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THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

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*The Institutionalization of 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.

## **Keywords**

Institutions, institutionalization, legislatures, the European Parliament



## Introduction

The European Parliament (EP) has been in existence for only 50 years and is thus a relatively young legislature. It has, however, grown in power over time. Writing in 1979, in the same year direct elections were introduced, Geoffrey Pridham and Pippa Pridham observed the EP as follows:

The European Parliament is primarily a scrutinizing and consultative body, with advisory and supervisory powers over the legislative proposals produced by the Commission for approval by the Council of Ministers. It differs fundamentally from national parliaments (despite its name) in that it is not yet elected by universal suffrage. It is not a legislature - it does not formally initiate policy and its budgetary powers are minimal; the Community's executive is neither drawn from it nor responsible to it; it does not sit permanently, and it has no fixed location (Pridham and Pridham 1979, 4).

In the intervening 30 years, however, the EP has become a true parliament with extensive legislative and budgetary powers. It now has the power to dismiss the Commission, amend and enact the budget, legislate, and exercise a legislative veto. The EP is thus not dissimilar to other legislatures and in fact resembles the U.S. House of Representatives more than the parliaments of its own member states, sharing the characteristic of being “the most untypical example of the legislative institution” (Shepsle and Weingast 1994,17, quoted in Raunio 1997, 27).

The need to understand this unique institution and its internal development has increased in parallel with its growing role and powers within the European Union. Today, there exists a significant body of theoretically and empirically rich literature on the internal workings of the EP (Hix et al. 1999). This paper will not review this literature. Instead, the purpose of this paper is to provide evidence that the degree of actual change in the EP has been consistent with the pattern of change predicted by the “theory of institutionalization.” In other words, this paper empirically measures the extent to which the European Parliament has become more complex, decentralized, autonomous and universalistic: the extent to which it has become institutionalized.

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. An empirical analysis of the internal evolution 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. The European Parliament, as a “transformative legislature,”<sup>1</sup> in Polsby's words (1975), presents a good case with which to assess institutionalization over time.

The paper is organized as follows. In the following section I review the literature on institutionalization in general and on legislative institutionalization in particular, introduce Polsby's model, and identify the implicit difficulties that I find 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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 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).

## Legislative Institutionalization: What We Already Know

An analysis of institutionalization should begin by defining what an institution is, although it is not an easy task to undertake. The term refers to almost everything from handshakes to formal organizations, yet much of the literature on institutions does not even define the term (Levi 1990, 403). Furthermore, it is commonplace to see the terms “organization” and “institution” used interchangeably, and the varying usages appear to be more often a matter of taste than of ontological decision. As I see it, these two concepts are closely related, but it is critical that we analyze their relationship clearly, rather than lump them together under one term. Thus, I define institutions as “stable, valued, [and] recurring patterns of behavior” and institutionalization as “the process by which organizations and procedures acquire value and stability” (Huntington 1965, 394). That is, by acquiring value and stability, organizations may become institutions. However, institutionalization is not “a finite quality” (Sisson 1973, 19). As Norton suggests, “there is no one point at which a body suddenly becomes ‘institutionalized’ and is then kept in aspic” (Norton, 1998:8). Thus, institutionalization is not unidirectional or irreversible; de-institutionalization and re-institutionalization may occur. It is also not inevitable or monotonic; as such it takes place in a variety of patterns (Polsby 1975, 288).

The question naturally arises: can we develop a uniform model of institutionalization or a “rough metric” of this process that can help us compare the degree of institutionalization of any organization or political system (Jepperson 1991, 151; Huntington 1968, 394)? Ronald Jepperson warns us to stay away from a “holistic comparison of institutionalization” and argues that it is “more legitimate (and in principle productive) to compare the relative institutionalization of institutions within collectivities, or types of institutions across societies, or of analytical types of social orders” (Jepperson 1991, 161). For instance, Samuel Huntington (1968) compares the degree of institutionalization across different political systems. And, the major characteristics of an institutionalized organization à la Huntington are the adaptability, complexity, autonomy and coherence of its internal structures and procedures. Thus, institutionalization is the process by which a body acquires a “cumulative capacity” to adapt to changes in its environment, becomes internally complex, establishes boundaries and exists independently of other organizations, and finally develops “the capacities for coordination” (Huntington 1965, 396-404). Moreover, “if these criteria can be identified and measured, political systems and organizations can be compared in terms of their levels of institutionalization” (Huntington 1965, 394).

Similarly, the level of institutionalization can be measured within one organization across time. In this regard, Nelson Polsby’s 1968 article “The Institutionalization of the U.S. House of Representatives” still remains the most influential study of institutionalization. Polsby put the notion of institutionalization found in the works of Fustel de Coulanges, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, and more recently developed by S. N. Eisenstadt (1964) and Samuel Huntington (1965), to use in the context of the U.S. House of Representatives. Celebrated as one of the twenty most influential articles published in the *American Political Science Review* over the past hundred years, Polsby’s seminal work heralded a number of studies applying institutionalization to other legislatures (Loewenberg, 1973; Kornberg, 1973; Sisson, 1973; Gerlich, 1973; Haeberle, 1978; Hibbing, 1988), courts (Schmidhauser 1973 and McGuire 2004), and international organizations (Keohane 1969).

Despite its wide range of application, Polsby’s framework has not proven to be easily “exportable” to the study of legislatures outside or even within the U.S. (Rae 2002, 2). As Hibbing (1988) suggests, legislatures have not evolved in fashions that resemble each other. In other words, we should not expect two different legislative bodies to institutionalize in the same manner. That is why, as Hibbing warns us, measures of institutionalization must be context specific while being consistent with the broad themes of institutionalization (Hibbing 1988, 695).

For these reasons, while remaining consistent with the “themes” of institutionalization, I carefully select my operational indices, because “the direction and scope of change are not random but depend...on the nature of the system generating the change, on its values, norms and organizations, on the various forces operating within it and on the external forces to which it is especially sensitive” (Eisenstadt 1964, 247). Because institutionalization is a long-term process “reflecting the

organization's own distinct history, the people who have been in it, the groups it embodies and the vested interests they have created, and the way it has adapted to its environment" (Selznick 1957, 16).

Nevertheless, although several different authors employ different indicators, they seem to agree on two aspects of an institutionalized organization: autonomy (Eisenstadt 1964, Huntington 1965, Polsby 1968) and complexity (Polsby 1968, Huntington 1965). Other characteristics include universalism (Polsby 1968), and coherence and adaptability (Huntington 1965). With these indicators we are able to test whether the degree of actual change in any given organization (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.

The evidence from the House of Representatives supports the view that the House has become institutionalized over time, that is, it has developed well-defined boundaries, has become internally complex, and has adopted universalistic standards and automated methods. What about other legislatures, have they also evolved "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 does the European Parliament exhibit these characteristics?

In the following analysis of the EP, I seek to answer these questions. The main argument of this paper is that the EP has become more institutionalized over time, not only on all the measures of institutionalization (e.g. *autonomy*, *complexity*, and *universalism*) but also because this process has been highly driven by the Parliament itself despite the very best efforts of the Member States.

In one of the most innovative applications of Polsby's framework to a state legislature (e.g. the California Assembly), Peverill Squire (1992, 2009) links the concept of professionalization to the concept of institutionalization, and maintains that each results from the desires of the legislators' career goals and behavior. That is, while institutionalization is driven by insiders, deinstitutionalization occurs because of outsiders (Squire 1992, 1026). This can be seen nowhere else better than the EP, as the legislature has spent its existence battling to expand its authority and influence vis-à-vis other institutions of the Union (then the Community). To this end, Members of the European Parliament unilaterally decided to call the institution the European Parliament, a move that was not officially recognized by the Council until 1987 (Kreppel 2002, 56-57).

In the remainder of this paper, I will assess the internal institutional development of the European Parliament. Thus, my goal is to explain the extent to which this legislative body has become more *autonomous*, *complex*, and *universalistic*, that is, the extent to which it has become institutionalized.

## **Institutionalization of the European Parliament**

### ***Autonomy/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" (Huntington 1965, 393). Autonomy can be measured by "the distinctiveness of the norms and values of the organization compared with those of other groups, by the personnel controls (in terms of cooptation, penetration and purging) existing between the organization and other groups, and by the degree to which the organization controls its own material resources" (Huntington 1965, 405).

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 might include 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). It is, however, important to note that autonomy is not power. Here autonomy, as I employ it, refers to the independence of a political

organization from outside influences and its freedom to exercise its authority without the impact of a particular group.

Although, on these measures, the European Parliament has gained more autonomy over the years, from the onset the Founding Treaties gave it the right to determine its own organization, write its own rules, and elect its own officers without any external influence. Even before direct elections, the Parliament was electing its own officers, and it 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 (EP Rules of Procedure).

Consistent with its evolution within the European Union, the EP Rules of Procedure have also changed and been upgraded “to include the EP in more and more of the decision-making processes” (Shephard 1998, 167). Thus, the way that Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) decided to organize themselves reflected organizational complexities and decision-making difficulties of the inter-institutional context within which the European Parliament has operated.

To begin with, the EU operates in a separation of powers system with its basic institutional organs (the Council of the European Union, European Commission, European Court of Justice, and European Parliament) separately and differently selected, which facilitates their mutual independence (Kreppel, 2006). This relative independence of the EP from the control of the EU executive has had a major impact on the kind of legislature that the EP has evolved into. The separation of powers system almost always creates a powerful legislature (Kreppel 2004, 140). This was the case with the EP, and the end result is a high level of internal organizational complexity, a distinct hierarchy, and the existence of explicit and precise procedures to regulate behavior (Blau and Schoenherr 1971, 5). This is consistent with Aldrich (1979, 265), who argued that political institutions located in highly complex and uncertain environments develop more complex internal structures.

“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, the most important instance of autonomy in EP history was the end of the double mandate after the introduction of direct elections in 1979. Although some Member States still allow their MEPs to hold concurrent positions, it has not been a very common practice. Another very important step towards greater autonomy for MEPs was the adoption of a uniform salary, which has entered into force with the new Parliament that convened just after the June 2009 EP elections. Until 2009, each MEP received the same salary as a member of his or her own national parliament.

### ***Complexity***

The second trait of an institutionalized organization identified by Huntington (1965) and others is internal complexity, defined as the degree of differentiation within a given system. The extent of differentiation may be horizontal and/or vertical in nature.<sup>2</sup> Vertical complexity refers to the number of hierarchical levels, whereas horizontal refers to the number of functions, departments, and jobs. Organizations vary in their degree of complexity. However, the more complex they are, the greater their ability to adapt to new demands, and the more stable they are, the more institutionalized they are. To measure vertical complexity I will search for an increasing number of hierarchical levels. However, legislatures are not particularly hierarchical organizations, but new levels are occasionally added.

For our purposes, here I will focus on horizontal complexity, which refers to the “lateral differentiation of functions...activities and divisions” (Campbell and Akers 1970, 438). Horizontal complexity is measured by the number of subunits, jobs, and functions, but as applied here to a legislature, an increase in horizontal complexity would be shown by an increase in the number of

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<sup>2</sup> It could also be spatial or personal, but I do not employ those in this study.

standing committees, although this may be misleading given that “the raw number of committees may not reflect the true level of internal differentiation” (Hibbing 1988, 697).

Instead, Polsby chose three indicators to measure the growth of internal complexity in the House of Representatives: the growth in importance of committees, the growth of specialized agencies of party leadership, and the growth of resources assigned to internal House management. Among these, Polsby considered the growth in the importance of committees 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 assistance, and committee staff) as major indicators of increasing internal complexity (Polsby 1968, 153). Here, I will examine these two as Polsby did, and then add a suggestion by Philip Norton to the list: complex rules and procedures.

- The EP Committee System

Committees are the *sine qua non* of legislative institutions. The number of committees, their degree of specialization, and 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 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 of times a year” (McElroy 2001, 4). To this end, by 1953 it had installed seven committees 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 developed gradually, but in the aftermath of the direct elections in 1979 the committee system was significantly expanded and the number of standing committees gradually increased to 20 by 1999, but was subsequently reduced to 17 after the June 1999 elections<sup>3</sup> (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 its committees 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).

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 of the internal organization of the EP shows that committee assignments and the use of questions reflect the highly specialized committee structure. Using data from the 1989-94 Parliament and also from the 1989-99 period (see also Mamadouh and Raunio 2001, 9), they match committee assignments with occupation, group membership, ideology and national data. The evidence suggests that 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 on the Economics Committee. The asking of questions also follows specialization in the EP. A similar relationship is also evident between the occupational attachments of 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).

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

With regard to the 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 provide scientific and technical information to the individual MEPs but also give 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.

The European Parliament is one of those parliaments that work to a greater extent through their committees. 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 EP party groups. The literature on this issue is divided. Damgaard (1995), McElroy (2001), and Bowler and Farrell (1995) all argue for high party group influence on committee work, whereas 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.

- Resources

Further evidence 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 conducting the 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 a dramatic increase was experienced in the aftermath of direct elections. As Corbett argues, "one thing that the elected Parliament immediately 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 also been an enormous increase in the overall staff size of the EP since its inception, from the 49 posts in 1958 to 5303 in 2007. This significant increase has been due to several factors such as the increase in the Parliament's membership from 142 in 1958 to 785 in 2009, the increase in the powers and competencies of the EP, and the rise in the number of working languages from four in 1952 to 23 in 2009.<sup>4</sup> (See Table 1 on the facing page)

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 have "in turn led to the creation of 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).

Evidence suggests that the resources devoted to running the EP have increased enormously over time. The total cost of operating the Parliament has grown, and its staff size and physical attributes have also increased significantly. Today the total cost of running the EP is much higher than the corresponding cost for any of the member states' parliaments.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Even we control for the number of officials in linguistic services and the resources devoted to these services, the European Parliament still remains well-staffed and well financed.

<sup>5</sup> The total voted cost of the House of Commons for 1993 was 170 million pounds, whereas the equivalent cost for the European Parliament was 476 million pounds. (Westlake, 1994:229)

**Table 1. Internal Organizational Development of the EP**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Member States</b>	<b>Number of MEPs</b>	<b>EP Staff</b>
1958	6	142	49
1973	9	198	603
1979	9	410	1553
1981	10	434	2081
1986	12	518	2886
1995	15	626	3663
2004	25	732	4610
2007	27	785	5303

- **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 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 the 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. 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, they became increasingly technical and complex.

Today, the number of EP rules has increased to 204, with 16 Annexes. 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>). With its complex, detailed and highly technical rules of procedure, it seems to be an internally complex body.

### ***The Development of Universalistic Rules***

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

of applying 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 use the rise of the seniority system as the means of determining committee rank (from Polsby) and 'Question Time' (from Hibbing).

Seniority, as a norm, does not operate in the EP to the extent it does in the US Congress (Bowler and Farrell 1996, 239), yet it is not completely irrelevant or trivial. In fact, "there is strong evidence", writes Gail McElroy, "in support of a seniority norm operating in the EP" (McElroy 2006, 17). Data collected by McElroy on the distribution of committee seats by freshmen versus non-freshmen reinforces this point. As she explains, 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 illustrates 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, and over time, a very elaborate set of 'rules of the game' has developed around Question Time with the number of questions addressed gradually increasing (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, although, 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 "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 gradually increased over time. In the year of the direct elections, 1979, a total of 1977 written questions were submitted, rising 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 (See Table 2 on the facing page).

Today, the right to put questions to the Commission and the Council, one of the basic rights of the MEPs, remains a well-established activity within the EP, and MEPs' questioning activity shows signs of specialization. Research on the 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.

The development of explicit and universalistic rules refers to the "institutionalization of relationships" as Selznick puts it. That is, an organization's security is "removed from the uncertainties of individual fealty or sentiment" (Selznick 1948, 25). Thus, its human components are interchangeable and replaceable and the organization does not depend on their personal qualities (Selznick 1948, 25).

**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 the General Report on the Activities of the European Community (1980-1995).

## Conclusion

The European Parliament is a fascinating institution. It is uniquely powerful - the most powerful transnational assembly in the world - yet it is not *sui generis*. Like the U.S. House of Representatives, it is a "transformative" legislature that "possesses the independent capacity to mould and transform proposals from whatever source into laws" (Polsby 1975). There are some other obvious parallels between the two. In fact, they are surprisingly similar, with the EP being a true legislature despite being called a "parliament" (Kreppel 2006, 155-56).

Unlike the U.S. Congress, the European Parliament is a relatively young legislature with only a 50-year history. Despite its youth, the EP is a "mature" political institution, not unlike the U.S. Congress (Davidson and Oleszek 2004, 4). And the evidence suggests that the changes observed in the EP have been consistent with the pattern of change that might be expected based on the notion of institutionalization. That is, the EP has become more autonomous, and internally more complex and universalistic. In other words, it has become institutionalized in that it exhibits the various characteristics of an institutionalized organization identified by several scholars. Thus, this paper, through an analysis of the EP, has demonstrated empirically that "institutionalization" has the potential to serve as a useful model that can be applied to different types of legislatures in a variety of settings. One must, however, be careful not to overstate its use, because not every political organization need follow the same path in institutionalizing, and institutionalization is not the final stage of a general process that will occur every time and in every place.

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