

Legislative Institutionalization and the European Parliament

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Abstract:

This paper analyzes the extent to which the 'world's only elected supranational assembly' has become institutionalized. More specifically, it asks the following question: Has the European Parliament become more complex, autonomous, specialized and universalistic? Using the concepts derived from the theory of institutionalization, I attempt to address this question and develop our knowledge of the institutional evolution of the European Parliament.

I) Introduction

The role and the powers of the European Parliament (EP) have gradually increased over the last twenty years. It has evolved from a powerless consultative organ into a true parliament with extended legislative and budgetary powers. Now it has the power to dismiss the Commission, amend and enact the budget, legislate and exercise a legislative veto.

The need to understand this unique institution has increased concomitantly with its growing importance within the European Union. Its unique status as 'the world's only elected supranational assembly,' its *sui generis* role and array of powers has generated significant scholarly interest. The history of the European Parliament, its changing role and powers, and its relations with other Community institutions has been well studied and documented. However our knowledge of the internal workings of the parliament and its institutional evolution remains limited. This work intends to redress this gap and to extend our knowledge in this area.

The purpose of this paper is therefore to track changes in this transnational legislative body since 1979, when the first European direct elections were held. I measure empirically the extent to which the European Parliament has become more complex, decentralized, autonomous and universalistic, in other words the extent to which it has

become institutionalized. The European Parliament, as a “transformative legislature,”¹ in Polsby’s words (1975), presents a good case for assessing institutionalization over time.

A systematic analysis of the internal institutional evolution of the EP is clearly significant in several respects. Given that a legislature’s capacity to influence policy outcomes is greatest when it is highly institutionalized, to know the extent to which the European Parliament has become institutionalized is important in order to understand its role and powers vis-à-vis other institutions of the European Union. An autonomous, specialized, internally complex and universalistic EP will definitely show the greatest capacity to determine legislative and policy outcomes and constrain the Commission and the Council. Furthermore, an empirical analysis of the internal organization of the European Parliament is also highly significant in terms of determining the concept of institutionalization as a model that can be used for other legislatures.

This paper is organized as follows. In the following section I review the literature on institutionalization in general, and on the legislative institutionalization in particular, introduce Polsby’s model and identify the implicit difficulties that I found with its direct application. In the third section I apply Polsby’s model with some changes to the European Parliament. Finally, in the fourth section I conclude.

II) Legislative Institutionalization: What We Already Know

While it is considered as largely “a function of modern political thought and of the great social transformation wrought by modernization,” the notion of

¹ Polsby defines two types of legislatures: *arenas* and *transformative legislatures*. At one end of the continuum lie *transformative legislatures* that possess the independent capacity, frequently exercised, to

institutionalization is not completely new to “theories and intellectual responses to an age of rapid social change” (Sisson, 1973: 21). It has its intellectual origins in early works of historical sociology and pervades much of contemporary sociology and politics. It is found in the works of Fustel de Coulanges, Emile Durkheim and in Weber’s analysis of capitalism and in his theory of legitimation (Sisson, 1973:21).

How to define institutionalization? While the concept of institutionalization is central to a number of works, there is a lack of scholarly agreement on a definition of this concept.

S. N. Eisenstadt in his acclaimed study, “Institutionalization and Change,” defines the process of institutionalization as “the organization of a societally prescribed system of differentiated behavior oriented to the solution of certain problems inherent in a major area of social life” (Eisenstadt, 1964: 235). Samuel Huntington, focusing on the relationship between institutionalization and stability, defines institutionalization as “the process by which organizations acquire value and stability” (Huntington, 1968: 12-24).

Richard Sisson, rejecting the earlier definitions, advances one of the most lucid definitions of this concept. He defines political institutionalization as “the creation and persistence of valued rules, procedures and patterns of behavior that enable the successful accommodation of new configurations of political claimants and/or demands within a given organization whether it be a party, a legislature or a state” (Sisson, 1973: 19).

Instead of advancing a definition like Eisenstadt, Huntington and Sisson, Nelson W. Polsby goes on to identify major characteristics of an institutionalized organization. According to Polsby, an institutionalized body is characterized by the establishment of

mold and transform proposals from whatever source into laws. At the other end of the continuum lie *arenas*, legislatures without real policy making powers (Polsby, 1975:277-296).

boundaries or the differentiation of it from its environment, by the growth of internal complexity, and the development of universalistic rather than particularistic criteria for conducting its internal business (Polsby, 1968:145). Institutionalization therefore is the process by which a body acquires autonomy from its environment, becomes internally complex and develops universalistic as opposed to particularistic decision-making rules. As Hibbing argues in his seminal study on the British House of Commons, it is “more than modernization, more than stability, and more than gaining power,” a process, “that can be traced back to the ‘laws’ of human nature” (Hibbing, 1988:682).

We have defined the concept of institutionalization. How to translate this concept into operational terms? How to operationalize the institutionalization? What operational indicators can be devised to measure autonomy, complexity and universalism? In this regard, Polsby’s study remains as one of the best systematic and empirical analysis of institutionalization. Polsby applies concepts derived from the theory of institutionalization to a legislature (the US House of Representatives) and suggests several operational indices that enable us to measure empirically the extent to which an organization has become institutionalized. With these indicators we are able to test whether the degree of actual change in any given unit (a legislature, a court or a party) has been consistent with the pattern of change that might be expected based on the concept of institutionalization. Intrigued by the formulations of Polsby, several scholars apply the concept of institutionalization to different organizations, namely to legislatures (Kornberg, 1973; Sisson, 1973; Gerlich, 1973; Loewenberg, 1973; Hibbing, 1988), to a court (Schmidhauser, 1973) and to subcommittees (Haeberle, 1978).

While each of those scholars employs different indicators to assess institutionalization, they all agree on “autonomy” as a major characteristic of an institutionalized organization (Keohane, 1969; Polsby, 1968; Huntington, 1968; Eisenstadt, 1964). In an autonomous organization, entry to and exit from membership is more difficult and turnover is less frequent; recruitment to high level offices is more likely to occur from within the organization.

Three types of indicators can be identified for autonomy or differentiation. First indicator identified by Polsby is the membership turnover. According to Polsby, as an organization institutionalizes we must perceive a distinct decline in the turnover rate (Polsby, 1968:148). Second is recruitment to leadership positions. As Polsby notes “another method of investigating the extent to which an institution has established boundaries is to consider its leaders, how they are recruited, what happens to them, and most particularly the extent to which the institution permits lateral entry to and exit from positions of leadership” (Polsby, 1968:148). Polsby examines the length of service in the House before becoming speaker.

The second trait of institutionalization identified by Polsby and by many others is the growth of internal complexity. However it is not easy to develop simple operational indicators of institutional complexity as in the case of the establishment of boundaries. The most obvious measure is to count the number of standing committees but this may be misleading given that “the raw number of committees may not reflect the true level of internal differentiation” (Hibbing, 1988:697). Polsby therefore opts for other indicators namely the growth in the autonomy and importance of committees, the growth of specialized agencies of party leadership and the general increase in the provision of

various emoluments and auxiliary aids to House members in the form of office space, salaries, allowances, staff aid and committee staffs (Polsby, 1968:153).

The last feature of institutionalization is the adoption of universalistic rules rather than particularistic ones and automatic rather than discretionary methods in the internal decision-making of any given unit. In regard to the House, the best evidence of the shift away from discretionary and toward automatic decision-making is the growth of seniority as a criterion of determining the committee rank and the growth of the practice of deciding contested elections to the House strictly on the merits (Polsby, 1968:160).

The evidence from the House of Representatives supports that the House has become institutionalized over time; has developed well-defined boundaries, has become internally complex and has adopted universalistic standards and automated methods. What about other legislatures? As Hibbing asks: “have other legislatures also changed in a manner consistent with the tenets of institutionalization?” (Hibbing, 1988:685) What about the European Parliament? Has the European Parliament also changed and evolved in a similar manner? To what extent the European Parliament exhibits these characteristics?

However it is important to keep in mind that Polsby’s framework has not proven to be easily “exportable” to the study of legislative institutions outside the U.S. (Rae, 2002:2). As Hibbing suggests legislatures have not evolved in fashions that resemble each other. In other words, we should not expect that two different bodies would institutionalize in the same manner. That is why as Hibbing emphasizes, “measures of institutionalization must be selected carefully and tailored to the distinctive features of

the specific legislature while remaining consistent with the broad themes of institutionalization” (Hibbing, 1988:695).

For these reasons, while remaining consistent with the broad themes of institutionalization, I am suggesting some other measures suggested by other authors and using some of those suggested by Polsby to investigate the extent to which the European Parliament has become autonomous, internally complex, decentralized and universalistic. (See Table 1)

III) Legislative Institutionalization Applied to the European Parliament

The Establishment of Boundaries

The level of institutionalization of any organization is conceived in terms of its establishment of boundaries, in other words its autonomy, which refers to “ the extent to which political organizations and procedures exist independently of other social groupings and methods of behavior” (Sisson, 1973:21). Polsby defines institutional autonomy in terms of difficulty of entry to leadership positions, turnover rates and internal recruitment of leadership. According to Richard Sisson, autonomy is also evident in the existence of means of environmental control (Sisson, 1973:26). First I examine Polsby’s measures and then I look at the indices suggested by Sisson.

Evidence presented by Polsby demonstrates that in the House from 1789 to 1966 membership turnover declined. What has happened in the European Parliament? With regard to turnover, the evidence shows high turnover in its membership at each election. Of the 518 members elected in 1989, only 267 were outgoing members, most of the rest were completely new members. Only 83 of the current MEPs have served continuously

since 1979² (Corbett, 1990: 43). In 1994, on the other hand there has been a much greater membership turnover than in 1989 or 1984, over 50% of the members elected were new comers.

The turnover of parliamentary membership in the European context has been affected to great extent by the enlargement process. For instance in 1981 with the entry of Greece to the European Community, 22 new members entered into the Parliament. Then with the Iberian Enlargement total membership of the EP increased from 434 members to 518. As an indirect result of German Unification the EP numbered 569 with new members from Germany, France, Italy and the UK. Finally with the membership of Austria, Finland and Sweden in 1994 the total membership of the EP reached its current number: 626 (Redmond and Rosenthal, 1998:69-75). The high turnover rates perceived in the European Parliament can be related to the enlargement of the EU. Given that I lack sufficient data on this measure I refrain from arguing that the European Parliament has had a high rate of membership turnover.

Further evidence of autonomy is difficulty of entry to leadership positions and the length of service and the level of experience within the organization before gaining office. Polsby looks at the position of Speaker of the House. Here instead of looking at Speakership, I look at another position within the Parliament: the presidency.

The presidency has been the most contested office in the EP. The elections for the EP presidency were highly competitive, even requiring third and fourth ballots (Kreppel, 2002:188-189). The 1982 and 1987 elections were the most competitive ones where the results were determined in the fourth ballot in the former and in the third ballot in the latter. In 1982 among the five candidates running for the office, Piet Dankert, who had

² It seems that a career in the National parliaments were more attractive to the MEPs.

made a name as Parliament's Budgetary rapporteur and then as a Vice-President won the presidency in the fourth ballot. In 1984 there were seven candidates in the first ballot but Pierre Pflimlin of the European People's Party, a former French Prime Minister and the long standing Mayor of Strasbourg was elected on the second ballot. Nicole Fontaine, who has served as the President of the EP from 1999 to 2002, has been the First Vice-Chairman of the EP and the Bureau. The current President, Pat Cox, has been in the Parliament since 1989. He has also been the President of the Liberal Group. The evidence demonstrates that the presidency is a very prized and contested seat for MEPs and the political prestige, and longer service in the Parliament are influential in selection.

The autonomy of an institution with respect to its external environment also depends on the existence of means of environmental control. This refers to "the right of the relevant unit in the larger system to the management of its own affairs under given conditions, as well as stipulating the formal conditions for controlling the distribution of values and the determination of action external to it" (Sisson, 1973:26). Such types of control include an organization's control over its own resources, in other words budgetary control, power of appointment (ability to appoint and to elect its own members) and participation in the determination of rules fundamental to the constitutive system (Sisson, 1973:26).

On these measures the European Parliament has definitely gained some autonomy over the years. The method of election of Parliament's officers is determined by the Parliament itself without any external influence. As Corbett writes, even before the direct elections, the Parliament was electing its own officers itself and resisted any instructions from outside (as was attempted by the Member States in 1958) (Corbett, 1990:86-87).

The first to be elected is always the President of the EP. Then follow the Vice-President and the Quaestors. Nominations for these posts are generally submitted by a Political Group or coalition of Political Groups in the Parliament, but may also be put forward by 13 or more members (Corbett, 1990:87).

With regard to participation in the determination of rules fundamental to its constitutive system, the EP has also become highly autonomous. Like most national parliaments, the European Parliament determines its own organization and writes its own rules. It prefers to use formal Rules of Procedure than informal conventions and norms (Hix, 1999:75-76).

“For a body to institutionalize,” Hibbing asserts, “it is not necessary for it to be the supreme political body in its system.” Instead, “it is only necessary for it to have a reasonable degree of autonomy, to be able to make its own rules, and to establish itself as a relatively permanent and viable part of the whole, not necessarily the master of all” (Hibbing, 1988:696). In this regard, it seems clear that the European Parliament has established boundaries and become well bounded.

The Growth of Internal Complexity

Polsby chooses three indicators to measure the growth of internal complexity: the growth in importance and complexity of committees, the growth of specialized agencies of party leadership and the growth of resources assigned to internal House management. I examine two indicators suggested by Polsby, the growth in importance of committees and the growth of resources and I add another indicator to the list suggested by Philip Norton: *complex rules and procedures*.

- Committees

Committees are the *sine qua non* of legislative institutions. The number of committees, their degree of specialization, their autonomy from the parent chamber are good indicators of the degree to which a legislature has become institutionalized and has the potential to challenge the executive (Bowler and Farrell, 1996: 220).

Committees have been extremely important in the European Parliament from the outset. They have been considered as the “legislative backbone” of the Parliament. The Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community, the predecessor of the EP, acknowledged that “committees would help alleviate the problems inherent in coordinating work in an Assembly which was scheduled to meet in plenary only a handful times a year” (McElroy, 2001:4). To this end, it installed seven committees by 1953 to conduct Assembly business. With the establishment of the European Economic Community (EEC) and the EURATOM the number of committees rose to 13. From 1958 to 1979 the committee system in the Parliament gradually developed. In the aftermath of the direct elections in 1979 the committee system was significantly expanded and their number gradually increased to 20 by 1999 and then was subsequently reduced to 17 after the June 1999 elections³ (Neuhold, 2001:2).

Today the European Parliament has a very well developed committee system when compared with its counterparts in other parliaments in Western Europe. The EP is a committee-oriented legislature, where the committees are a crucial contribution to the shaping of legislation (Shephard, 1998:182). However as Polsby suggests we need to

³ The decrease in the number of committees should be reviewed with the main objective of distributing the new legislative obligations resulting from the Amsterdam Treaty more evenly (Neuhold, 2001:3).

look beyond raw numbers to measure the growth in importance and autonomy of committees.⁴

As in the House of Representatives, the committees in the European Parliament are fairly autonomous from the parent chamber and their party groups (Mamadouh and Raunio, 2001:7). They are internally complex and their work is highly technical and specialized (Westlake, 1994:191; Bowler and Farrell, 1996: 230). Bowler and Farrell's study on the internal organization of the EP shows that committee assignments and the use of questions reflect the highly specialized committee structure in the EP. Using data from the 1989-94 Parliament and also from the 1989-99 period (see also Mamadouh and Raunio, 2001:9), they match the committee assignments with occupational, group membership, ideological and national data. The evidence suggests that the occupational or interest group attachments are the only consistently significant determinants that drive committee membership. For instance, those MEPs who are or were attached to farming or a farming group are more likely to be on the Agriculture Committee. Similarly lawyers are more likely to be members of the Legal Affairs Committee and those MEPs with business and labor backgrounds of the Economics Committee. The asking of questions also follows specialization in the EP. A similar relationship is also evident between the occupational attachments of the MEPs and the questions they ask (Bowler and Farrell, 1996: 229-232). This increased familiarity of committee members with particular issues leads to increased specialization and strengthens the confidence of non-committee members in the work of the committee (Neuhold, 2001:20).

⁴ This is a very debated issue. Gordon Smith argues that there is an inverse relationship between the number of committees and executive power. Therefore "[t]he greater the number of small groups, the less amenable to government control they are than a single, large one." Neo-institutional theories also assert that

With regard to resources and staff they have, compared to the US Congress, the full-time staff of the EP's committees remains miniscule but still greater than in some national parliaments of the Member States. The committee staff not only provides scientific and technical information to the individual MEPs but also gives advice on political issues. By giving assistance to the MEPs and the committees staff members also help increase the functional capacity of the Parliament as a whole.

As Laundry asserts "[a]ll parliaments work to a greater or lesser extent through committees" (Laundry, 1989:96). The European Parliament is one of those parliaments that work to a greater extent through its committees. The EP's committees, 'primary vehicles of specialization,' play a crucial role in the legislative process of the European Union and their role is growing in parallel to a rise in the workload and powers of the Parliament (McElroy, 2001:1).

It appears clear that the committees have become highly specialized, complex and more and more important within the European Parliament. However it is difficult to say that they are completely autonomous from the party groups. The literature on this issue is divided into two. Damgaard (1995), McElroy (2001), Bowler and Farrell (1995) all argue for high party group influence on committee work, Mamadouh and Raunio (2001) do not seem to be convinced with these findings and claim that in the European Parliament committee members are autonomous from their party groups.

- Parties

Another good example of the growth of internal complexity suggested by Hibbing is the advent of well-organized parties (Hibbing, 1968:699). Hibbing following Philip

the number of committees matters to a great extent. "All else being equal, the more committees, the more bills can be dealt with at the same." (Mattson and Strom, 1995:260)

Norton, argues that the creation of well-organized parties, including elected officials and regularly scheduled rather than sporadic meetings, is considered as another key development in the evolution and development of parties (Hibbing, 1988:699). In the European Parliament, one of the most important changes since the establishment of the transnational party federations in the 1970s, has been the institutionalization of the 'party leaders' summits.' These meetings initially were informal and sporadic but in the late 1980s they became the central decision-making organs within each of the transnational party federations (Hix, 1999:178).

If the committees are the European Parliament's legislative backbone, its political groups or parties are its life blood (Westlake, 1994:190). They are of central importance in the work of the Parliament and play also a pivotal role within parliamentary committees. They have become more and more developed, specialized and more elaborate over time within the EP.⁵

- Resources

The third indicator of the growth of internal complexity is the growth of resources devoted to running the legislature, measured in terms of personnel, facilities and money. Have the resources assigned to conduct internal business of the European Parliament grown over time?

The staff and resources assigned to the European Parliament have increased gradually since its inception but the dramatic increase was experienced in the aftermath of direct elections. As Corbett argues, "one thing that the elected Parliament immediately

⁵ Each party groups has its own staff and receives substantial amount of fund from the Parliament. Each of them is entitled to a fixed total of two A grade posts, with a further such post for every 4 MEPs within the Group and another A grade post is for each language. The total number of A posts to which a Group is entitled then determines the number of B and C posts within each group.

embarked on was the development of *its own infrastructure* in terms of facilities and back-up support for its own members” (Corbett, 1998:90).

Once elected, new MEPs are given offices in two different locations in addition to the European Parliament’s offices in their own national capital, one is in Strasbourg and the other is in Brussels. They also receive assistance from the Parliament to recruit their own personal assistants, researchers and secretaries, working in their constituency office or in their Brussels office. They receive daily allowances for the amount of time they spend in Brussels and Strasbourg and they also receive travel allowances to and from their constituencies or Member States (Corbett et al, 1990:39-40).

There has been also an enormous increase in overall staff size of the EP since its inception from the 37 posts in 1952 to 1995 by 1979, 2966 by 1984 and more than 4000 by 1995 (Corbett et al, 1990:156; Shephard, 1998:185). This significant increase in the size of the staff has been due to several factors such as the increase in Parliament’s membership from 78 in 1952 to 626 in 1995, the increase in the powers and competencies of the EP, and the rise in the number of working languages from four in 1952 to six by 1973, and to 11 by 1995⁶ (Shephard, 1998:185).

The European Parliament’s Secretariat, along with the officials working in the political groups “have been a significant though frequently unremarked factor in its recent development.” These recruitment drives “in turn led to the creation if a pool of young, talented and committed officials who thereafter devoted their talents to sustaining and extending the Parliament’s role and powers” (Westlake, 1994:196-197).

⁶ Even we control the number of officials in linguistic services and the resources devoted to these services, the European Parliament still remains as well-staffed and well financed.

Evidence suggests that the resources devoted to running the EP has increased enormously over time. The total cost of operating the Parliament has grown, its staff size and physical attributes have also increased significantly. Today the total cost of running the EP is much higher than the corresponding costs for any of the member states' parliament.⁷

- Complex Rules and Procedures

Is the European Parliament organizationally spartan or does it enjoy a high degree of organizational complexity, with established and universal rules and a range of established procedures? The European Parliament does certainly enjoy a high degree of internal complexity with its recorded rules and procedures.

In parallel with its increasing role and powers within the European Union, the internal structures (rules) of the European Parliament have changed and been upgraded "to include the EP in more and more of the decision-making processes" (Shephard, 1998:167). Since my analysis covers the period after the first direct elections I focus on the reforms made after 1979.

The introduction of direct elections and resulting end of the double mandate and increase in membership of the EP led to a succession of attempts to reform the rules. As Kreppel argues, in the end, "an entirely new set of rules was created" (Kreppel, 2001:97). The total number of rules rose from 54 to 116, but most importantly, "activity in whole new areas was formalized through incorporation into the rules" (Kreppel, 2001:98). Overall, the rules underwent significant changes in the immediate aftermath of the direct elections and have become more and more precise and well-organized over the years.

⁷ The total voted cost of the House of Commons for 1993 was 170 million pounds, whereas equivalent costs for the European Parliament were 476 million pounds. (Westlake, 1994:229)

With the introduction of cooperation and codecision procedures, the sections of the rules dedicated to legislation were dramatically increased. As the EP's new powers in the legislative and budgetary areas were incorporated into the rules, the rules have become increasingly technical and complex.

Today the number of the EP's rules increased to 186 with 14 Annexes to them. The European Parliament's Rules of Procedure and the annexes to these Rules are published periodically in booklet form and in the Official Journal of the European Communities. (<http://www.europa.eu.int>) The European Parliament with its complex, detailed and highly technical rules of procedure seems to be an internally complex body.

The Development of Universalistic Rules

Polsby introduces two indicators to examine the shift away from particularistic and discretionary to universalistic and automated decision making: the growth of seniority as a criterion determining committee rank and the growth of the practice of deciding contested elections to the House strictly on the merits. Instead of employing these measures to the House of Commons, Hibbing invokes 'Question Time' as an indicator to examine the development of universalistic rules.

Among these indicators suggested by Polsby and Hibbing, I choose to use the rise of the seniority system as the means of determining committee rank from Polsby and 'Question Time' from Hibbing.

Committee chairmanships are highly influential positions, 'prized offices' for the MEPs in the European Parliament (Hix, 1999:79). Apart from being a popular and prestigious office, "the post of chairman carries also a lot of potential political weight. She or he is in charge of the committee meetings, speaks on behalf of the committee in

the plenary debates and is a major broker in drafting the committee agenda” (Raunio, 2001: 237).

What are the factors that might affect appointment to one of the formal positions in these committees? Bowler and Farrell present a number of possibilities. One is the former position of the MEP in national political life: a member of the national legislature, a cabinet minister, or even a head executive. The longer tenure in the EP is also an advantage in being placed on these committees. The length of tenure within the EP, length of tenure on an existing committee and whether or not the MEP has held any previous important office in the EP all affect appointment. Data presented in their study shows that having prior experience of leadership within the EP and being relatively prominent national politician both affect the probability that an individual might occupy a leadership position in the EP. However remaining on same committee from the previous parliament does not seem to be helpful in being selected as chair or vice chair. Given that there does not seem to be the equivalent of the US Congress’s seniority rule in the European Parliament, Bowler and Farrell conclude that seniority matters little in the EP (Bowler and Farrell, 1996:239). Accepting the fact that seniority does not operate to the extent it does in the US Congress, McElroy presents evidence that seniority is not completely irrelevant or trivial in the European Parliament. The data on the distribution of seats by freshmen versus non-freshmen for the Third through Fifth Parliaments demonstrate some noticeable differences. High demand committees such as Foreign Affairs and Legal Affairs “have a much higher number of returning MEPs than low prestige committees such as Culture or Regional Policy” (McElroy, 2001:20).

A second indicator of the development of universalistic rules suggested by Hibbing is 'Question Time'. Hibbing argues that the rules structuring Question Time were developed, polished and codified in the late nineteenth century, but what best illustrated the growth of universalistic rules was the movement to give Question Time "a preset and automatic place in the daily timetable" (Hibbing, 1988:704). Later there were more refinements in the House and over time, a very elaborate set of 'rules of the game' has developed around Question Time and the number of questions addressed increased gradually (Hibbing, 1988:706). Have similar changes occurred in the European Parliament as well?

Question time was introduced in the European parliament in 1973 with British entry, as Raunio notes it "has never come close to matching the liveliness of debate, which characterizes this institution in the British House of Commons" (Raunio, 1997: 134). According to Westlake, this tradition could never work "in a culturally diverse Parliament where debates had to be interpreted through earphones, where there was no government and opposition and above all, where there was no prime minister" (Westlake, 1994:176). In spite of all these shortcomings, the procedure has survived and has remained as "a permanent feature in the organization of parliamentary work in Strasbourg" (Raunio, 1997:135).

As in the case of the House of Commons several refinements have been made and the overall number of questions has increased gradually over time. (See Table 2) In the year of the direct elections, 1979, a total of 1977 written question were submitted rose to 3661 in 1995. Approximately 90 per cent of the questions are addressed to the

Commission and the questions addressed to the Council have also increased over the years.

Today one of the basic rights of the MEPs, the right to put questions to the Commission and the Council remains as a well-established activity within the EP and MEPs' questioning activity shows signs of specialization. Research on questioning activity of MEPs shows that they "tend to ask questions concerning those issue areas in which they specialize within the framework of the legislature's organization" (Raunio, 1997:156). The evidence therefore shows that as in the case of the House of Commons, within the EP, Question Time itself has also become institutionalized.

IV) Conclusion

This paper has sought to make a contribution to the literature on the internal development of the European Parliament. For this reason, I have attempted to measure the extent to which the European Parliament has become institutionalized. Although I lack sufficient data to provide rigorous test of Polsby's framework, I have provided some evidence that the degree of actual change in the European Parliament has been consistent with the pattern of change that might be expected based on the notion of institutionalization. Nonetheless, this paper should be seen as the first step in a much larger project on the institutionalization of the European Parliament.

The European Parliament has become more autonomous, internally more complex and universalistic, in other words has become institutionalized in that it exhibits various characteristics of an institutionalized organization identified by several scholars.

Committees have grown in importance and autonomy, several previous norms and

activity in new areas have been formalized through incorporation into the rules, the staff size and the cost of the Parliament have increased, Question Time has become institutionalized, entry to leadership positions has become more difficult. As in the case of the House of Commons, a position in the Parliament has become something desirable, respected and a potential career in its own right. A “new corps of full-time politicians,” fully equipped and backed up by the EP, has appeared on the political landscape and become part and parcel of the life of Europe’s political networks (Corbett, 1998:66).

However institutionalization is not “a finite quality or process,” it is “continual and universal” (Sisson, 1973:19). It is not entirely linear and it is also reversible (Rae, 2002). As Norton suggests, “there is no one point at which a body suddenly becomes ‘institutionalized’ and is then kept aspic” (Norton, 1998:8). This is also the case for the European Parliament. Compared to the U.S. Congress or the British House of Commons, the EP is a relatively young legislature, whereas compared to newly emerging legislatures of the Central and Eastern Europe and Latin America it is characterized as an established legislature. Whether it is an established legislature or a young one, the European Parliament is still developing institutionally. Is the institutionalization going to continue?

Remember that the enlargement of the European Union has had an immense impact on the development of the European Parliament. The increase in membership, combined with the increase in working languages and responsibilities, has dramatically changed the internal workings and coherence of the Parliament. The European Parliament has become more and more institutionalized. However it is not clear if the next enlargement will also contribute positively to the institutional evolution of the European Parliament. The EP adopted a resolution to the effect that a total number of 700 members

would be the maximum to ensure efficiency. If this number reached the European Parliament has to revise its rules, and redistribute parliamentary mandates (Redmond and Rosenthal, 1998:66). Therefore, the possibility of deinstitutionalization, which was occurred in the British House of Commons, can be perceived in the European Parliament too.

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Table 1: Schematic Illustration of My Framework

ESTABLISHMENT OF BOUNDARIES (Autonomy)	GROWTH OF INTERNAL COMPLEXITY	DEVELOPMENT OF UNIVERSALISTIC RULES
-Membership turnover	-Growth in the importance and autonomy of committees	-Growth of seniority as a criterion determining the committee rank
-Entry to leadership positions and internal recruitment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presidency 	-The advent of well-organized parties	- Question Time
	-General increase in the resources	
	-Complex rules and procedures	

Table 2: The increase in written questions in the EP since the first direct elections (1980-1995)

Year	C	CM	EPC	TOTAL	Per MEP
1980	1995	271	57	2323	5.7
1981	1744	210	37	1991	4.6
1982	2022	256	66	2344	5.4
1983	1946	242	49	2237	5.2
1984	1976	262	73	2311	5.3
1985	2949	258	125	3332	7.7
1986	2671	195	157	3023	5.8
1987	2591	201	150	2942	5.7
1988	2512	159	171	2842	5.5
1989	1711	144	114	1969	3.8
1990	2732	217	126	3075	5.9
1991	2905	257	119	3281	6.3
1992	3051	338	137	3526	6.8
1993	3588	354	169	4111	7.9
1994	2505	401		2906	5.1
1995	3217	444		3661	5.8

Note: Question for written answer

Abbreviations: C= Commission; CM= Council; EPC= European Political Cooperation

Data compiled by Tapio Raunio from *General Report on the Activities of the European Community* (1980-1995).