

University Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation Abstract

**THE EUROPEANIZATION OF THE
HUNGARIAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

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I BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES OF THE DISSERTATION

Subject-matter and objectives of the research

National parliaments of the Member States of the European Union (EU) play numerous roles in European integration. They participate in the revision and approval of the Treaties. National parliaments control the application of the principle of subsidiarity and hold their governments to account for their participation in EU decision-making procedures. National parliaments transpose European law into domestic law. These functions are not only important in terms of constitutional law, but also in terms of democracy in the EU. In order to perform these functions, national parliaments had to adapt their own procedures and bodies. However, institutional adaptation is not sufficient, only the actual presence of EU affairs on the parliamentary agenda can contribute to the articulation of national interests and party positions and to providing information for citizens about EU affairs.

Since the Maastricht Treaty of 1993, almost every amendment of the Treaties has contained new provisions concerning national parliaments. The Treaty on European Union (TEU) currently in force provides that the functioning of the EU shall be founded on representative democracy, stating that ‘Member States are represented in the European Council by their Heads of State or government and in the Council by their governments, themselves democratically accountable either to their national parliaments, or to their citizens’.¹ According to further provisions of the Treaties, national parliaments actively contribute to the good functioning of the EU.

The emergence of national parliaments in the primary law of the EU reflects theoretical assumptions that the EU suffers a democratic or legitimacy deficit. Enhanced involvement of national parliaments in European affairs can assist in tackling this problem and ‘bring Europe closer to the citizens’ (that is to say, improve understanding and acceptance of European policies and institutions).

The situation of national parliaments in the EU is not, however, unproblematical. They are regarded as ‘losers’ in the process of European integration but also as adaptive institutions, able to face new challenges and control governments in connection with EU affairs. Without a doubt, national governments have been the most important decision makers in the EU, pushing national parliaments into the background (deparliamentarization). On the

¹ Article 10 TEU.

other hand, national parliaments have shown themselves ready to implement institutional and procedural changes in order to reinforce the scrutiny of European affairs (Europeanization).

The objective of the research is to explore how the Hungarian Parliament, also known as the National Assembly (*Országgyűlés*) has adapted to EU Membership and what impact EU integration has had on its functioning; in other words, the Europeanization of the Hungarian Parliament. For this purpose, it is necessary to analyse the role of national parliaments in European democracy, and assess what rights are provided to national parliaments in EU law.

Many studies have reviewed national parliaments' role in the EU. From the 1990s, increasing academic attention has been given to the scrutiny of EU affairs in the Member States' parliaments. Comparative research concerning all or most of the national parliaments has attempted to find the common features and best practices of this EU scrutiny. The main question of such research has been which model of scrutiny is more efficient, giving a stronger position to the national parliaments vis-à-vis the government. Despite the abundant literature, the issue of national parliaments' involvement in EU affairs remains a topical one, and provides a field for genuine research and novel findings. On the one hand, the Lisbon Treaty contains new provisions concerning national parliaments, giving a new perspective for their role in European integration. On the other hand, as far as the Hungarian Parliament is concerned, the ten years which have passed since Hungary's accession to the EU provide the opportunity to undertake an empirical analysis of parliamentary activities related to EU affairs.

The main question of the present dissertation is how, and to what extent, the EU impacts on the work of the Hungarian National Assembly. The initial hypothesis is that there is a discrepancy between the Hungarian National Assembly's legal ability to participate in EU decision-making procedures on the one hand, and the actual use of the Hungarian National Assembly's powers in European affairs on the other. I assume that the Hungarian Parliament is 'marginalised' rather than 'integrated' in the complex system of EU decision making and democracy.

This research has been inspired by previous investigations, but its approach is somewhat different. The focus is on the Hungarian Parliament, but the comparative approach also plays a role, and helps to assess empirical findings. This research is not confined to analysing the legal and institutional adaptation of the Hungarian Parliament to European integration, but covers the examination of parliamentary customs and practices. Besides the Committee on European Affairs (CEA), the work of the plenary and sectoral committees of the Hungarian

Parliament is also assessed. The examination of the Europeanization of the Hungarian Parliament would not be complete without empirical analysis. Through quantitative analysis, I explore the intensity of parliamentary EU scrutiny. Finally, case studies on parliamentary debates form the basis of a qualitative analysis. Apart from some earlier research by the present author, there has not yet been such detailed quantitative and qualitative analysis of Hungarian parliamentary activities in EU affairs.

Structure and methods of the dissertation

This dissertation contains five chapters, each of which applies different methods and draws on different sources. Chapter 1 seeks to systematize the theories and ideas on the reasons, modes and consequences of national parliaments' involvement in European affairs. National parliaments have been seen as institutions that are able to alleviate the democratic deficit of the EU. Although it is widely accepted that the EU suffers a democratic deficit, it is worthwhile examining why this is the case, to what extent, and how national parliaments may contribute to remedy it. Chapter 1 also deals with how the role of national parliaments has changed with European integration, whether they are weakened vis-à-vis the government (deparliamentarization) and how they have reacted to the changes. The literature serving the basis of this Chapter is not only summarised, but also critically analysed, in order to discover any underlying weaknesses or contradictions in the theories.

Chapter 2 focuses on the constitutionalisation of national parliaments in EU law. Although the process of the emergence of national parliaments in the primary law of the EU is also discussed, the real emphasis of the analysis is on the provisions of the Treaties in force, i.e. on the changes that the Lisbon Treaty has brought about in connection with the involvement of national parliaments in EU decision-making procedures. First, national parliaments' rights to information provided by the Treaties are presented. Second, national parliaments' ability to participate in EU decision-making procedures are described and evaluated. 'Decision-making procedures' are understood broadly, including not only the legislative procedures, but also treaty revisions, the decision-making of the European Council, etc. 'Participation' can include various activities, again understood in a broad sense. Finally, modes of inter-parliamentary cooperation are outlined.

Chapter 3 turns to the detailed examination of the Hungarian National Assembly. The research covers the relevant legislation and parliamentary customs and practices. The Hungarian Parliament adopted the legal framework for cooperation with the Hungarian

government in EU affairs in 2004. The legislation was changed slightly in 2012 and now contains the necessary provisions for the application of new rights provided by the Lisbon Treaty. According to the legislation, EU law, and European issues in general, are present in various ways in the activities of the Hungarian Parliament. Probably most importantly, Parliament can follow and eventually influence EU decision-making procedures indirectly through the Hungarian government, via the ‘scrutiny procedure’. The scrutiny procedure is coordinated by the CEA, which is entitled to adopt a parliamentary standpoint on EU legislative drafts and on the relevant government position in the name of the Hungarian Parliament. Consequently the CEA receives special attention in Chapter 3, but the systematic examination has a global approach and covers every parliamentary instrument which may concern European affairs.

Chapters 4 and 5 contain empirical research about European affairs on the agenda of the Hungarian Parliament. Raunio, one of the most prominent academics on this research area, suggests that research on national parliaments, especially on CEE parliaments, should examine whether legal and procedural choices that work on paper also produce effective scrutiny in practice.² Accordingly, it is necessary to examine not only the formal rights and possibilities, but also the actual scrutiny itself. ‘Actual’ scrutiny covers both the intensity of the use of parliamentary means to scrutinise EU matters and the quality of the scrutiny; in other words, whether debates are sufficiently deep and comprehensive. Where possible, results of the empirical research are compared to experiences of other national parliaments.

Chapter 4 examines whether EU affairs are present in the work of the Hungarian Parliament. The quantitative analysis covers the agendas of the plenary, the CEA and sectoral committees. Data has been collected through the Hungarian Parliament’s home website page and the public database. As ten years have passed since the accession of Hungary to the EU, longitudinal examination provides an opportunity to identify possible trends and offer explanations for them. I am especially interested in whether the composition of the government (a coalition cabinet, a government with a minority or a two thirds majority in Parliament) influences the intensity of EU scrutiny.

Conversely, Chapter 5 contains a qualitative analysis of Hungarian parliamentary debates on EU affairs. For the investigation, I read the official and public minutes of the Hungarian Parliament and used the search engine of the parliamentary database. With the help of four case studies, I attempt to gauge the awareness of EU policies and the attitudes of

² RAUNIO, Tapio, National Parliaments and European Integration: What We Know and Agenda for Future Research, *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 2009, Vol. 15, No. 4, pp. 317-334 at p. 321.

Members of Parliament (MP) towards the EU. I would like to know whether MPs are prepared to articulate their position on EU affairs, hold the government to account in an efficient way and contribute to the formulation of the national interest. The case studies concern different sources of EU law (primary and secondary) and jurisprudence of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU). The research also includes longitudinal aspects and looks for trends in the characteristics of the debates.

II SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

National parliaments and the EU

When we think about national parliaments of the Member States and the EU, the most essential question that has to be examined is what impact one may have on the other. In other words: a) what is the role of national parliaments in the European architecture, and b) how does European integration affect the position and functioning of national parliaments?

a) It is widely accepted in the literature that the EU suffers a democratic deficit and national parliaments may contribute to improve European democracy. However, more detailed analysis shows that the question is not quite so clear. First of all, the basic elements of democracy are undoubtedly present in the EU. Furthermore, the Lisbon Treaty enhances good governance, articulates democratic equality, and representative and participatory democracy. These are principally unproblematic elements. The problematic point is the missing direct accountability of the Council (and the European Council), the main European decision-maker. However, the ideas on the democratic deficit stem from the fact that the concepts of democracy are elaborated for states, and the EU is not a state, and neither parliamentary nor presidential governance entirely fits the EU mode of governance. If we accept this fact, the democratic deficit of the EU seems less important.

In any case, EU democracy has to be improved to gain more legitimacy. Indeed, support for the EU is declining among European citizens, while at the same time the EU institutions have to tackle, or at least contribute to the resolution of, complex economic and social problems. To achieve this aim it is necessary that EU institutions adopt successful EU policies (output legitimacy) through democratic decision-making (input legitimacy) which needs to be transparent, and that they establish a balance between different national and sector interests.

National parliaments may contribute to making the EU and its decision-making more democratic. Two basic possibilities are provided: national parliaments can be involved in certain decisions at European level and can exercise control over their governments in European affairs at national level. Furthermore, public national parliamentary debate on EU matters could foster understanding and acceptance of EU institutions and policies.

These theoretical ideas constituted the background for the emergence of EU law provisions concerning the role of national parliaments in EU decision-making procedures. The relevant dispositions of Treaties and Protocols 1 and 2 attached to them may be grouped in terms of their function: informational rights serving as the basis of national parliaments' participation in EU decision-making, the participation itself, and the inter-parliamentary cooperation as a means supporting the participation. As regards the informational rights, the Lisbon Treaty enlarged the scope of the documents and information sent directly to national parliaments by EU institutions, including draft legislative acts, legislative resolutions of the EP, agendas and positions of the Council. It must be observed that Treaty provisions on information and notification are important constitutionally, because they constitute the legal basis for national parliaments' participation in European decision making procedures, though their practical importance is less, since these documents and information are publicly available.

The participation of national parliaments in EU decision-making includes their role in the Treaty revisions, the ratification of well-defined EU acts and control of the compliance of EU drafts with the principle of subsidiarity. In the ordinary revision procedure representatives of national parliaments take part in the work of the Convention, and thus in the elaboration of Treaty amendments. However, the 'ordinary' revision seems to be only applied exceptionally in practice, and simplified revisions are used more generally, where the role of national parliaments is limited to a ratification or veto of the modification of the primary law.

The control of the principle of subsidiarity by national parliaments is one of the most remarkable innovations of the Lisbon Treaty. With the help of the so-called early warning mechanism national parliaments may signal to the EU law-making institutions if they assume that an EU draft legislative act breaches the principle, i.e. that the planned EU measure should not be regulated at Union level, because it lacks added value compared to national regulation. If the number of reasoned opinions sent for this purpose in connection with a given draft reaches a threshold, the law-making institutions have to review the draft (the yellow card procedure). If more than half of the national parliamentary chambers send a reasoned opinion in the framework of an ordinary legislative procedure, the Council and the European

Parliament may hinder further negotiation of the draft (the orange card procedure). Consequently, national parliaments, either individually or collectively, are not able to reject any EU draft legislative act or block the decision-making procedure, but they can warn, at an early stage of this procedure, that a proposed EU measure could be efficiently regulated at national level.

Although the early warning mechanism is considered an important innovation, it has several limitations, attenuating its practical effect. It is confined to the principle of subsidiarity, and does not include, for example, the very closely linked principles of conferral or proportionality, not to mention policy considerations. Furthermore, the eight week time-limit to send a reasoned opinion seems quite short for national parliaments to complete the internal process of the adoption of the opinion, although experience so far shows that this cannot be an obstacle to the implementation of the early warning mechanism. The early warning mechanism is completed by the right of national parliaments to initiate the introduction of an action for annulment of EU legislative acts before the CJEU via their governments. This opportunity is also limited, because of the lack of *locus standi* of national parliaments. The rules on the *locus standi* of national parliaments before the CJEU would be worth revising, thus providing more effective judicial protection to their rights emanating from the Treaties.

Since increased national parliamentary involvement in European decision-making may be beneficial for the democratic legitimacy of the EU, the post-Lisbon situation is therefore an improvement. However, national parliaments' direct participation in EU decision-making can only be meaningful if the European institutions take their obligations (i.e. justification, taking into account of parliamentary opinions) seriously, too. This can be an incentive for national parliaments to invest in European affairs, which can generate a better understanding of the EU both by themselves and by citizens.

b) As far as the influence of European integration on national parliaments is concerned, various explanations exist related to the changes that have occurred in the position of national parliaments vis-à-vis the government. The deparliamentarization thesis accentuates the declining importance of parliaments in contemporary governance, something which has been further accentuated by European integration. With European integration national parliaments accepted the transfer of certain legislative powers to EU institutions, where the most important decision-maker, the Council, is composed of the already dominant executives. However, national parliaments should not become meaningless even in this situation, as they

have a considerable constitutional and legitimising function. National parliaments should, thus, adapt to the new modes of governance.

Theories of the Europeanization of national parliaments analyse and explain the legal, institutional and functional changes in legislatures induced by European integration. National parliaments' adaptation to Union membership has been gradual and voluntary and based on the constitutional traditions of each Member State. However, parliaments have learnt and copied the solutions adopted by other parliaments. Mimicry of constitutional norms or best practices of scrutiny is derived from a recognition of the need to comply with the logic of EU membership. National parliaments have established special committees to deal with European affairs and control government activities in the Council. With the help of EU scrutiny, national parliaments may take part in the formulation of the national interest to be represented in the EU institutions and decision-making procedures.

The Europeanization of the Hungarian Parliament

The Europeanization of the Hungarian Parliament has been characterised by copying EU scrutiny mechanisms of the old Member States.³ Based on the experiences of several decades of the old Member States, CEE parliaments have introduced more comprehensive EU scrutiny systems than many of the old Member States. Their development has another special feature: in the 1990s and early 2000s they had both to consolidate their position in the new democracies and prepare for EU Membership at the same time. Parliamentarization after the regime change and deparliamentarization consequently seem to have a special dynamism.

The legal adaptation of the Hungarian Parliament to EU membership took place in 2004, when most of the existing EU scrutiny tools were established in the Constitution, in the Act on cooperation between the Parliament and the government in EU affairs and in the Standing Orders of the Parliament. The original provisions were complemented in 2012 with the creation of the procedures necessary to implement the Lisbon Treaty's provisions concerning national parliaments. The Cooperation Act has been abolished, and most of its provisions have been transferred to the Act on Parliament. The amendments of 2012 have not brought about fundamental changes in parliamentary EU scrutiny.

³ 'Old' Member States are the 15 Member States of the EU before the enlargement of 2004.

The Hungarian system of parliamentary EU scrutiny is composed of various procedures providing for the participation of all parliamentary bodies: the plenary and the standing committees. The parliamentary instruments for supervising or influencing European affairs can be divided into three groups. There are traditional parliamentary tools which are long-established parliamentary instruments also used in connection with EU affairs (e.g. questions, interpellations). The scrutiny procedure allows for discussion in the CEA and other standing committees of selected EU draft legislative acts and the related government positions with the aim of the adoption of a parliamentary standpoint which the government has to take into account during the negotiations in the Council. Finally, other EU scrutiny tools provided for the implementation of subsidiarity control, the veto on *passerelle* clauses, the political dialogue with the Commission, the hearings before and after the European Council meetings, regular reports on the government's activities in EU matters and hearings of government nominees to EU institutions.

As far as the plenary session is concerned, EU affairs rarely feature on its agenda. Examination of the most important control mechanisms applied at the plenary, which are mostly broadcast by the media, has shown that in the Hungarian Parliament between 2004 and 2010 on average about 4% of instantaneous questions, questions and interpellations and 6% of speeches before the agenda related to EU affairs. The so-called 'policy debates' seldom concern EU matters. The weak plenary involvement may be a logical consequence of the creation of the CEA. It is more surprising that, contrary to preliminary assumptions, based on the literature, the salience of EU issues has remained low in Parliament, regardless of the time spent as a Member State and the composition of the government.

Another aspect of Europeanization is the share of EU-origin bills on the parliamentary agenda: between 2004 and 2010 30% of all acts adopted in Parliament were EU-related. The data indicate a significant penetration of EU law into national law, following on from Hungary respecting its obligations stemming from EU law.

The case study of plenary debates of treaty ratification has revealed that these discussions have not generated profound debates and have remained rather solemn and superficial, especially in cross-country comparison. Only in rare cases, where national or symbolic political interests emerged, did the debates go beyond diplomatic show. Governments (and government parties) seem to place overriding importance on fast ratification procedures. Therefore, the Hungarian Parliament has not provided a forum for public debate on such fundamental issues as Treaty amendments.

The results of the case study on parliamentary debates on the economic crisis and EU crisis management are different. These debates have generated heated debates, especially at the plenary session. The relevant plenary discussions revealed a keener interest in the future functioning of the EU and demonstrated that the parties, particularly opposition parties, are familiar with the merits and consequences of the proposed European measures. Several MPs were ready to seize their opportunity to voice viewpoints about European integration in general. However, these ‘several’ MPs form only a small group in Parliament, the majority of MPs do not engage in discussions of EU affairs.

The CEA is the central parliamentary actor regarding EU related issues. It is the standing committee specialized in EU affairs and has managed the scrutiny of the government’s EU related activities since 1992. Its composition reflects the proportion of parliamentary groups, thereby assuring support for the government in EU matters. The CEA is responsible for managing the scrutiny procedure, the subsidiarity control, the objection on the application of *passerelle* clauses and the political dialogue with the Commission. In addition it organises hearings on EU-related issues.

The CEA’s most important task is the scrutiny procedure. The prerequisite of the scrutiny procedure is the multitude of EU documents, including EU legislative drafts, emanating from the EU institutions and the government. In terms of the quantity of the documents, the CEA disposes all the necessary information for the management of the scrutiny procedure. After the selection of the EU draft to be scrutinised in the Parliament, the CEA proposes the designation of the sectoral committee(s) (which gives its opinion) and invites the government to send its proposed negotiation position to be represented in the Council. According to general experience, the government provides sufficient information to the CEA in the proposed position; occasionally, however, the position of the government is expressed laconically, in a minimalist interpretation of the requirements. Moreover, the government position destined for the Council meetings is broader in content than the position sent to the Parliament. Consequently, in Hungary the information asymmetry between Parliament and government stems not from the quantity, but rather from the quality of the documents forwarded to the Parliament.

The ultimate aim of the scrutiny procedure is the adoption of a parliamentary standpoint on the selected EU draft and the related government position. The CEA is given a unique and unprecedented role in the parliamentary control of EU decision-making in Hungary: it adopts the standpoint in the name of the whole Parliament. In the standpoint the CEA takes into account the proposed government position, the hearing of the government representatives and

the opinion of the parliamentary sectoral committee. The parliamentary standpoint identifies the most important elements of the EU draft in terms of the national interest and states whether it supports the government position or not. As the standpoint is classified as a confidential parliamentary document, it cannot be the object of wider public scrutiny or scientific analysis. The standpoint of the CEA is politically binding on government, i.e. the government must elaborate its final position on the basis of the standpoint and in a contrary case, give justification.

Although the scrutiny procedure is the most important parliamentary control mechanism concerning EU affairs, it functions at a low intensity. On average, only about seven drafts per parliamentary session (nearly half a year) have been examined by the CEA. The number of scrutiny procedures has been decreasing since 2009. Furthermore, the time management of the procedure is not always the most efficient. As the CEA does not convene meetings in parliamentary recess, the parliamentary control of government activity in EU affairs is entirely lacking in these periods. Besides, the adoption of the parliamentary standpoint occurs just before the political decision in Council. Thereby the latter can be considered more a post facto control (approval) of what the government has represented in the Council working groups, rather than a real attempt to influence the government position.

The case study of the scrutiny procedure on the sugar sector reform has revealed that although the theoretically advantageous early control was not carried out, the CEA was able to follow the schedule of the EU decision-making. While the discussion in the sectoral committee was very technical in nature, the CEA placed more attention on the negotiation strategies and the conciliation between the different interests. However, even despite the expertise of the sectoral committee the parliamentary work was not able to anticipate the consequences of the policy change. The added value of the parliamentary standpoint cannot be easily demonstrated. It proved to be difficult for the MPs to find the ‘national’ interest despite the basic consensus between majority and opposition.

The CEA is entitled to conduct the subsidiarity check and initiate the adoption of a reasoned opinion by the plenary. Since the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, the CEA has relied on the new provisions on only one occasion. The procedure completed in the Hungarian Parliament was very fast, proving that the eight week deadline available for subsidiarity control is long enough if there is sufficient political will to implement the procedure.

In the case of the *ex post* control of subsidiarity, the final parliamentary decision to initiate the introduction of an action before the CJEU is made not by the plenary but by the

CEA. The government may decide to follow the CEA's initiative or refuse to take proceedings. In my view, the effectiveness of Article 8 of Protocol 2 would have been better provided for if the Hungarian rules had not left discretion for the government in the introduction of the action.

In the framework of the political dialogue between the Commission and national parliaments the CEA is entitled to adopt an opinion and communicate it to the Commission. The CEA has had recourse to the political dialogue once. Consequently, the CEA does not take the opportunity to make its opinion heard at EU level: subsidiarity control and political dialogue is almost non-existent in practice. The Hungarian Parliament has not yet realised the potential of these mechanisms.

Parliamentary sectoral committees do not dedicate much attention to what is happening in the EU and how the government represents Hungarian interests or implements EU law. They participate in the scrutiny procedure, and can organize hearings on EU matters, although they are not particularly eager to do so. Furthermore the number of EU-related hearings in sectoral committees is decreasing.

Quantitative analysis of EU affairs on the parliamentary agenda has not identified unambiguous trends in parliamentary EU scrutiny. It was expected that the intensity of scrutiny would increase with time, but this assumption cannot be confirmed. What is more, the CEA's commitment to the scrutiny procedure has decreased over the last few years. I have not found sufficient evidence of the effect of government composition on the intensity on EU scrutiny, although some trends (e.g. less frequent scrutiny procedure) may be explained by the comfortable majority of the coalition in parliament. On the other hand, trends in EU scrutiny do not necessarily reflect strategic choices, but may be justified by other reasons (e.g. excessive parliamentary workload).

Finally, the case study on the CJEU proved that the case law is present in the debates of the Hungarian Parliament and MPs are aware of the power of the CJEU. Reliance on the lack of compliance of bills with the jurisprudence of the CJEU has proved to be a regularly used tool for the opposition MPs in their argumentation. Future (possible) rulings have also had an anticipatory effect on legislative behaviour. On the other hand, the control of the government in connection with the Hungarian cases before the CJEU in the CEA is not systematic and is quite superficial.

The initial hypothesis was that in the Hungarian National Assembly there is a discrepancy between the legal possibilities available for the control of government activities in European affairs and direct participation in the European decision making on the one hand, and the actual use of parliamentary powers on the other. This hypothesis can be confirmed since it has been demonstrated that legal and institutional Europeanization has taken place in the Hungarian Parliament, but the performance of the national legislature is poor in contributing to the European Union decision-making procedures. The reasons of the low intensity of the scrutiny of EU affairs may be various: e.g. comfortable majority of the government parties in parliament, a lack of capacity or expertise, a lack of political interest, a lack of the feeling that national MPs or one national parliament can have any influence on EU decision-making. It is also true that the disappointing performance is not exclusively peculiar to the Hungarian Parliament, but to the Hungarian public administration as a whole.

The functioning of the EU must be learnt by both the national political elites and society. In Hungary, before the accession there were no domestic fora to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of Hungary's accession to the EU, to identify who would be the losers and winners, and why, how, and to what extent.⁴ Much has still to be done in this respect. Parliamentary debates show that in some cases meaningful discussion on EU affairs has emerged, but it is doubtful whether this would be enough to provide a better understanding of the domestic implications of EU measures, added value in the articulation of the national interest and real political alternatives for citizens.

Nonetheless, investing resources in the parliamentary scrutiny of EU affairs should not be meaningless. Legal opportunities must not be wasted, but should be translated into the 'power to influence'.⁵ The Hungarian National Assembly has to better find its place in the system of EU decision-making and in the formulation and representation of the national interest, as well as provide a forum for public debate on EU matters in order to communicate policy alternatives, inform citizens and contribute to the enhancement of the democratic legitimacy of the EU.

⁴ ÁGH, Attila, Europeanization and Democratization: Hungarian parliamentary committees as central sites of policy-making, in LONGLEY, Lawrence D. and ÁGH, Attila (eds.), *Working Papers on Comparative Legislative Studies II: The Changing Roles of Parliamentary Committees*, Research Committee of Legislative Specialists, Appleton, 1997, pp. 443–453 at p. 451.

⁵ Expression used by AUER, Katrin and BENZ, Arthur, The politics of adaptation: The Europeanisation of national parliamentary systems, *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 2005, Vol. 11, No. 3/4, pp. 372–393 at p. 389.



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