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by

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## Summary:

The Lisbon Treaty introduced major reforms regarding, *inter alia*, the external representation of the European Union. As a consequence, the role of the rotating Council presidency has been downgraded, making way for the central EU bureaucracy to represent the EU in the international arena. Yet, as far as its parliamentary dimension is concerned, there appears to be an important post-Lisbon paradox: the role of the rotating presidency is enhanced. This is due, in part to the increased role of national parliaments and of the European Parliament post-Lisbon, and in part, to the role that each parliament of the country holding the Presidency decides to adopt. On that respect, during the Greek EU Council presidency, the Greek Parliament undertook an active role making use of the powers conferred to it by the treaties. The current analysis focuses on the Inter-Parliamentary Conference on CFSP/CSDP during the Greek presidency.

## Key Words:

Parliamentary diplomacy, EU rotating presidency, Inter-Parliamentary Conference on CFSP/CSDP, EU external affairs.

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# The parliamentary dimension of EU external affairs during the 2014 Greek Presidency

## Introduction

It is difficult to assess any Presidency in general, and the Greek Presidency in particular, as there are no specific criteria for doing so due to the fact that literature remains rather limited on the subject<sup>2</sup>. Past evaluations have often tended to be attempts at showing “success” (on Spain, see Powell 2003; for a critical review on Greece, see Stavridis 2003), often biased by party political or ideological preferences (for an extensive critique in the case of Spanish foreign policy, see Stavridis 2013). Diachronic assessments also sometimes fail to take into consideration evolving institutional and other legal arrangements, let alone changes in the international environment.

Thus, it is important to try to contextualize what rotating presidencies can or cannot do but it is as important to try and avoid unnecessary hype: for instance, Piedrafita and Conroy repeatedly qualify the 2014 Greek Presidency as a “success” which allowed for “landmark” decisions ... before lowering themselves their own hype with references to coincidence of calendars for several events or that at the end of the day, Greece basically “held numerous working party meetings to ensure that the other member states were informed and involved in the negotiations” (Piedrafita, Conroy 2014: 3). Not much to boast about in other words.

Greece undertook the rotating EU Council Presidency during a rather troublesome period, marked by internal economic uncertainty, political skepticism and worrisome developments in Europe's periphery. Yet, even though the country's situation was alarming in many ways, expectations on its foreign policy abilities were fairly high, focusing, mainly on cooperation opportunities with non-EU partners in Europe's neighborhood and not only (Gianniou 2013). Certainly, assuming the Presidency during an important juncture, Greece had to find the way to foster growth and ensure prosperity both within its borders and on the entire European environment. This is why the Presidency programme<sup>3</sup> mainly focused on stimulating growth and employment and on promoting social cohesion (see also Piedrafita, Conroy 2014). At the same time, Greece had to come up with pertinent recommendations for Europe's main external challenges, i.e. immigration flows, stability in

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<sup>2</sup> For an effort in that direction, but dealing with “internal” EU policies and not with international affairs, see Maciej Kaczynski (2011).

<sup>3</sup> [www.gr2014.eu/sites/default/files/draft%20programme.pdf](http://www.gr2014.eu/sites/default/files/draft%20programme.pdf).

the neighborhood, energy security etc. Moreover, what is more important is the fact that according to the new institutional framework established by Lisbon the rotating Presidency's role regarding EU foreign policy matters was considerably downgraded, making way for the High Representative and the EEAS to undertake the leading role. Yet, a rather interesting paradox has emerged: the role of the rotating Presidency was enhanced as far as its parliamentary dimension is concerned<sup>4</sup>. This is in part due to (a) a direct result of the increased role of national parliaments and of the European Parliament following the Lisbon Treaty; and (b) the role that each parliament of the country holding the Presidency decides to take - or not<sup>5</sup>.

The current analysis focuses on the parliamentary dimension of the Greek EU Council Presidency and tries to pinpoint its input in the EU foreign policy system via the use of parliamentary instruments, more specifically, the Inter-Parliamentary Conference on CFSP/CSDP.

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<sup>4</sup> Formally and legally speaking it is the High Representative who presides this Council: “The High Representative exercises, in foreign affairs, the functions *which, so far, were exercised by the six-monthly rotating Presidency*, the High Representative for CFSP and the Commissioner for External Relations”.

<sup>5</sup> On this question in general, see Heffler, Kreiling, Rozenberg, Wessels (2013). On specific cases, as for instance France or Portugal, see Jancic (2013 and 2011) respectively. See also below.

## The Greek Presidency and External Affairs

The Greek Presidency in 2014 was the *fifth* Greek rotating EU Presidency since the country joined the EU (then EEC) in 1981 - but the first one after the Lisbon Treaty institutional modifications, in particular those that deal with the EU Council Presidency and with the EU's external representation.

It was a particularly arduous presidency not only because of the rather dubious record of the previous ones, especially that of 1983 and that of 2003, which occurred within the special context of the war in Iraq (see Stavridis 2003), but more specifically because of the deep economic, financial, social and above all political crisis that Greece has been involved in over the past few years. As Piedrafita and Conroy (2014: 1) further explain: “[e]xpectations of the Greek presidency were not high: the available budget was limited, the legislative term was drawing to a close and the European Parliament dissolved in mid-April for the elections”. This “shorter” presidency (Chatzistavrou 2014: 1) could however be seen as particularly important for a country where anti-European sentiments had grown hand in hand with the various EU plans to stave off the deep economic crisis in the country (see below). Indeed such an opportunity could have offered the possibility for the country holding the Presidency to set out what Chatzistavrou calls a “mandate [that] could potentially transform the narrative structure of Europe” (Chatzistavrou 2014: 1).<sup>6</sup>

In practical terms, considerable budget cuts affected both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defense. In 2011 alone there was a 22% Budget cut (FP represents 0.29% of the overall budget). Intensive and severe budgetary cuts affected, *inter alia*, Greece's activities in the military and the diplomatic realm. For instance:

- ▶ 7 consulates were closed;
- ▶ 28 August 2011, 24 m euros were saved when a Greek frigate was withdrawn from Operation ATALANTA (against piracy in the Indian Ocean, off the coasts of Somalia);
- ▶ Total international peace mission participation costs going down: 122.5 m in 2010 to 70.5 m in 2011 and 33 m in 2012;
- ▶ Defence (real cuts) respectively in Greece, compared to rest of EU27: 2008-2011:  
-26% -6.2% / 2009-2011: - 28.9% -7.8%;
- ▶ In % of GDP, 2008, 2009, and 2010 respectively: 3% 1.5%, 3.2% 1.6%, 2.3% 1.5% (Dokos, Kollias 2013; Grigoriadis 2012; Liargovas, Repousis 2013: 76-81).

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<sup>6</sup> Irrespective of (or perhaps because of) the rather narrow focus on discourse that constructivists tend to take, her study also suffers greatly for being written at the beginning of the Presidency, that is to say well before being able to assess it.

On top of the budgetary and financial implications, in the political realm, the crisis has practically ended bipartisanship and given rise to (political) extremes (Anastakis, Singh 2006: 6). But, most of all, it has generated a strong anti-EU sentiment among the Greek population:

“Before the crisis began in 2012, EU membership was associated in Greece with economic progress, prosperity, and modernity following totalitarian rule. But since then, Greece has gone through severe recession, harsh austerity, structural reform, and humiliating bailouts. Unsurprisingly, this traumatic experience has led to a precipitous fall in Greek support for the EU: in 2007 net support was +26 percent; by 2012 it was -63 percent” (Leonard, Torreblanca 2014: 4, emphasis added).

As Chatzistavrou (2014: 2) also reminds us, “most Greeks consider the EU as being responsible for the austerity measures imposed since the beginning of the crisis”. Although she does not mention the other side of the same coin (i.e. the EU-led bailouts and other support measures), she is right to focus on the importance of “populist ideas” in Greece. In terms of capabilities, Chatzistavrou (2014: 47) summarizes the financial limitations of the Greek Presidency:

Greece (...) has a budget of no more than €50 million, while the cost of past rotating presidencies – the Irish and Cypriot for example – ranged between €60 and €80 million.

The Greek EU Council Presidency placed unemployment and social relief at the top of its agenda, as well as other issues of paramount importance to EU foreign policy (southern Mediterranean countries and Eastern neighbors, development cooperation as an essential tool of EU external action, etc.). The Greek Presidency's preoccupations also reflected ongoing tensions in the international arena: the nuclear issue in Iran, the situation in Ukraine and in Syria or the EU involvement, through two CSDP missions, in Mali. At the same time, a clear “Mediterranean bias” could be seen in the organization of a meeting in Athens with the Arab League and the launch of AMICI, a southern Mediterranean Investment Coordination Initiative<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Notes are also omitted.

<sup>8</sup> On the Initiative, see *Southern Mediterranean Investment Coordination Initiative (AMICI): Mapping/stocktaking exercise key findings* (2014): [www.enpi-info.eu/medportal/publications//747/Southern-Mediterranean-Investment-Coordination-Initiative-\(AMICI\):-Mapping/stocktaking-exercise-key-findings](http://www.enpi-info.eu/medportal/publications//747/Southern-Mediterranean-Investment-Coordination-Initiative-(AMICI):-Mapping/stocktaking-exercise-key-findings) (as accessed, 09.03.15).

For a background to the Initiative see the December 2014 Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions: [www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/146255.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/146255.pdf) (as accessed, 09.03.15).



## The Parliamentary Dimension of the Greek Presidency

All of the above has implications and raises additional questions about the parliamentary dimension of the EU Presidency in general. In other words, how does the parliamentary dimension fit in the wider EU Presidency? Since the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, each EU Presidency includes a parliamentary dimension, including joint parliamentary meetings with the European Parliament, joint committee meetings, sectorial committee meetings<sup>9</sup> and Inter-Parliamentary Conferences on specific issues (European Parliament, 2010<sup>10</sup>).

During the last years the role of national and transnational parliamentary bodies in the conduct of foreign policy has significantly increased. Although diplomacy traditionally remains within the hands of national governments, empirical evidence suggests that parliaments and parliamentarians offer alternative ways to customary diplomacy, not only complementing the work of the executive, but at the same time paving the way to new and innovative forms on how to establish sound relations within an international framework. As such, they offer valuable support to the promotion of democratic practice, they inform the public opinion and involve civil society representatives to the foreign policy agenda, they promote and build relations based on mutual trust, while providing, at the same time, complementary action on conflict prevention, human rights, social development and other internationally crucial matters.

A number of scholars have advanced the idea that greater national parliamentary involvement in international affairs is greatly due to a number of reasons such as the democratization of politics, the adjustment of foreign policy to the public sphere, or the technological developments (Stavridis 2004: 291). At the same time, parliamentary bodies repeatedly have to deal with issues outside the domestic realm and often related to governmental activity in international organizations (Weisglas, de Boer 2007: 94). Additionally, the importance of regionalization in international relations has led to the proliferation of transnational parliamentary bodies, creating thus opportunities for the conduct of what is generally coined as parliamentary diplomacy.

The concept of parliamentary diplomacy is not widely researched in the academic literature. It would be quite inappropriate to try providing a strict definition of the notion, as parliamentary diplomacy could encompass a great number of activities and processes. In general terms,

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<sup>9</sup> Which also requires preparatory work prior to holding the Presidency as the example of the joint meeting of the Hellenic Parliament Standing Committees on National Defense and Foreign Affairs, Economic Affairs, Production and Trade and the Special Standing Committee on European Affairs with a delegation of the EP Committee on International Trade on December 18, 2013 at the Hellenic Parliament Senate Room shows:  
[www.gr2014parliament.eu/Media/PressReleases/TabId/928/ArtMID/2667/ArticleID/89/Visit-to-the-Hellenic-Parliament-of-the-EP-Committee-on-International-Trade-INTA-in-view-of-the-Greek-Presidency.aspx](http://www.gr2014parliament.eu/Media/PressReleases/TabId/928/ArtMID/2667/ArticleID/89/Visit-to-the-Hellenic-Parliament-of-the-EP-Committee-on-International-Trade-INTA-in-view-of-the-Greek-Presidency.aspx) (as accessed, 25 May 2015).

<sup>10</sup> See the relevant EP resolution at: EP resolution, 7 July 2011, P7\_TA(2011)0337:

[www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P7-TA-2011-0337+0+DOC+XML+Vo//EN](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P7-TA-2011-0337+0+DOC+XML+Vo//EN) (as accessed, 25.05.15)..

parliamentary diplomacy refers to the role played by parliamentarians and parliaments in foreign policy development and international relations. Its cutting-edge quality lies in the fact that “it differs from traditional approaches to diplomacy by shifting focus away from the actions of Ministers and States”<sup>11</sup>. By doing so, it encompasses multi-level operations ranging from inter-parliamentary activity (interaction between different groups within a parliamentary body, such as political parties or committees) to extra-parliamentary activity, such as communication between different parliamentary bodies or between parliaments and diverse political stakeholders (government, civil society representatives, political advocacy groups etc.). More specifically, as Stavridis proposes, parliamentary diplomacy entails:

- MPs missions abroad and participation in transnational parliamentary bodies;
- visits by other MPs and parliamentary delegations to parliaments and other institutions (national or transnational);
- questions (written and oral), reports and other studies on foreign affairs that take place within a parliamentary body;
- the activities of transnational parliamentary bodies;
- parliamentary participation in the monitoring of elections in third countries (Stavridis 2002).

Traditionally, parliament involvement in foreign policy formulation is limited because of the executive's reluctance to allow public opinion and political parties to have influence on such a sensitive domain of national sovereignty. But, as Herranz-Surrallés notes, “sidestepping parliaments in decisions on the use of force [and foreign policy decisions in general] is becoming more difficult in practice” (Herranz-Surrallés 2014: 2). Using different tools and methods, parliamentary diplomacy has a two-fold aim: (a) on the one hand, it monitors developments in national and transnational foreign policy via democratic accountability mechanisms and (b) on the other hand, it seeks to influence, on the short, medium or long-term, the formation, execution and evaluation of foreign policy (Malamud, Stavridis 2011: 102).

On the EU level, monitoring EU foreign policy decisions has become a cumbersome challenge for national parliaments, mainly, because of the hybrid nature of EU foreign policy, which involves a number of actors (Huff 2013). At the same time, the European Parliament is better placed, than national assemblies, to monitor CFSP/CSDP developments, having, *inter alia*, easier access to the EU executive, supervising activities through the Foreign Affairs Committee (AFET) committee and the Security and Defence sub-committee (SEDE), questioning the High Representative/Commission Vice-President in plenary session, participating in Joint Consultation Meetings (JCMs) held on a regular basis with the Council, the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the Commission, and having budgetary powers. The EP has gained, overtime, prerogatives and rights regarding its

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<sup>11</sup> Interview, November 2014, Athens.

involvement in EU foreign policy, which are stipulated in the Treaties but also in the form of inter-institutional agreements (Herranz-Surrallés 2011: 5-6)<sup>12</sup>.

With the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, member states' national parliaments acquired extended powers and duties regarding their participation in EU policy-making. These new provisions respond to the demand for a more democratic and transparent Europe and guarantee, to a certain degree, a parliamentary insight into the work of the EU.

As a result, national parliaments have, under article 12 TEU, the following basic rights: (a) information on legislative acts; (b) subsidiarity control; (c) participation in the evaluation mechanisms for the implementation of the Union policies in the area of freedom, security and justice; (d) inter-parliamentary cooperation; (e) revision of the Treaties; (f) notification regarding accession. Title I, articles 1 to 8 of the Protocol 1 on the role of national parliaments in the EU, describes the information procedure for national parliaments. In particular, EU institutions must forward draft legislative acts to national parliaments, which, in their turn, issue an opinion on whether the legislative act complies with the principle of subsidiarity or not. Title II, articles 9 and 10 determines the inter-parliamentary cooperation between national parliaments and the European Parliament, noting that a conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs may be able to organize conferences with a special focus on issues relating to the EU's common foreign and security policy, including common security and defense policy.

As far as the parliamentary dimension of the Greek Presidency goes<sup>13</sup>, a number of events having an international implication took place, including COSAC meetings<sup>14</sup>, the 7<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Plenary Session of EUROLAT that was held in Athens on 27-29 March<sup>15</sup>, the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly that took place in Strasbourg<sup>16</sup>. In terms of sectoral events, a Meeting of Chairpersons of the Committees on Justice and Home Affairs took place on 16-17 February, that of Chairpersons of the Committees on Production, Trade and Maritime Affairs on 16-17 March, and finally that of Joint

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<sup>12</sup> For a more comprehensive assessment of the EP in international affairs, see Stavridis, Irrera (2015).

<sup>13</sup> For more information and details: [www.gr2014.eu/](http://www.gr2014.eu/) & [www.gr2014parliament.eu/en-gb/homepage.aspx](http://www.gr2014parliament.eu/en-gb/homepage.aspx).

<sup>14</sup> Following normal COSAC practice, two meetings took place, one at the beginning of the Presidency on 26-27 January, that of its Chairpersons, and the other towards its end on 15-17 June, that of its full session, its session number 51: the main international issues covered were migration, the Western Balkans, and Ukraine. See [www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/media/committees/euaffairs/Final-COSAC-Report\\_09072014.pdf](http://www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/media/committees/euaffairs/Final-COSAC-Report_09072014.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> It is quite surprising to see such an event in Athens, a country with little official links with Latin America. Yet, it seems that the Greek Government and its Parliament made a special effort in hosting that event. That led to a number of practical problems because of the delay in deciding its final venue between Athens and Brussels (the dates initially discussed also coincided with a national holiday in Greece – 25<sup>th</sup> March) but eventually it took place in the Senate Room and other premises of the Hellenic Parliament. The event was held at the specific invitation of the Greek Presidency as a whole, not only its parliamentary dimension<sup>15</sup>, although formally speaking it does not appear on the list of events organized by the Parliamentary Dimension of the Presidency. One of the authors attended the event as an academic observer. For more on the EuroLat in general see Ajenjo, Stavridis (2012).

<sup>16</sup> The ACP-JPA Plenary was held in Strasbourg on 17-19 March 2014 and the Speaker of the Hellenic Parliament Evangelos Meimarakis was present at the opening Presidency: [www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/acp/2014\\_strasbourg/pdf/acp\\_strasbourg\\_background\\_en.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/acp/2014_strasbourg/pdf/acp_strasbourg_background_en.pdf).

Meeting of the Committees on Justice and Home Affairs on 19 March. The Inter-parliamentary Conference on Economic Governance of the European Union was held on 20-22 January. Finally on 3-4 April, the Inter-parliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CFSP/CSDP) celebrated the first of its bi-annual sessions in Athens. We now turn to it in more detail in the following section.

## The Inter-Parliamentary Conference on the CFSP-CSDP and its Athens Session

What follows focuses on the 3-4 April 2014 Athens IPC for CFSP-CSDP, as this has now become a key parliamentary event for EU foreign, security and defence issues. The section begins by looking at the IPC's origins and developments, before it analyzes the Athens event.

The dissolution of the WEU Parliamentary Assembly in 2011 left a considerable gap regarding parliamentary control on foreign policy and defence issues, which had been *de facto* exercised by the Assembly since 1954. Unsurprisingly, this vacuum was also reflected in the Lisbon Treaty provisions regarding the role of the national parliaments in EU matters. In particular, articles 9 and 10 of Protocol I offered the possibility of establishing inter-parliamentary foreign and defence policy control instruments. Yet, the lack of specific proposals left the room open for divergent interpretations (Wouters, Roubé 2012: 7), especially between the European Parliament and the COSAC regarding the way in which inter-parliamentary control should be structured. The EP insisted that any monitoring mechanism should be based on cooperation between the EP on the one hand and national parliaments on the other (EP resolution 2011). On the contrary, COSAC considered that its initiatives organized under article 10 could also assume a more regular character (Blanke, Mangiameli 2013: 1603). At the same time, there were concerns expressed by national and European practitioners as to what extent the EP should be granted the right to exercise parliamentary control over security and defence issues (Herranz-Sorrales 2011: 23).

Eventually (Stavridis 2014; Butler 2015), as it is often the case in EU matters, compromise led the way and, in April 2012, the Conference of Speakers of EU Parliaments officially established the Inter-Parliamentary Conference (IPC) for the CFSP and the CSDP. Since its creation, the Conference has convened in total five times (Cyprus, Ireland, Lithuania, Greece, Italy), once every six months in the country holding the Presidency of the Council of the EU.

In Athens, the IPC took place in April 2014 and its works basically focused on Europe's southern and eastern neighborhood major challenges, with the issue of Ukraine and recent developments in the Middle East monopolizing the agenda.

In general, both the national parliament of the EU presidency country and the European Parliament have an equal footing in the organization of each biannual conference. This was also the case for the Greek IPC, with consultations regarding organization issues beginning at least three months before the meeting actually took place. Within this framework, members of the Hellenic Parliament met with Elmar Brok, Chair of the EP Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET), in order to set the agenda. Even though the European Parliament is, in fact, the principle coordinator of each IPC, the Greek EU Presidency pushed forward its own priorities which were eventually reflected in the three workshops that were organized during the second day of the IPC: (a) "European Union Maritime Security Strategy, the maritime dimension of the Common Security and

Defence Policy"; (b) "Recent developments in the Middle East" and (c) "Deploying military forces under CSDP, parliamentary decision making procedures and practices". Besides the leading role of the country holding the Presidency, at the same time, the final agenda is structured on the basis of consultations between the EP, the rotating EU Presidency and the Presidency Trio (in this case Ireland, Lithuania, Greece).

Examining foreign, security and defence policy issues from an inter-parliamentary perspective constitutes a delicate exercise and reveals the multi-layered decision-making process of EU foreign policy, which involves a plethora of actors. This administrative patchwork is clearly reflected in the interventions made during the Athens IPC. As such, Elmar Brok spoke on behalf of the EP, the Greek ministers of foreign affairs and of defence spoke on behalf of the EU Presidency, the Chair of the standing committee on national defence and foreign affairs, Mr Tsiaras, a Greek MP, spoke on behalf of the Hellenic Parliament, the HR/VP spoke using her double-hat position, while the deputy secretary general for inter-institutional affairs, Mr Popowski, spoke on behalf of the EEAS. At the same time, during debate, interventions were made by a number of MPs and MEPs, as well as by observers, who have the right to speak during questions and answers time. In their interventions during the opening session, the workshops and the debates, MPs and MEPs stressed the importance of a stronger European role in foreign affairs, especially in light of the ongoing crises in Europe's periphery.

Yet, besides lofty declarations on EU's international and regional duties, it remains to be seen whether the IPC has, in fact, any kind of parliamentary oversight in Europe's hectic foreign and security policy. Each IPC culminates with the final conclusions, which summarize the key points raised during the meeting. In Athens, the six-page text underlined the main challenges Europe was facing at that time in its neighborhood, i.e. Ukraine, Syria, and Egypt. Regarding European defence, the need to follow up the European Council on defence in December 2013 was expressed, while welcoming, at the same time, the joint communication between the Commission and the HR/VP on a European comprehensive approach to external conflicts and crises. The Greek Presidency's priorities were reflected in the final text with the reference on the adoption by the Commission and the HR/VP of the joint communication on EU maritime security strategy, as well as a comment on the resumption of negotiations on the Cyprus issue.

In fact, the IPC on CFSP/CSDP, as one MP observed<sup>17</sup>, does not provide a mechanism which can impose the conference's conclusions on the European executive with a view of integrating them in the EU foreign policy-making process. As such, it could be judged as yet another forum of exchange of views, with no parliamentary oversight whatsoever. But, many participants consider that the IPC constitutes a platform for supervising EU foreign and security policy because it offers MPs and MEPs the possibility of asking questions to key EU foreign policy decision-makers. Indeed, during debate time, participants are inscribed in the speakers' list and have two minutes each to intervene and pose their question.

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<sup>17</sup> Interview, November 2014, Athens.

In Athens, MPs and MEPs made full use of this prerogative by insisting on issues of both European and national importance. Members of the European Parliament were mostly interested in challenging the HR/VP, while members of national parliaments put forward issues of national interest. For example, the Baltic countries insisted on Russia's involvement in Ukraine, Cyprus on Turkey's provocations, or France on the situation in Mali. Through questioning, debating and challenging, MPs and MEPs can actually participate, in an indirect way, in EU foreign policy-making. The IPC's final conclusions constitute a subtle exercise of compromise, although its wider impact and in particular on the European executive remain an open question. At many times, the wording used in the final conclusions is identical to the conclusions of the Council of foreign affairs, as one MP underlined<sup>18</sup>, noting that "it is difficult to tell who follows whom". There is, consequently, evidence of interaction, granting the IPC on CFSP/CSDP a special place in the EU foreign policy system.

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<sup>18</sup> Interview, November 2014, Athens.

## Conclusions

The current analysis focused on the parliamentary dimension of the Greek EU Council Presidency. It has shown that whereas the Lisbon Treaty reforms have on the whole downgraded the importance of the rotating Presidency, as far as its parliamentary dimension is concerned, there appears to be an important paradox following Lisbon: the role of the rotating presidency is enhanced. As shown here, this results in part from the increased role of national parliaments and of the European Parliament post Lisbon, and in part, from the role that each parliament of the country holding the Presidency decides to adopt: the Greek government and the Greek Parliament decided to take an active part in that respect. This conclusion does not refer to whether there is success or failure in the policy efforts. For such an assessment to occur one would need precise and objective criteria, something that the current literature (including this piece), have not managed to produce to date. However, the more research, especially empirical, there is, the more likely such criteria will be identified.

In short, even though (1) the EU continues to be a Union of states and (2) parliamentary input still remains rather limited as far as foreign policy and security or defence issues are concerned, and again (3) the new system of EU international representation following Lisbon has reduced the external role of the rotating presidency, this study shows that somewhat paradoxically this situation has enhanced the potential role of national and EU parliaments in those specific areas. What remains to be seen still is how practice will meet theory. The EU's overall and specific deficits in foreign and security policies remain important challenges for its future.

Yet, contrary (or in addition to, as the following quote covers internal and institutional issues exclusively), on international affairs it does not seem to be the case that "[u]nder the [Lisbon Treaty] new system, the rotating presidencies' "political" dimension has been seriously limited, if not eradicated" (Maciej Kaczynski 2010: 340). In fact, quite the opposite as this study has shown.



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