

Keeping tabs on the executive: the engagement of the Finnish Eduskunta in foreign affairs

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Abstract

It is often argued that foreign and security policy is (and even should be) dominated by the executive, with parliaments wielding marginal or at best limited influence. However, legislative-executive relations in the realm of foreign and security policy have attracted remarkably little scholarly attention. Hence there is a demand for subjecting this notion of alleged ‘executive drift’ in foreign affairs to careful empirical scrutiny. There is also a need to examine whether and how parliamentary politics in foreign affairs differs from domestic or EU matters, both regarding the use of control mechanisms and party competition. The notions of ‘executive dominance’ and ‘politics stopping at the water’s edge’ certainly point in the direction of less active control and casting aside public partisan differences in favour of providing domestic support for the government. A case study of the Finnish Eduskunta indicates that instead of actual control, it is more appropriate to say that MPs keep tabs on the government and that party politics, or even government-opposition dynamics, are less relevant in foreign policy. The paper shows the multiple instruments MPs have for becoming involved in foreign affairs, from participating in the formulation of the national ‘grand strategy’ document to ministerial hearings in the Foreign Affairs Committee. The paper also provides strong evidence of the Europeanization of national foreign policy, with CFSP matters in a central role in the Foreign Affairs Committee.

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Introduction

It is often argued that foreign and security policy is (and even should be) dominated by the executive, with parliaments wielding marginal or at best limited influence. A viable tradition in political theory holds that the role of parliament does and should stop at the ‘water's edge’ where an area of executive privileges and responsibilities begin. However, with two notable exceptions, legislative-executive relations in the realm of foreign and security policy have attracted remarkably little scholarly attention. One exception is the recent wave of studies on the parliamentary control of military missions that have emerged in the wake of the so-called Democratic Peace debate. The other exception is the vast number of studies on the U.S. Congress whose unparalleled power has made it impossible to ignore in any comprehensive analysis of American foreign policy. For almost every other democratic country, however, the study of legislative-executive relations in external relations short of the use of force is by and large uncharted territory. Hence there is a demand for subjecting this notion of alleged ‘executive drift’ in foreign affairs to careful empirical scrutiny. (Raunio 2014; Raunio & Wagner 2015)

The level of parliamentary engagement in foreign policy impacts on the second question addressed in this paper: how do legislatures become involved in foreign affairs? This question may appear trivial or mundane, but considering the lack of research, there is a need to examine whether and how parliamentary politics in this field differs from domestic or European Union (EU) affairs, both regarding the use of control mechanisms and party competition (Hegeland 2007; Lüddecke 2010). The notions of ‘executive dominance’ and ‘politics stopping at the water’s edge’ certainly point in the direction of less active control and casting aside public partisan differences in favour of providing domestic support for the government. Hence the working hypothesis of this paper is that parliamentary control of the executive in foreign affairs takes mainly the form of the legislature ‘keeping tabs’ on the government and that party politics, or even government-opposition dynamics, are less relevant in foreign policy.¹

These questions are answered through an exploratory case study of the Finnish Eduskunta, a legislature that has through weakening of presidential powers and EU membership acquired constitutional authority in foreign affairs since the mid-1990s. The theoretical section first revisits the general argument of executive dominance in foreign affairs before formulating hypotheses on why we should expect Finland to both conform and deviate from that pattern. The empirical

¹ According to the Oxford Dictionary, the definition for ‘keep tabs (or a tab) on’ is to ‘monitor the activities or development of; keep under observation’.

analysis, based on in-depth analysis of parliamentary behaviour and interviews, focuses on three questions: the channels of parliamentary engagement, parliamentary decision-making culture in foreign affairs, and variation between various foreign policy issues. The concluding discussion reflects on whether parliamentary culture in foreign affairs differs from the processing of domestic matters and suggests avenues for further research.

Analytical framework: weak parliaments, strong executives?

Parliaments are weaker vis-à-vis the executive in foreign policy than in domestic matters.² This line of thinking is nothing new, and can be traced back to political philosophers such as Locke (1960) or de Tocqueville (1990). But what accounts for this allegedly low level of parliamentary influence? The literature suggests two interconnected explanations: either legislatures voluntarily acquiesce to such government-driven policy-making or they simply fail to control the cabinet in external relations (see Raunio 2014; Raunio & Wagner 2015).

According to the first perspective, parliaments delegate policy-making to the executive which represents the country in international negotiations. The effective formulation and defense of national interest requires that the executive is given sufficient flexibility and room for manoeuvre, with parliamentary participation thus limited to setting ex ante constraints to government action. This applies particularly to military or security matters where limited openness and secrecy is often presented as integral to the advancement of national interests. Ex post control is in turn politically difficult, as rejecting unilaterally international agreements reached by governments can be exceedingly costly, potentially damaging the reputation of the country and its success in future negotiations. Delegation is also attractive for members of parliament (MP) as foreign relations are not that important for re-election. There are thus more costs than benefits for legislators in subjecting the government to tight scrutiny.

The second perspective, on the other hand, focuses on the real-life constraints MPs face in foreign affairs. Essentially none of the studies claim that legislators in the U.S. or elsewhere would enjoy the same level of information about foreign affairs than members of the executive branch. Hence there is a persistent problem of informational asymmetry, and just as in domestic policy, many of the procedural reforms introduced by parliaments have been designed to address such asymmetries.

² In the U.S. this argument has been strongly influenced by the thesis about ‘two presidencies’, initially proposed by Wildavsky (1966), with the president enjoying considerably more discretion in foreign affairs than in domestic matters.

The executive also has considerably more resources to invest in foreign affairs, and in the end it is always the government that represents the country abroad. Moreover, the structural two-level games logic of international bargaining shields cabinets from parliamentary control. The executive branch uses international institutions to insulate themselves from legislatures and other domestic actors, and to push through or legitimize even unpopular policies. And beyond such possible strategic considerations, global or regional governance is by its very nature intergovernmental, thus empowering governments at the expense of legislatures. But importantly, the two-level game scenario also emphasizes that governments are often constrained by domestic actors such as legislatures that in the end can veto the agreements, and that the executive can use this constraint as a bargaining advantage. The latter feature is known as the ‘Schelling Conjecture’ (Schelling 1960), according to which an executive whose hands are tied by a domestic ratification constraint such as a parliamentary veto can negotiate more favourable outcomes than an unconstrained executive (Putnam 1988; Evans et al. 1993; Milner 1997; Pahre 2006; Mansfield & Milner 2012).

As most of the research has focused on the U.S. Congress, it is worth examining the main arguments and findings of this body of work, especially as it informs our hypotheses presented in the next section. First, if there is a discernible trend, it is towards stronger parliamentary engagement, with much of this empowerment explained by executive failures. The role of Congress underwent a dramatic change during the Vietnam War. The level of partisan consensus, or so-called bipartisanship, may not have diminished that much in foreign affairs, but the Congress has clearly become more assertive in foreign affairs. For example, it has introduced stricter reporting requirements that force the president to consult Congress prior to decision-making or during international economic negotiations and military conflicts, the most famous being the War Powers Resolution. Not very surprisingly, congressional influence and assertiveness are on average stronger under divided government. The literature on the Congress also shows the variety of tools legislators have for engaging in foreign policy. In addition to using routine mechanisms such as plenary debates and questions or committee scrutiny, Congress has influenced foreign policy through voting on budgetary items and ratifying international agreements, setting *ex ante* limits to presidential action, changing the rules of delegation in the direction of less executive discretion, exercising direct control over the military, or using public posturing and grandstanding. (e.g. Hinckley 1994; Lindsay 1994; Henahan 2000; Hersman 2000; Howell & Pevehouse 2007; Stevenson 2007; Carter & Scott 2009; Chaudoin et al. 2010; Kriner 2010; Auerswald & Campbell 2012; Howell et al. 2013; Zeisberg 2013; Campbell & Auerswald 2015).

Comparative research has almost exclusively focused on parliamentary ‘war powers’. This body of work underlines the importance of historical experiences, such as wars, on structuring the constitutional framework for foreign policy, including parliamentary participation rights (Cassese 1980). Negative war experiences and lower levels of security threats correlate with parliamentary veto power over troop deployments (Peters & Wagner 2011; 2014). For example, the unpopular decisions to enter the Iraq War in 2003 resulted at least in Spain and in the UK in reforms, with the former introducing parliamentary veto power over troop deployments and the latter moving in that direction and the House of Commons even voting against prime minister Cameron’s proposal to attack Syria in 2013 (Strong 2014). Inspired by the so-called ‘Democratic Peace’ argument (Brown et al. 1996), a number of studies provide support for the ‘parliamentary peace’ argument according to which the likelihood of countries entering wars decreases the stronger the war powers of parliaments (e.g. Peters & Wagner 2011; 2014; Auerswald & Saideman 2014; Mello 2014; Dieterich et al. 2015). On the other hand, joint military missions, coordinated primarily by North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the United Nations (UN), and the EU, or collective defence clauses create challenges for parliamentary involvement. In the context of accession to NATO and the EU, many Central and Eastern European states relaxed their parliamentary restrictions and abolished their parliamentary provisos for NATO and EU operations. (E.g. Born & Hänggi 2004; Peters & Wagner 2011; 2014). Another emerging strand of work has begun to examine parliamentary control of EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)³, indicating rather strong variation between legislatures (Peters et al. 2008; Huff 2015).

Perceived security threats and obligations thus impact on legislatures’ influence – in line with what is termed ‘securitization’ in international relations literature (Waever 1995; Buzan et al. 1998). In the U.S. presidents can benefit from framing foreign policy issues as security matters or from employing the rhetoric of war even in issue areas such as fighting drugs. Hence the president can be tempted to use military or security instruments since other types of foreign policy questions are subject to greater legislative constraints. Furthermore, during wars presidents enjoy not only more discretion but also greater overall policy success, domestic affairs included. (Milner & Tingley 2012; Howell et al. 2013; Howell & Rogowski 2013) However, comparing the impact of the ‘war on terror’ on the legislative-executive relationship in eight countries, the volume edited by Owens and Pelizzo (2009; see also Scott & Carter 2014) suggests that parliaments are not necessarily

³ The term CFSP is used in this paper to refer to all aspects of EU’s foreign and security policy, crisis management and military issues included.

weakened, with only three cases — the United States, Great Britain and Russia — providing evidence of executive empowerment.

The fight against terrorism is a good example of the changing nature of foreign policy agenda. Previously one could more plausibly argue that international issues were significantly less relevant for MPs and voters, thus reducing incentives for parliamentary engagement. Already in the late 1970s, however, Manning (1977) paid attention to the rise of issues falling somewhere between pure foreign and domestic policy — or what he referred to as ‘intermestic’ issues. Analysing the Swedish Riksdag from 1970 to 1985, Jerneck et al. (1988) showed how the share of issues handled by the parliament with an international connection increased significantly, and that such trend applied to most committees, notably in environment, economic affairs, and energy policy. Growing levels of interdependence and globalization have internationalized an increasing range of questions previously decided nationally, such as immigration, trade, energy, environment policies or human rights. Most of these policies also have tangible distributional consequences for constituencies and can be more expensive than ‘traditional’ or more diplomatic foreign policy issues. When considering the financial uncertainty and budget deficits that characterize most democratic countries, legislatures have thus also stronger economic incentives to curb executive discretion in foreign policy.

Hence it is not surprising that legislative involvement in trade or aid policy follows a different logic, concerning both the rules of parliamentary engagement and the nature of domestic party-political competition. Overall, foreign trade has much more direct economic distributional consequences, producing winners and losers inside individual countries. As a result, legislative bargaining and voting about trade is at least a priori driven considerably more by constituency interests. Legislative support in Congress and other select parliaments for foreign aid, trade, and for funding international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is more likely when an MP comes from a district that is well endowed with a relatively high-skilled constituency. Left-leaning legislators are more likely to favour foreign aid and funding of international financial institutions. (E.g. Bailey 2001; Broz 2011; Broz & Hawes 2006; Hiscox 2002; Milner & Tingley 2011; 2012). Measuring conflict with reservations added to committee reports in the Swedish Riksdag, Jerneck et al. (1988) showed that while foreign and security policy were characterized by consensus, foreign aid and to a lesser extent general defence policy (which has often strong constituency links, for example through decisions on location of domestic military bases) produced conflict in the committees.

Turning to parliamentary culture in foreign affairs, decision-makers often evoke notions of national consensus, or that disunity at home undermines success abroad. This is indeed the core of the ‘politics stops at the water’s edge’ idiom, according to which ideological differences are set aside in favour of national interest, particularly in security and military matters. Yet there is room for party politics and government-opposition dialogue, although apparently less than in domestic policy. Overall, the preferences of political parties or intra-party factionalism within cabinet set significant constraints on executive autonomy in foreign policy (Hagan 1993). It is normally perceived that in foreign policy ‘hawks’ are found among right-leaning legislators and ‘doves’ on the left. In the U.S. context there is strong evidence of such a divide between Democrats and Republicans (e.g. Poole & Rosenthal 1991; Alesina & Rosenthal 1995), although party composition of the government does not seem to have any discernible effect on American use of force abroad (Gowa 1998). Examining British, French and German responses to conflicts in Bosnia and Kosovo and to the development of EU’s military capacity, Rathbun (2004) showed that leftist parties were more likely to believe in multilateral cooperation and utilized a broader conception of the national interest that included the promotion of human rights. Right-wing parties, in turn, were more likely to believe in military responses. Other studies also provide evidence of centre-right parties being more supportive of military operations, such as joining the ‘coalition of the willing’ in the Iraq War (Schuster & Maier 2006; Auerswald & Saideman 2014; Mello 2014).⁴ When it comes to actual foreign policy decision-making, leftist parties should also be more favourable to broader domestic participation, including parliamentary engagement.

The level of public party competition impacts on the salience of foreign policy in elections. On the one hand, higher levels of education and more varied sources of information have brought about a comparably well-informed and interested public that pays more attention to international questions (Norris 2011). The politicization of international relations (Zürn 2014) thus provides an increasing ‘electoral connection’ to foreign affairs (Aldrich et al. 2006). But electoral considerations can naturally also favour executive discretion. Overall, delegation to the government can be attractive for MPs if foreign relations are not that important for re-election. And while MPs may vote against trade policies that have negative distributional consequences for their constituencies, attacking the executive on security issues is more risky business. Parliamentarians may also share the belief that

⁴ Government composition is also relevant, with coalitions less likely to use force abroad than single-party cabinets (e.g., Auerswald 1999; Auerswald & Saideman 2014); Mello 2014), although research by Kaarbo (2012; Beasley & Kaarbo 2014) suggests that multi-party cabinets actually correlate positively with international commitments and conflictual behaviour.

that public criticism of the government might compromise or jeopardize national security. Hence blame avoidance can seem like a persuasive tactic, at least in security matters.

This discussion has drawn strongly on research on the U.S. Congress for the simple reason that there is hardly any empirical research on the foreign policy engagement of other legislatures. Moreover, the exceptions to this rule have almost exclusively focused on parliamentary rights over troop deployments. Yet for most legislatures, such as the Eduskunta, decisions about wars or use of force abroad beyond crisis management operations are quite rare events. In fact, given the lack of research, we simply do not know what types of foreign policy matters appear on the agendas of national legislatures. Hence we shall next turn to Finland, explaining whether we can expect the general findings reported in this section to apply to the Eduskunta.

The Eduskunta: stronger participation rights, culture of consensus

Finland certainly confirms the rule of historical experiences influencing the constitutional regime in foreign policy. For centuries, Finland has been a ‘borderland’ in between east and west, as a part of Sweden, as part of Russia, and then from 1917 on, as an independent state trying to find its position between east and west (Tiilikainen 1998; Alapuro 2004). Another tenet that grew out of Finnish history was that of a small state, and by the early 1990s the Finns had become used to living in a world where state sovereignty and national security formed the uncontested starting points for political life.

The Cold War entailed a delicate balancing act, with priority to good relations with the Soviet Union reconciled with democratic political institutions at home and integration into western markets. While the direct interference of the Soviet leadership in Finnish politics has often been exaggerated, the Finnish political elite nevertheless was always forced to anticipate the reactions from Moscow, and this set firm limits to Finland’s cooperation with West European and Nordic countries. Foreign policy was very much driven by the policy of neutrality, and this culminated in 1975 when Finland hosted the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. From the mid-1960s at least until the mid-1980s, this foreign policy line enjoyed virtual unanimous political and public approval. During the long reign of president Urho Kekkonen (1956-1981) foreign policy was personally identified with the president, who was more or less visibly supported by Soviet political elites. Political debate and contestation on foreign policy were rare during this era of ‘compulsory consensus’ that placed a premium on maintaining amicable relations with the Soviet Union (Arter 1987). When the Soviet Union collapsed, Finland wasted no time becoming fully engaged in

European integration, joining the EU in 1995. Pragmatism and adaptability are the leading qualities of national EU policy, behavioural traits obviously influenced by the Cold War experience. The priority of the domestic EU coordination system is to manufacture national unanimity, or at least broad elite consensus, which can arguably be translated into additional influence in EU level bargaining (Hyvärinen & Raunio 2014).

The fall of the Soviet Union and EU membership acted as a catalyst for constitutional change from the early 1990s onwards, providing a major exogenous factor for reducing the powers of the president. This question was very important also in terms of parliamentary accountability as the president is not accountable to the Eduskunta. The new constitution, which entered into force in 2000, completed a period of far-reaching constitutional reform that curtailed presidential powers and brought the Finnish political system closer to parliamentary democracy. The president is almost completely excluded from the policy process in domestic matters: leadership by presidents has been replaced with leadership by strong majority coalition governments. The Eduskunta very much emphasizes that its role is to control the government, especially in foreign relations. For example, the Eduskunta (2010) has argued that at the EU level there is only the one Finnish position as approved by Eduskunta; the government and the Eduskunta do not have separate, independent positions on EU matters.

Under the old constitutional regime foreign policy was the exclusive domain of the president, and hence the new constitution has for the first time granted the Eduskunta genuine authority in Finland's external affairs. According to Section 93 of the new constitution the government is responsible for EU policy with foreign policy leadership shared between the president and the government.⁵ The jurisdiction of the government covers all EU matters, but in CFSP the cabinet must act in close cooperation with the president. Despite occasional public conflicts between the president and the cabinet, overall foreign policy co-leadership has functioned rather smoothly (Raunio 2012). It is also probable that the constitutional amendments from 2012, and particularly the fact that the prime minister alone represents Finland in the European Council, have clarified the rules of dual leadership.⁶ The semi-presidential regime nonetheless means that parliamentary control of foreign policy applies directly only to the government. Section 96, which regulates

⁵ The Constitution of Finland, 11 June, 1999 (731/1999). An English translation is available at <http://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/1999/en19990731.pdf>.

⁶ According to a constitutional amendment from 2012 (Section 58) the position of the Eduskunta is decisive in cases of disagreements between the president and the government. Only a small share of foreign policy matters, basically those issues necessitating formal decision-making, would be decided under that procedure.

Eduskunta's role in EU affairs, states that the Foreign Affairs Committee considers EU issues pertaining to foreign and security policy. Section 97 in turn is important in terms of Eduskunta's access to information in foreign affairs: 'The Foreign Affairs Committee of the Parliament shall receive from the Government, upon request and when otherwise necessary, reports of matters pertaining to foreign and security policy.' Finally, in line with Section 94, all international obligations and commitments with legislative or budgetary implications are to be approved by Eduskunta. Constitutional empowerment and the high salience of foreign policy thus provide incentives for parliamentary engagement, but the legislative culture together with the nature of foreign affairs matters, most of which are non-legislative issues, should impact on the type of engagement. These observations lead to our first hypothesis:

H1: The Eduskunta is actively involved in foreign affairs, but it focuses on 'keeping tabs' on the government that represents Finland abroad.

The post-Cold War foreign policy debates have focused on three inter-related questions: Russia, CFSP, and crisis management. The shadow of the eastern neighbour looms large over Finland, influencing particularly security policy choices. The policy of neutrality or military non-alignment has been compromised as Finland has played an active part in the further development of CFSP, especially regarding crisis management. Finnish foreign policy has thus become strongly Europeanized (Jokela 2011; Palosaari 2011). The active interest in crisis management is not surprising: Finland has a long-standing track record from UN peace-keeping missions, and debates on Finnish participation in various crisis management operations have reflected Finland's changing security context.

The debates have been structured, at least to a certain extent, by a left-right cleavage, with the right-wing parties – National Coalition, the Centre, the Swedish People's Party – more in favour of developing closer ties with NATO and the leftist parties – Social Democrats, Left Alliance, the Greens – emphasizing a broader conception of foreign and security policy, crisis management included. In multi-party cabinets the coalition partners most likely have different preferences also regarding foreign policy (Rathbun 2004; Kaarbo 2012). This certainly applies to heterogeneous Finnish governments, with competing foreign policy views co-existing inside the cabinet. In the 2011-2015 electoral term Finland was governed by a 'six-pack' coalition that brought together six

parties, including the most right-wing and left-wing parties in the Eduskunta.⁷ Such modest ideological differences aside, largely the same logic continues to guide decision-making in foreign policy and EU issues, with emphasis on national unity and avoiding public cleavages. The fragmented party system, with no party as a rule winning more than 25 % of the votes in elections, also facilitates consensual governance and ideological convergence between political parties. Hence our two other hypotheses are:

H2: Engagement in foreign policy differs between policy questions, with crisis management and more security policy-related CFSP matters subjected to tighter scrutiny than other matters. We also expect to see different logic at work in questions that are less tied to security policy, with MPs more willing to publicly criticize the cabinet when there is no single national (security) interest at stake.

H3: The overall approach of the Eduskunta is consensual, with no public conflicts over foreign policy. Committee work is nonetheless characterized by party-political differences, including between governing parties.

Empirical analysis

How does the Eduskunta engage in foreign affairs?

Legislatures essentially have the same toolkit for influencing foreign affairs as in other policy areas: committee scrutiny, plenary debates and votes, parliamentary questions, with MPs also benefiting from direct contacts with ministers, civil servants and other stakeholders (Lüddecke 2010). In addition, legislatures, political parties and individual MPs can also utilize interparliamentary organs or direct ties with foreign actors (e.g. Crum & Fossum 2013; Costa et al. 2013).⁸

Budgetary politics is often emphasized in studies of U.S. foreign policy, with the Congress exercising at times strong influence through its power to approve or reject funds. In Finland such

⁷ The cabinet was reduced to four parties towards the end of the term after the exits of the Left Alliance over economic policy and the Greens over nuclear energy in 2014.

⁸ Apart from EU-related interparliamentary cooperation, the Eduskunta sends delegations for example to the Nordic Council, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, and the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC). The Eduskunta has also various informal friendship or cooperation groups in foreign affairs: the former focus on particular topics (such as globalisation) whereas the latter have brought MPs together with parliaments of over fifty individual countries. The Eduskunta also has an International Department to assist various parliamentary organs in their international contacts (Seppinen 2007)

budgetary steering power appears very limited. The whole budgetary process is strongly government-driven, with the Eduskunta normally making just marginal changes (around 1 % of the total sum) to the draft budget. While budgets for foreign affairs, from defence forces to development policy, must be approved by the Eduskunta, any influence by MPs or parties must thus normally occur before the budget is introduced in the parliament.

In foreign affairs the government programme is often not the most important document guiding government action. Countries throughout the world, as well as NATO and the EU, have ‘grand strategy’ documents outlining the core objectives and issues in foreign and security policy. In Finland the formulation of grand strategy reports – titled since 1995 the Government Security and Defence Policy Report and published roughly every four years – provides an important channel for party-political influence in foreign affairs. The report is based on a broad conception of security and provides an overall framework for subsequent foreign policy decision-making. The Eduskunta has over time become less directly involved in drafting the reports. The first report was produced in 1971 by the Eduskunta’s Defence Committee, with new versions appearing in 1976 and 1981. Since 1987 the drafting of the reports has been closely monitored by parliamentary working groups that bring together representatives from all Eduskunta parties, opposition included. Inside the government the Cabinet Committee on Foreign and Security Policy oversees the drafting of the report. In the Eduskunta the report is scrutinized carefully, with the Defence Committee submitting a statement to the Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC) which produces a report on the draft report. Finally, the plenary debates and approves the final report. Considering the consensual approach to formulating the report, it is hardly surprising that the plenary debates have not witnessed any real conflicts between political parties.

Plenary involvement has varied between policy questions. Table 1 reports oral questions on foreign policy in the 2011-2015 electoral term.⁹ Foreign policy questions accounted for 7 % of all oral

⁹ In Tables 1-5 the years run from 2011 to 2014 according to the parliamentary sessions. The categorization of questions, committee minutes, statements and reports was done manually in two stages: first involved reading the parliamentary documents to identify relevant issue categories, and the second coding the items to the categories. No pre-defined categories were thus used. The categories are the same in all Tables: EU external relations – relations between EU and individual third countries or groups of countries); EU foreign policy decision-making – EU meetings (mainly Foreign Affairs Council and the European Council), information on EU’s actions and positions, appointments relating to EU’s foreign policy; Nordic cooperation – matters relating to Nordic cooperation, including the Nordic Council; Defence and crisis management – national security and defence and international crisis management, including EU operations (but excluding EU meetings dealing with crisis management); International organisations and treaties – participation in international organisations and international treaties (excluding Nordic cooperation and participation through

questions (41/569) in the four-year period, with half of them on bilateral relations. The remaining questions focused largely on defence and crisis management and international organisations and treaties. As for written questions (Table 2), foreign policy questions constituted only 2 % of all questions (88/4047). Bilateral relations were again the topic attracting most attention, followed by international organisations and treaties, EU external relations and defence and crisis management. Of the questions on bilateral relations, many focused understandably on ties with Russia and on Ukraine, with other questions dealing with a broad range of issues ranging from development policy, Palestine-Israeli conflict, human rights in various countries to implementation of international treaties. The oral and written questions were asked by 1/3 of MPs (N= 67), with the most active deputy tabling ten questions and around half of the questions coming from opposition MPs. These findings are line with Martin (2013), who showed that in Ireland MPs addressed far fewer questions to the foreign minister than to the ‘average’ minister, although at least in Germany foreign affairs feature more prominently in the plenary, questions included (Lüddecke 2010). No interpellations (that always are followed by a vote of confidence) have focused on foreign affairs since the early 1990s, although several in recent years have dealt with the euro crisis.

TABLES 1 AND 2

These results indicate that plenary performs a limited role in foreign policy. Crisis management operations have sparked quite lively debates, primarily as decisions regarding Finland’s participation have reflected the changing security policy context, with Finland moving away from UN-led missions to operations run by EU or NATO.¹⁰ Left-leaning MPs have defended more traditional peace-keeping values, including UN authorization, and the civilian side of the missions, and representatives have often linked participation in operations to the defence capacity of the armed forces. Another topic relevant for national defence that produced quite heated debates in the plenary and in the committees was the long process of Finland joining the Ottawa Mine Ban Treaty in November 2011. Beyond such specific operations or treaties, the plenary has not really debated foreign or security issues. And when such topics have surfaced, for example in January 2015 when

the EU); National foreign policy – reports and statements on national foreign and security policy (excluding on bilateral relations); Bilateral relations – Finland’s bilateral relations with other countries (including briefs on FAC trips). If an item belonged to two categories, it was coded 0,5 per category.

¹⁰ Previously Finnish troops could be dispatched only to UN-approved operations and where a cease-fire prevailed among the conflicting parties. Since 2006 Finland can participate in basically any kind of operations, including missions without a UN mandate.

the Eduskunta organized a debate on Finland's relations with Russia, they have been characterized by cautiousness and cross-party consensus.

The main forum for engaging in foreign affairs is undoubtedly the Foreign Affairs Committee, the jurisdiction of which covers general foreign and security policy, foreign trade, development cooperation, international treaties and organisations, peace-keeping operations and CFSP. The Defence Committee, on the other hand, mainly focuses on defence forces. In line with the 'working parliament' thesis, committees are the backbone of the Eduskunta. They meet behind closed doors and are the central arena for constructive argumentation and party-political cooperation, including between government and opposition (Helander & Pekonen 2007; Rinne 2010; Pekonen 2011). FAC has consistently ranked high in committee hierarchy (Wiberg & Mattila 1997; Forsten 2005; Holli 2014), and it has always attracted senior and high-profile MPs – a finding that applies also to the Congress and to other European legislatures (Lüddecke 2010). A real turning point was the 1987-1991 term, when under the aggressive chairmanship of Markus Aaltonen the FAC began asserting its role in foreign affairs, demanding more reports from the government, issuing statements about them (until then FAC had merely discussed the reports), and hearing more experts. This pro-active approach, which preceded the constitutional reforms that would a few years later give the Eduskunta real powers in foreign policy, led to several conflicts between president Mauno Koivisto (1982-1994) and the FAC (Kallenautio 2007: 127-131; Meres-Wuori 2014: 135-150). In the 2011-2015 Eduskunta FAC was chaired by Timo Soini, the leader of the main opposition party (the Finns Party), and among its members were again several senior party figures, including two other party leaders. 11 out of 17 members were men, continuing the pattern of mainly male-dominance from previous electoral terms.¹¹ The next sub-section focuses on two aspects of FAC work: decision-making culture and issue variation.

Foreign Affairs Committee: decision-making and issue variation

Examining first FAC minutes (N = 369), it is interesting to see the difference when compared with plenary involvement (Table 3). EU clearly dominates the committee agenda: almost half of all agenda items (N = 1631) deal with EU foreign policy decision-making or EU's external relations, while also other categories, notably defence and crisis management, include EU-related topics. Bilateral relations, on the other hand, are in a marginal role, or come up in the context of EU debates. The salience of EU/CFSP matters is explained by the parliamentary EU scrutiny system,

¹¹ The only female FAC chair has been the Social Democrat Liisa Jaakonsaari, who chaired the committee from 1999 to 2007 (Holli 2014: 146).

which is based on the systematic processing of EU matters by the committees and the ‘mandating’ of ministers either in the Grand Committee (the EU affairs committee) or in FAC, with the latter hearing ministers before and after the Foreign Affairs Council and the European Council on CFSP issues (Raunio 2015). Meeting regularly (four times a week) and enjoying good access to information, FAC is thus actively involved in CFSP matters.

TABLES 3, 4 AND 5

Turning to FAC statements (N = 27) and reports (N = 49), yet another picture emerges (Tables 4 and 5). Statements are addressed to either the government or to report-producing committees, while reports are normally reserved for more important matters. Defence and crisis management and national foreign policy are the dominant categories for statements, comprising roughly 2/3 of all statements. The category of national foreign policy includes several statements on annual national budgets. Reports are more evenly distributed, but defence and crisis management and EU external relations make up just over half of all reports.

Eduskunta committees normally aim at unanimous decisions without voting, but an individual MP or the losing minority can add its dissenting view to the committee reports or minutes. Overall, the number of such dissenting opinions has increased since the turn of the millennium, with roughly every fifth committee report or statement nowadays containing a dissenting view (Mattila 2014). Interestingly, the outbreak of the euro crisis and the 2011 Eduskunta elections triggered a major domestic politicization of Europe, which also affected parliamentary behaviour. EU issues are now debated more often in the full chamber, while voting has become more common in the Grand Committee and the losing opposition minority adding its dissenting opinions to the EU reports of the committees. The Finns Party initiated most of this public contestation, but whether it was driven primarily by vote-seeking or conflicting logics of appropriateness is difficult to assess (Raunio 2016).

Analysis of FAC documents shows that such contestation does not apply to foreign affairs. Committee minutes from the 2011-2015 contained no dissenting opinions. FAC voted five times during that period, with all votes demanded by the Finns Party. Six out of 27 statements (22 %) had a dissenting opinion, with all of them signed by the Finns Party MPs. 4 out of 49 reports (8 %) included an dissenting opinion (officially called ‘objections’), with three signed by the Finns Party and one by the Swedish People’s Party. Most of the dissenting views tabled by the Finns Party dealt

with national foreign and security policy, and, in addition to criticizing development policy, the party has certainly expressed concerns about both credible national defence and the lack of independent foreign policy. It is at the same time clear that the Finns Party does not feel bound to the same extent by the norm of consensus, an aspect of politics which it has strongly criticized.

The interviews confirm the culture of consensus in FAC. In line with the ‘politics stops at the water’s edge’ thesis, the goal is to arrive at unanimous committee opinions. However, consensus-seeking approach does not rule out conflicts. In fact, FAC debates are often quite heated, but normally they do not reproduce the government-opposition cleavage that characterizes parliamentary work in domestic issues. There is a left-right cleavage in foreign and security policy, with centre-left parties emphasizing more a comprehensive or broader approach to foreign affairs, including human rights and development policy, while centre-right parties are more against cuts to defence spending and more supportive of developing closer links with NATO. However, most Finnish parties are internally quite divided over foreign policy issues and these differences also surface in FAC discussions. Interestingly, FAC debates often find coalition partners criticizing the government – thus offering evidence for the Martin and Vanberg (2011) theorem about committees providing a forum for coalition parties to ‘keep tabs’ on one another.¹²

But what can we say about the type of engagement or level of control? Most foreign affairs agenda items differ from domestic issues in the sense that they are not legislative initiatives, but instead consist of the FAC either monitoring EU or international negotiations or examining government reports on various foreign policy questions. Constitutionally regulated access to information is of great importance for the FAC, which has not only insisted on government fulfilling its reporting obligations but has also actively requested further information from the government (Pitkänen 2006). A further challenge is caused by the semi-presidential regime, and while FAC and the president have held joint meetings since 1969 (Meres-Wuori 2014: 225), the FAC has on several occasions complained that the president has not been willing to share relevant information with it.¹³ Current president Sauli Niinistö (National Coalition, 2012-) vowed in his election campaign to

¹² Interviews are the only way to gain information on committee decision-making. The information contained in the public minutes of the committees is basically restricted to listing the agenda items, which MPs and expert witnesses were present and spoke, and potential votes and dissenting opinions. Any speeches or questions, and any replies from government representatives are not minuted.

¹³ See for example P. Salolainen, ‘Tieto ulkopolitiikasta ei kulje eduskuntaan’, *Helsingin Sanomat* 18.1.2010.

improve dialogue with FAC and the situation seems to have become better.¹⁴ It also appears that the overall exchange of information between the government and president functions better under Niinistö than particularly during the final years of Tarja Halonen's presidency (2000-2012) which were plagued by jurisdictional conflicts between the two executives. Divided government no doubt contributed to the tensions, with the Social Democratic Halonen co-leading foreign policy from 2003 onwards with cabinets led by the Centre and the National Coalition. The Finnish case thus has important implications for the parliaments of those semi-presidential regimes where foreign policy leadership belongs either wholly or in part to the competence of the president (Raunio 2012).

Tables 1-5 show interesting variation between issue categories. Committee agendas are dominated by EU / CFSP matters, and the Eduskunta is thus systematically involved in CFSP, with emphasis on ex ante scrutiny of European level decision-making. However, most CFSP issues do not inspire any real debates. Overall, questions related to national security and defence seem to be most salient, both in FAC and in the Eduskunta at large. This is quite understandable in light of Finland's geopolitical location and modern history. For example, debates on crisis management, particularly those held in the plenary, have often focused on the effects the operations will have on either the defence forces or on Finland's 'non-aligned' status, not so much on the actual operations (Koivula & Sipilä 2011), and the same applies to the case of the Ottawa Mine Ban Treaty. Decisions on crisis management participation offer also examples of the Eduskunta not just monitoring but also influencing government policy. Essentially parliamentary approval is needed before every operation (although the president has the final say over troop deployments), and this has clearly created 'ownership' of crisis management among MPs. For example, when NATO suggested in the mid-1990s that Finland could participate in its Implementation Force (IFOR) in Bosnia, the government proposed quite extensive amendments to Finnish law on international peace-keeping but the FAC refused to go as far as the cabinet proposed. Finnish participation in NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) in 1999 also sparked intensive debates, not least on account of NATO bombing Yugoslavia ahead of the operation, as did the new law on crisis management in 2006. The debates have nonetheless become less intense in recent years, and nowadays there is broad cross-party support in the Eduskunta for stronger international engagement in crisis management and for EU-led operations in particular. (Tiilikainen 2008; Koivula & Sipilä 2011; Häkkinen 2015) Contestation over development aid in turn been largely initiated by the Finns Party, but otherwise foreign trade or international treaties seem to attract less attention among MPs.

¹⁴ T. Uusivaara, 'Salolainen: Presidentin ja eduskunnan välinen tiedonkulku parantunut', *Yle Uutiset* 26.6.2012.

The analysis thus provides support for our hypotheses. For the most part, the engagement of the Eduskunta and its FAC can be characterized as monitoring or overseeing government actions. Hence the Eduskunta ‘keeps tabs’ on the cabinet, but there is also evidence of FAC shaping government policy. Overall, the Eduskunta is actively involved in foreign affairs, and hence at least this case study contradicts the standard argument about foreign policy being a policy area where executives enjoy most discretion. The Eduskunta utilizes a variety of avenues for influencing foreign affairs, from contributing to the ‘grand strategy’ documents to ministerial hearings in FAC, particularly in CFSP matters. In fact, it might be better to talk about regular cooperation between the government and the Eduskunta, with the cabinet seeking *ex ante* support from FAC for its positions. It is more difficult to ascertain whether this is purposeful strategy in line with the Schelling Conjecture, but there has certainly emerged a culture where the cabinet consults the FAC in essentially all foreign and security questions. In line with our second hypothesis, particularly crisis management issues and those CFSP matters with stronger security implications are subjected to tighter scrutiny. And finally, the policy-making style is very consensual, both in the plenary and in FAC, but the meetings of the latter nonetheless feature quite active discussions that also see coalition partners keeping tabs on each other.

Concluding discussion

The case study of the Eduskunta offers strong evidence that legislatures are not necessarily marginalized in foreign affairs. In fact, one could even argue that the very nature of foreign and security policy facilitates parliamentary engagement. Domestic and also EU laws are often technical and detailed, requiring a lot of policy-specific knowledge from MPs. Foreign policy, on the other hand, consists largely of non-legislative items such as monitoring CFSP matters or international developments. Finnish politics as a whole is very government-driven (Raunio & Wiberg 2008; 2014), but perhaps less so in foreign affairs. Instead of implying weaker scrutiny, ‘keeping tabs’ thus just denotes a different mode of parliamentary engagement or influence. However, even with active parliamentary input, the information asymmetries in favour of the executive remain significant. Such informational disadvantages are probably most acute in bargaining over international trade agreements, where in the EU context the Commission negotiates on behalf of the Union even when national legislatures possess veto power over the agreements.

This underscores the importance of establishing a culture of parliamentary involvement in foreign affairs. Constitutional rights are obviously important, and the recent empowerment of the Eduskunta

certainly provided the needed legal framework for engaging in foreign policy. But the Finnish case suggests that at least equally significant is to design parliamentary procedures that facilitate effective government scrutiny. In the Eduskunta the Foreign Affairs Committee is systematically involved in all types of foreign policy, receiving information from the government and hearing ministers ahead of EU or global meetings. This applies particularly to EU-related matters, and it is safe to conclude that the Eduskunta is undoubtedly one of the national parliaments with the strongest level of CFSP involvement (Huff 2015). Crisis management in turn is an example of a politicized issue, where the initial period of contestation in the mid-1990s created ownership among MPs in troop deployments. Overall, issues related to national security attract clearly most attention among Finnish MPs.

Governments may also have a vested interest in seeking the *ex ante* approval of legislatures, and in Finland foreign policy decision-making is characterized by active *ex ante* cooperation between the cabinet and the Eduskunta. The findings are thus in line with Martin (2000: 201), who argued that the executive may try to evade legislative constraints in one-off situations, whereas parliamentary engagement will be more institutionalized in stable and repeated forms of international cooperation. The logic of international or EU level bargaining thus sees to it that the legislature must really seek to influence government beforehand, but also that the executive itself has an incentive to seek parliamentary approval for its positions, particularly when the legislature has the power to reject the outcome of international agreements. Critics can point out that this makes international bargaining more difficult, as status quo bias in global or EU politics increases when the role of the legislature and other domestic veto-players is more institutionalized. However, *ex ante* parliamentary engagement should facilitate both the actual international bargaining and the eventual implementation of the agreements (Martin 2000).

From a normative perspective scrutiny behind the closed doors of committees may not be the best way in which legislatures contribute to legitimacy of foreign affairs. In a world characterized by increasing interdependence, troop deployments, international agreements on trade, energy or human rights, or the development of CFSP are all issues that have more tangible consequences for domestic electorates. Even if governments are successful in using 'securitization' strategies, the growing internationalization of various non-security issues suggests both more MPs becoming involved in foreign affairs and a higher preparedness for public contestation over such matters. Hence what matters is that the legislature provides a forum for debate where the issues are justified and explained (Lord 2011). The deliberate search for cross-party consensus in the name of national

interest does not necessarily exclude such debates, but relaxing such notions of unanimity would certainly facilitate a stronger role for the plenary and more public party competition over foreign policy. In the Eduskunta the role of the plenary has so far been rather limited, but unlike during the Cold War, at least there is now domestic debate about foreign and security policy.

Future research should examine if the Eduskunta is an outlier, as the literature would suggest, or whether we see active engagement in foreign affairs also by other legislatures. Recent work on parliamentary scrutiny of EU affairs has increasingly challenged notions of executive dominance (e.g. Auel & Christiansen 2015; Heffler et al. 2015), and there is a need to analyse whether such stronger parliamentary involvement extends also to foreign affairs. Comparative studies on parliamentary scrutiny of CFSP should focus on explaining variation between parliaments and on identifying best practices (Huff 2015). The analysis certainly provides further evidence of the Europeanization of domestic foreign policies, with EU-related matters contributing well over half of all FAC agenda items. The downside of active participation in European or global governance is the increased workload. In Finland, the EU-related agendas of both the government and the Eduskunta are increasingly ‘downloaded’ from the agendas of EU institutions (Hyvärinen & Raunio 2014), leaving thus less time for other issues, although the FAC deserves credit for requesting information from the government on topics of its own choice. Considering the multi-level nature of European and global governance, scholars should explore how national MPs are using other channels than government scrutiny, such as direct contacts with foreign actors or interparliamentary networking, for influencing European or global issues. Finally, future research should examine how parliaments and their Foreign Affairs Committees engage with non-governmental organisations and other civil society actors in foreign policy (Lüddecke 2010), a topic made all the more salient given the stronger links between domestic and external affairs and the increasing politicization of international relations.

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Table 1. Oral questions on foreign policy, 2011-2015.

	2011	2012	2013	2014	Total	%
EU external relations	0	0	0	1	1	2,4 %
EU foreign policy decision-making	0	0	0	1	1	2,4 %
Nordic cooperation	0	0	0	0,5	0,5	1,2 %
Defence and crisis management	2	2	0,5	5	9,5	23,2 %
International organisations and treaties	2	0	1,5	3,5	7	17,1 %
National foreign policy	0	0	0	1,5	1,5	3,7 %
Bilateral relations	2	4	4	10,5	20,5	50,0 %
Total	6	6	6	23	41	100 %

Table 2. Written questions on foreign policy, 2011-2015.

	2011	2012	2013	2014	Total	%
EU external relations	0	1	7	5,5	13,5	15,3 %
EU foreign policy decision-making	0	0	0	1	1	1,1 %
Nordic cooperation	0	1	0	1	2	2,3 %
Defence and crisis management	1	4	2	4,5	11,5	13,1 %
International organisations and treaties	1	5	5	8,5	19,5	22,2 %
National foreign policy	1	2	3	2	8	9,1 %
Bilateral relations	2	14	8	8,5	32,5	36,9 %
Total	5	27	25	31	88	100 %

Table 3. Foreign Affairs Committee minutes, 2011-2015.

	2011	2012	2013	2014	Total	%
EU external relations	51,5	67,5	50	118,5	287,5	17,6 %
EU foreign policy decision-making	87	134,5	130,5	136	488	29,9 %
Nordic cooperation	3	9	6	18,5	36,5	2,2 %
Defence and crisis management	36,5	61	107	146,5	351	21,5 %
International organisations and treaties	24,5	41	43	50	158,5	9,7 %
National foreign policy	24,5	42,5	57,5	80	204,5	12,5 %
Bilateral relations	7	42,5	22	33,5	105	6,4 %
Total	234	398	416	583	1631	100 %

Table 4. Foreign Affairs Committee statements, 2011-2015.

	2011	2012	2013	2014	Total	%
EU external relations	0	0	0	2	2	7,4 %
EU foreign policy decision-making	1	0	1	2	4	14,8 %
Nordic cooperation	0	0	0,5	0	0,5	1,9 %
Defence and crisis management	1	1	3,5	4	9,5	35,2 %
International organisations and treaties	0	1	1	1	3	11,1 %
National foreign policy	1	2	3	2	8	29,6 %
Bilateral relations	0	0	0	0	0	0,0 %
Total	3	4	9	11	27	100 %

Table 5. Foreign Affairs Committee reports, 2011-2015.

	2011	2012	2013	2014	Total	%
EU external relations	1	3	2	7	13	26,5 %
EU foreign policy decision-making	0	2	1	0	3	6,1 %
Nordic cooperation	0	2	0	3	5	10,2 %
Defence and crisis management	1	2	2	7	12	24,5 %
International organisations and treaties	0	3	2	3	8	16,3 %
National foreign policy	0	2	0	4	6	12,2 %
Bilateral relations	0	0	1	1	2	4,1 %
Total	2	14	8	25	49	100 %