, to decide which documents should be debated (in a Committee or in plenary), and to consider

any issues arising or related matters (e.g. new treaties). Sectoral Committees (which, unusually, are concerned only with scrutiny, and which do not have a legislative function) frequently take up individual aspects of EU policy as part of their scrutiny work. In the *House of Lords*, the EU Committee has 19 Members, with a further 55 on its six Sub-Committees. These Sub-Committees are, to all intents and purposes, themselves the House's sectoral Committees. They are supported by 24 staff. Their function is to consider EU documents and other matters relating to the EU. This mainly involves scrutiny of EU legislative proposals and the UK Government's response to them. A substantial number of detailed reports are produced each year on a wide variety of EU-related issues. The UK has a non-statutory scrutiny reserve.

Relevance for Ukraine

A single Committee or multiple Committees?

Different countries have different views about the relative benefits of a single, expert Committee considering EU affairs as opposed to mainstreaming EU matters into the work of all sectoral Committees and giving the EU Committee responsibility for cross-cutting issues and coordination. The Polish Sejm and the Hungarian and Maltese Parliaments are among examples of a strong central Committee. In the case of Latvia, the European Affairs Committee is the only Committee with competence in European matters.

More common appears to be the appreciation that the involvement of all sectoral committees extends the pool of expertise and involves more parliamentarians in EU issues. This is the view, for example, in the Czech Republic, Italy, Ireland and Romania. It is also the case in a country like Finland with a powerful central Committee that works cooperatively with sectoral Committees, even though it can in theory compel them to consider certain matters. Often there is a formal procedure for the exchange of opinions between the European Committee and the sectoral Committee, and there are other useful practices such as the French National Assembly's procedure that allows Rapporteurs from the European Committee to attend sectoral Committees, the meetings of Rapporteurs in the German Bundestag or the practice in Lithuania and Sweden that each sectoral Committee should be represented on the European Committee. In the Lithuanian, German, Irish, Netherlands and Swedish Parliaments EU matters are mainstreamed into the work of all Committees with the European Committee providing a supporting role. These Parliaments' engagement with EU matters is particularly impressive.

The greater the recognition of the importance of EU engagement across the Parliament – the recognition that EU business is core business – the better. As wide a range of Members, and of Committees, should take part in the examination of European policies so that knowledge and understanding of EU policies, and of EU policymaking processes and EU institutions, can be

spread throughout Parliament. **The Rada of Ukraine should consider how to adopt best practice from EU member State Parliaments on liaison between sectoral Committees and the European Integration Committee: this might include requirements for consultation between Committees and either overlapping memberships or exchange of Rapporteurs. Whatever else is done, there should be close liaison between secretariats.**

Prioritisation

Effective scrutiny of EU matters is resource-intensive – in terms of Member and staff time, and there is no shortage of material for scrutiny emanating from Brussels. This means that EU member State Parliaments' Committees have a constant challenge is prioritise between EU proposals. At the same time, EU specialists must recognise that EU matters compete with non-EU matters for parliamentarians' attention. The system of annual work programmes used in countries like Bulgaria and Croatia is a useful method of prioritising, but it is also important to have a filtering system in place, as in Hungary or the United Kingdom, so that the most important EU proposals are highlighted to the Committee or Committees involved.

There is always a fear that Committees may become staff-driven rather than Member-driven, but most member State Parliaments recognise that parliamentarians would be overwhelmed if they needed to consider all EU proposals. This is a problem that is even more acute in Ukraine where both the approximation of current laws to the EU acquis, and the constant stream of new proposals from the EU, need to be considered. **The Rada of Ukraine should ensure that a system is developed that empowers high quality staff to filter EU-related legislative proposals so that the European Integration Committee, and the sectoral Committees, can concentrate on what is most important legally and politically.**

Resources for EU scrutiny

A Committee is dependent on the number and quality of its staff. European Committees in member State Parliaments have between one and 59 staff. Staff concerned with EU issues do not work exclusively for the European Committee – they may, for example, specialize in EU issues but work for sectoral Committees (as in Lithuania) or work for a central research service or central Legal Department (as in the United Kingdom and France).

The workload of the European Integration Committee in Ukraine is huge – perhaps 40 draft laws considered in three hours of meetings each month. Much of the work falls on the Committee members personally. The Committee is clearly overworked. Expert assistance, and secretariat assistance to the Committee, need to be enhanced so that Deputies need only concern themselves with draft laws, or parts of draft laws, flagged up to them as raising matters of political or legal importance. **The Rada of Ukraine should ensure that adequate resources are provided to the European Integration Committee and in the other services that help Deputies on European matters.**

Member resource

A Committee's resources also depend on the competence and commitment of its Members. It is noteworthy how senior European Committees are in a most member State Parliaments – containing, for example, a Deputy Speaker in Greece, the Minister for Foreign Affairs in Malta and, strikingly, in Lithuania, two former Prime Ministers, six other former Ministers, one current Minister, four Chairpersons and one deputy Chairperson of sectoral Committees. **Membership of the European Integration Committee should be strengthened so that it contains senior and committed Deputies who represent the various factions in the Parliament and who might also be drawn from the Parliaments's sectoral Committees.**

Access to information

Parliaments like the Czech Senate, the German Bundestag and the British House of Commons that have regular systems of notification of EU proposals and speedy access to information from Government. Parliaments like those of Denmark and Finland expect Ministers to appear before them on a regular basis. Some Parliaments do not receive information in a timely way – for example, this has been identified as an issue in the Polish Senate. Frequently the Constitution of the State lays down provisions governing aspects of the relationship between Government and Parliament on EU matters, as in Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary. In Germany and the Czech Republic, among other countries, this is supplemented by a formal protocol that governs the relationship between Parliament and Government on EU Affairs.

While scrutiny systems inevitably vary according to the national context, it is vital that national parliaments carefully scrutinise the EU activities of their national governments to ensure that the positions of national Ministers are effectively examined. In anticipation of EU membership, these mechanisms need to be established in Ukraine. **In Ukraine, it is imperative that information flows from Government to the European Integration Committee are regular and speedy, and that Ministers cooperate readily with the Committee.**

Links with plenary

Many Committees are able to put the most contentious EU proposals to plenary for debate (in the case of Italy, a minority in the Committee has this power). **Any inhibitions in Ukraine that prevent the European Integration Committee from bringing matters to the attention of Plenary should be reviewed.**

Communication with external stakeholders

Several Committees in EU member State Parliaments have been concerned to ensure that external stakeholders are fully informed about EU business. In Croatia, this has involved direct participation by stakeholders in the Committee. In Cyprus, a sub-committee was established with the specific remit of communicating with citizens on EU issues – pre-accession this information concentrated on how membership of the EU would affect Cypriots.

Effective Committees in Parliaments world-wide realise how important it is for them to engage with citizens and civil society. It strengthens popular support for Parliament, and, in the case of

EU Committees, popular support for the EU. **The European Integration Committee in Ukraine should consider developing its outreach strategy.**

COSAC, IPEX and representation in Brussels

While each national parliamentary chamber is unique, Parliaments should learn from each other. COSAC is a very good forum for this learning on EU matters. Although COSAC membership is restricted to EU member States, Georgia's European Integration Committee has secured invitations to COSAC. IPEX, the InterParliamentary EU information exchange, is a platform for the mutual exchange of information between the national Parliaments and the European Parliament concerning issues related to the European Union. It is also a useful source of comparative information. Several Parliaments, including Finland, France, Germany, Ireland and the United Kingdom, have established small units of parliamentary staff in Brussels. These units have proved invaluable means of gathering intelligence and fostering links on behalf of their Parliaments' European Committees. **The European Integration Committee in Ukraine might establish the closest possible links with COSAC and take advantage of IPEX. The Rada may also consider establishing a small office in Brussels.**

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