

Figure 1 – An overview of tools and practices of parliamentary oversight of foreign affairs in the reference benchmark

	Oversight tools	Denmark	France	Germany	Italy	Spain	Sweden	United Kingdom
Preventative scrutiny	<i>Foreign policy committee's oversight tools</i>	The Foreign Policy Committee enjoys reinforced scrutiny prerogatives, formally provided by the Act on the Foreign Policy Committee (Act. no. 54 of 5 March 1954)	Extensive hearings of the Minister for Foreign Affairs (once every five or six weeks). Committee meetings are held in open session. Use of informative missions as a foreign affairs' oversight tool	The Foreign policy committee (whose special status is based on art. 45.a of the Basic Law) enjoys a large variety of oversight tools and procedures in the foreign policy field. The committee has the right to be adjourned on the state of the governmental action in the different areas of German foreign policy; however, over the decades, there have been shortcomings in the government's capacity to fulfill all these duties. Its meetings are held in camera	The inquiry power has been used in the foreign affairs sector through the appointment of temporary inquiry committees, most often sharing a bicameral nature. By contrast, the standing committees responsible for foreign policy by the Chamber and the Senate make use of the ordinary oversight toolbox to scrutinise governmental' management of foreign affairs.	Scrutiny activity carried out by two standing committees: the 2nd Committee, on Foreign Affairs; and the 19th Committee on International Cooperation for Development (foreseen by art. 15.3 of the Act No. 23/1998 dated 7 July, that endows the Committee with reinforced sectorial informative prerogatives)	Reports to the plenary on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the relations and agreements of the Realm with international organisations</li> <li>- development assistance to other countries</li> <li>- foreign trade and international economic cooperation</li> </ul>	The Foreign Affairs Committee of the HoC undertakes inquiries into its area of competence. The inquiry power gives the Committee the right to obtain documents and records, hear persons and periodically report to the House on the state of the inquiries.
	<i>Parliamentary delegations participating in intergovernmental meetings</i>	MPs may participate in intergovernmental meetings at the request of Government	Parliamentarians from both Houses regularly participate in intergovernmental meetings at the Government's initiative (UN General Assembly; WTO Conferences). Parliamentary delegations usually join most relevant foreign missions	/	/	/	/	The participation of a parliamentary delegation to an intergovernmental conference entirely depends on the initiative of the Government; it is up to the Government to appoint members of the delegation, although the executive might leave to the Houses to formulate a proposal through the approval of a non-

			involving the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister or the Minister for Foreign Affairs.					binding resolution.
<i>Ad hoc consultative parliamentary bodies in foreign affairs</i>	The Foreign Policy Committee of the Folketing serves as a consultative body according to art. 19.3. of the Constitution Act	In October 2008, a temporary working group with a sectorial competence on the international financial crisis was created on initiative of the National Assembly and the Senate	/	/	/	Swedish Advisory Council on Foreign Affairs	/	
<i>Role of the Parliament during treaty negotiations</i>	For treaties of major importance, by common practice the Minister for foreign affairs confers with the Parliament while negotiating the treaty. This is not a constitutional duty, as the binding mandate system featuring any negotiations in the European Council or the EU Council of Ministers does not apply to extra-EU negotiations.	No formal role for Parliament during treaty negotiations. Contacts between MPs and governmental representatives may occur at the political level.	There is no necessary involvement of the Parliament in the negotiations' stage. When negotiations are pending, the Parliament cannot object to international treaties but competent committees may address non-binding recommendations to the plenary. When negotiations have formally been closed, the Parliament cannot propose amendments to the treaty, but it can object to it before it is formally concluded by the executive	No formal role for Parliament during treaty negotiations. Contacts between MPs and governmental representatives may occur at the political level.	In the above mentioned cases, listed in art. 94 Const., the Cortes generales can't amend the treaty, but they can introduce reserves or interpretative declarations if the treaty so provides	The Parliament does not formally have the right to amend international treaties; however, it can subordinate its approval to specific conditions. For more important treaties, the Riksdag is consulted during negotiations and it can vote a resolution to demand the government either to modify its position or to cease the negotiation. These decisions may be binding, depending on the nature of the treaty; in any case, a motion of censure may be used in the case the government does not comply with political directions voted by the Parliament	The Constitutional Reform and Governance 2010 Act does not provide the Parliament with any mechanism for scrutinising treaties during negotiations, when the text of the treaty still can be changed: parliamentary debates may occur at this stage, but they only have political significance; Ministers commonly inform relevant select committees before signing a treaty, but the effects of this practice are not clear.	

	<i>Parliamentary preventative approval of treaties (before being concluded by the Government)</i>	The <i>Folketing</i> must approve beforehand any international obligation which requires the concurrence of Parliament or which is otherwise of major importance	/	The conclusion of specific types of international agreements is subject to prior parliamentary approval; this is the case, in particular, of treaties involving the 'political relations' of the State or relating to matters of federal legislation	/	Any commitment of the State by means of treaty or agreement requires prior authorisation of the Parliament in a number of cases, regulated by art. 94 of the Constitution. The authorization must be granted before the treaty or agreement is signed	The <i>Riksdag's</i> approval is required before the Government concludes an international agreement which is binding upon the Realm if the agreement requires the amendment or abrogation of an act of law or the enactment of a new act of law; or if it otherwise concerns a matter to be decided by the <i>Riksdag</i> or if the agreement is of major significance	/
Ex post oversight	<i>Parliamentary authorisation to the ratification of treaties formally concluded by the Government</i>	/	The role of Parliament is required for authorising the ratification of a number of treaties considered of main importance and listed in art. 53 of the Constitution. Parliament's intervention follows the formal conclusion of the treaty by the executive; it takes the form of a law of authorisation. The law may be approved through shortened parliamentary procedures and simplified practices as to reduce the	/	The role of the Parliament is required for authorising the ratification of selected types of treaties, listed in art. 80 of the Constitution. The parliamentary authorisation takes place by means of a law, approved by both Houses in the usual procedure, thus excluding any chance of having the law approved in committee without a vote from the plenary.	/	/	Under the Royal Prerogative, it is for the UK Government to negotiate, sign and ratify treaties. Parliament has traditionally enjoyed a limited role in this process. The Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010 gave Parliament the statutory power to block treaty ratification. Some types of treaties are excluded from the procedure.

			ratification time span.					
	<i>Parliamentary right to amend the treaty</i>	/	The Parliament does not vote the single articles of the treaty that has already been negotiated and signed by the executive; nor has it the right to amend the treaty. The only choice reserved to the Parliament is between enabling or rejecting the authorisation to the ratification of the treaty.	/	The parliamentary law of authorisation cannot be amended by Parliament due to a long-established constitutional convention: the text of treaty itself cannot be modified by Parliament nor subject to interpretative clauses; the two Houses can hence either entirely agree or disagree with the text of the treaty. However, provisions included in the law of authorisation to give execution to the treaty in the internal legal system or to adapt the internal legal system to treaty obligations can be amended by Parliament, as long as they do not impact on the treaty itself.	/	/	The Houses (HOC) may block ratification by means of a 'negative resolution' procedure enabling them only to oppose to the treaty, without being called to debate and vote the ratification. No amending power is hence vested on the Parliament.
Informative control	<i>Debates in the plenary</i>	Recurring debates on foreign policy are provided for each parliamentary session (one interpellation debate at the beginning of each section)	Frequent plenary debates on foreign policy issues (also by means of the questions held twice a week)	Political parties can urge the government to provide answers in the plenary on governmental foreign policy guidelines (often in response to foreign affairs' political contingencies)	Foreign policy is commonly debated in the plenary by means of the usual oversight procedures (especially, governmental reports to the House and motions)		A Foreign policy debate is held every year in the plenary, in February	
	<i>Participation in inter-parliamentary cooperation and other forms of parliamentary diplomacy</i>	By common practice, members of parliamentary delegations are appointed through the same system as committee members	Permanent delegations are composed by representatives of both the National Assembly and the Senate (usually in	The formation of delegations is determined on conventional basis. A very limited number of delegations shows a bicameral	Parliamentary delegations to international interparliamentary assemblies act as permanent bodies, elected by each House in	Criteria regulating the activity of parliamentary delegations representing the Spanish Cortes Generales abroad are	Elections of parliamentary delegations to some international parliamentary institutions are regulated in the	It is up to the Government and specifically to the Prime Minister to appoint members of parliamentary delegations, selecting

		(proportionality). Only some delegations have a permanent membership; others are instead featured by alternate membership. Participation in the Nordic Council	proportions of 3/5 and 2/5, exception made for the delegation to the IPU, which is composed of an equal number of deputed and senators)	composition, including representatives from the Bundesrat.	the plenary or appointed by the Speaker and endowed with a representative mandate for the electoral term. Their composition follows the proportions among political groups.	agreed at the beginning of each legislative term by the Bureau of the two Houses. Their creation and activity is subject to bicameral agreements	Riksdag Act (in most cases, their duration is referred to the electoral period). Participation in the Nordic Council	them from both Houses, by means of written statement in Parliament (the party distribution of seats must reflect the composition of the House of Commons)
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