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# Governance, accountability, and political legitimacy: who participates in the European parliament's committee hearings (ECON 2004–2014)

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## ABSTRACT

The Europeanization of economic and financial governance poses a legitimacy question for the European Parliament (EP). Drawing from theories on resource-exchange and institutional legitimacy, we argue that committee hearings allow the EP to demonstrate its relevance as a political authority. We test our argument, focusing on the Committee on Economic & Monetary Affairs (ECON). Through an unprecedented systematic analysis of its hearings; we provide a fine-grained identification of all participants across two legislatures (2004–2014). We observe a considerable shift in the use of hearings from the 6th to the 7th legislature, reflected in the increase of events and participants. While business interests retain a strong presence, the participants' composition changes substantially. Research organizations and EU-level executive bodies saw the largest increase. Conversely, national level executive bodies saw a decrease in participation. Theoretically, we examine an understudied area of European governance, while contributing to discussions on interest group access, agency accountability, and deliberative procedures.

## KEYWORDS

European Parliament;  
Committee Hearings;  
Interest Groups; Governance;  
Legitimacy

## 1 Introduction

In recent years, the European Union (EU) has highlighted the role of procedures as an instrument protecting its democratic credentials against institutional capture, opaque policy-making, and public critique (Commission 2001; Schmidt 2013). The European Parliament (EP), being the EU's only directly elected representative institution, has received scholarly attention. Indicatively, the literature has examined the tensions between transparency and informality within committees (Fasone and Lupo 2015) as well as stakeholder mobilization (Lehmann, 2009; Coen, Lehmann, and Katsaitis 2021).

Nevertheless, little work examines committee hearings and their participants. Hearings are formal parliamentary procedures through which committees engage with various actors such as executive institutions, regulatory agencies, business interests, and civil society, to name but a few. By leaving them unexamined, we treat a formal procedure as

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a black box, downplaying calls for further transparency over such procedures (Pedersen, Halpin, and Rasmussen 2015), undervaluing their role as accountability mechanisms (see Eriksen and Katsaitis 2020), and overlooking questions of expertise-bias in the EU's governance (Bunea 2017; Rasmussen and Gross 2015). Overall, this limits the scope of the conceptual debate.

In this paper, we aim to assess the participants in the EP's hearings by exploring an understudied aspect of European governance. We focus on the Committee on Economic & Monetary Affairs (ECON) a central committee that has seen an increase in its responsibilities over time (Fasone 2014), in particular, following the Lisbon Treaty and later the Six-pack and Two-pack legislative reforms (Bressanelli and Chelotti 2016; Fromage 2018). Two interrelated questions come up: Which organizations participate in hearings? How has their composition changed over time?

Hearings are an instrument that serves different committee functions, and by implication leads to different actors' participation. First, hearings are linked with the legislative process (Costa & Brack 2018). As (co-) legislators, parliaments must produce legislative outputs formally informed by representative policy stakeholders (Coen and Katsaitis 2019a, 2019b). Second, parliaments act as the ultimate forum of political accountability scrutinizing the Commission, EU agencies, and the European Central Bank (Busuioc 2013). Third, the EP's committees are increasingly using hearings as a way of empowering themselves vis-à-vis the Commission and the Council (Héritier et al. 2019). Finally, as ECON's responsibilities over key policy areas became greater the use of hearings and participants over time is likely to have increased.

Addressing this research question is important in a number of ways. Research assessing the EP's interaction with policy stakeholders has expanded over time, but committee hearings and their participants have evaded this focus. By examining hearings across time, we gain an important insight into the parliament's evolution within economic governance, and the role of its hearings.

The paper maps and comparatively assesses the specific institutions, and organizations represented by speakers participating in the committee's hearings across the 6<sup>th</sup> (2004–2009) and 7<sup>th</sup> (2009–2014) legislatures. The results indicate a considerable shift from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> legislature, reflected in a dramatic increase in the number of events and participants. While business interests retain a strong presence, the participants' composition changes substantially. The participants representing research organization increases significantly, participants representing other political organizations decrease, and more executive authorities participate from one legislature to the next.

The paper provides an unprecedented systematic study of an entire population of hearings' participants across two legislatures, creating an original dataset of 290 speakers across 66 events. Methodologically, it innovates through meticulous archival work, providing a fine-grained identification of the participants and linking them to specific hearings. By doing so, the paper provides material for further research into the interplay between the EP and other actors (institutional, and interest group). Moreover, the paper contributes to our understanding of the EP and its role in the EU's monetary, financial, and economic policy (see for example, Majone 2014; Mathieu 2016; Dawson, Enderlein, and Joerges 2015; Collignon and Diessner 2016; Chang and Hodson 2019); and it indirectly adds to broader discussions on deliberative democracy, governance and parliaments (see

for example, Fishkin and Mansbridge 2017; Crum and Fossum 2013; Chaqués-Bonafont and Muñoz Márquez 2016; Martin 2011).

We begin with a discussion on the role of hearings and ECON's policy-making responsibilities, which acts as a guiding tool aiding this novel research venture. We then focus on the research design and analysis, and finally we present the discussion-conclusions.

## 2. Hearings: purpose & participants

To understand which organizations participate in ECON's hearings and how this might have changed across time, we must first address the hearing's purpose from an institutional-organizational perspective; as well as ECON's policy-making responsibilities. The EP has different forms of public events generally titled 'hearings' that act as forums allowing its committees to engage with various policy stakeholders through formal procedures. The EP's Rules of Procedure stipulate on hearings that '*[b]y special decision of a committee any other person may be invited to attend and to speak at a meeting*' (Rules of Procedure 2017). Hearings are open to the public, recorded, often live-streamed online, and available on the EP's online archive free of charge.

Organizing these events requires consensus, as well as exchanges between the committee's political groups (primarily party whips), the secretariat, the relevant file's rapporteur (and shadow-rapporteurs), the potential participants, and the EP's research service; all of which constrain partisan effects on the individuals invited. Nevertheless, the participants reflect also the purpose behind the hearing, which is intricately linked with the committee's policy-making responsibilities.

The Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs is a central EP committee. ECON is one of the first EP committees to wield substantial policy-making power, due to the Single Market's creation with the Maastricht Treaty in 1991 and the progressive integration of the above mentioned areas. It is also one of most populous committees in terms of the number of MEPs that are members. MEPs that act as committee chairs or vice-chairs in ECON tend to come from and/or continue to high-level positions within their domestic political arena or in the EU bubble. It is responsible for regulating financial services, it oversees policy on the free movement of capital and payments as well as policy on taxation and competition policies; it also has oversight of the European Central Bank and EU-level agencies in these fields.

In simpler terms, ECON is involved in three central policy fields, monetary policy, financial policy, and economic policy. However, not all three policy fields are equally or similarly Europeanized and/or involve the EP. Therefore, its involvement in legislating and holding actors to account varies across them. In the last 20 years all three policy areas have become Europeanized especially following the 2008 crisis; ECON's legislative responsibilities have been more pronounced in financial policy.

In the area of financial policy ECON holds policy-making authority under the ordinary legislative procedure, as such it can influence legislation directly. Moreover, following 2010 it is the political authority holding to account the newly created EU-level agencies linked to this field, specifically the European Securities & Markets Authority (ESMA), as well as the European Banking Authority (EBA), and the European Insurance and Occupational Pensions Authority (EIOPA). Monetary policy is the responsibility of the European Central

Bank that acts independently from political bodies. Nevertheless, ECON is responsible for holding the ECB to account, this includes questioning/interviewing future ECB presidents as well as annual exchanges considering the EU's economy and monetary policy.

Over the last 10 years, the EP has managed to gain a greater role in economic governance under the Lisbon Treaty, and specifically through the Six-pack and Two-pack legislative reforms that introduced the component of 'economic dialogues'. Economic dialogues *'are held in order to enhance the dialogue between institutions on the application of economic governance rules and with Member States'* (EP 2019). While the EP does not hold legislative powers in this area it has the ability to influence discussions through dialogue, making hearings a central venue.

Overall, ECON holds legislative responsibilities, and acts as a check for executive institutions. Hearings act a formal procedure that allow these central responsibilities to be facilitated via formal information exchange. From a legislative perspective, especially in the area of financial policy, they offer a formal space through which policy-makers and policy stakeholders can exchange opinions aiming to inform and formally legitimize policy outcomes; this includes interest groups as well as Institutions. Second, hearings are a tool for holding agencies that fall under ECON's responsibility to account (primarily in the area of financial policy), as well as communicating with the ECB (monetary policy). Third, hearings offer a space for exchanges between the EP and the Council and the Commission explicitly on economic policy, where it holds less authority but remains a relevant actors.

Nevertheless, without systematic analyses of hearings and their participants we limit our understanding of the procedure, and the objectives it serves. Significantly, changes in the EU's financial, monetary, and economic policy are likely to have altered their use and their participants. Below we outline how the use of hearings and their participants are likely to have changed over time.

## 2.1. Policy-making & interest groups

Due to information-asymmetries between the executives (supported by bureaucracies) and the parliaments' limited research capacity, members of parliament rely on information-expertise supplied by external actors (Austen-Smith 1993). Moreover, while producing legislation parliamentarians must also demonstrate that their legislative activities take into consideration pertinent actors' position. Therefore, parliamentary committees invite relevant interest groups, and consult with them over their policy-making activity.

From a supply side perspective, economic and financial policy is one of the most populated policy fields in Brussels (JTR 2019). A substantial body of lobbyists compete to gain access into the EP's policy-making process and influence economic governance, and these efforts include contacting MEPs and their offices, contacting the committees' secretariats (see for example, Marshall 2015; Chalmers 2013), as well as participating in formal procedures, such as hearings. In this sense, while interest group participation in committee hearings does not automatically improve policy-making outcomes, it does offer MEPs relevant expertise from different stakeholder perspectives.

Considering the groups likely to be participating in hearings across the two legislatures, we take into account the following. Given that economic sectors tend to feature high levels of business interest mobilization, we expect business interests to show

significant participation in committee hearings. However, the category of ‘business interests’ is broad, and so we set out some more granular assumptions regarding the different types of business interests present.

In the EU, the overarching framework governing financial regulation is Europeanised, but the actual implementation of the rules remains a national competence. Thus, in a multi-level regulatory environment that is territorially divided national level associations and businesses are better suited to provide cohesive expertise than EU level associations (Coen and Salter 2020; Chalmers 2018; Quaglia 2010). Indeed, the after-effects of the financial crisis exacerbated this reality, as trust between actors involved in financial governance deteriorated (Guiso 2010). On this basis, we expect that more business associations from the national level and fewer European-level associations participated during the 7<sup>th</sup> legislature. Moreover, dominant business actors, such as banks, are likely to have formed a greater portion of participants during the 7<sup>th</sup> legislature as the committee sought reliable and relevant actors to provide information.

Conversely, bearing in mind the distributive effects of the new banking union (Everson 2015; Claeys, Hallerberg, and Tschekassin 2014), citizens and civil society groups have a clear incentive to participate in policy making over economic governance. Therefore, ECON may have opted to increase the number of organizations representing the public interest (e.g. civil society) participating in hearings, to address critiques of ‘policy without politics’ in Brussels (Schmidt 2006), and to improve public perceptions over its legislative outputs. Indicatively, MEPs supported the creation of an EU level NGO focused exclusively on financial regulation. We note that these efforts may follow the effect of interest groups’ media coverage vis-à-vis the financial sector (De Bruycker and Beyers 2015). Overall, we expect that over time the number of civil society participants in hearings increased.

Finally, we consider a less discussed group: research organizations. As policy-making becomes progressively more complex, parliaments invite experts, such as think tanks, universities, and research institutes to give advice over their legislative activity. These groups provide a double benefit: as high-level experts in a particular field, they address an objective informational demand (Radaelli 1999). Simultaneously, they allow representatives to hold debates that are epistemic in nature minimizing political differences, making it easier for actors to pivot positions and reach agreement over legislative choices (Estlund 2009). As such, we also expect an increase in the number of research organizations participating in committee hearings over time.

## **2.2. Co-legislating & institutions**

Overall, ECON’s policy-making role in the central areas it is involved has increased over time, which in turn has increased its formal and informal interaction with EU institutions. Specifically, the European Commission and the Council. To maintain communication and improve policy-making flows, the Commission and the Council have permanent representatives during committee hearings. In other words, the Council and the Commission can have (and almost always do) a representative during a hearing that follows the exchanges during it. Nevertheless, this does not automatically preclude participation, as these representatives are primarily observers. On the contrary, when a representative for the Commission or the Council is to formally participate in a hearing a representative is included in the hearing’s formal schedule.

As such, it is likely that over time the presence of the Commission and the Council is likely to have increased in hearings as participants. Legislative responsibility in financial regulation means that ECON is likelier to hold hearings in order to formalize the exchange of opinion and policy-making outcomes. In doing so, the committee manages to expose differences between the Commission and the Council and to strengthen its position (Héritier et al. 2019).

While scholars argue that the EP's ability to impact policy outcomes in economic governance is limited (Bressanelli and Chelotti 2016, 2018), the current structure of economic governance places the EP at the centre of EU level inter-institutional discussions. Thus, changes in the EU's system of economic governance have shifted authority from the broader national level, placing it in the hand of national governments and intergovernmental bargaining in Brussels (Fasone 2014; Fabbri and Puetter 2016; Auel and Hoing 2014). We note that, six-pack and two-pack negotiations have made hearings the main way through which these actors engage in dialogue. As such, it is likely that over time interactions through hearings is likely to have increased.

### **2.3. Hearings & accountability forum**

Decreasing barriers to trade and economic integration have supported the creation of specialized depoliticized bodies, or non-majoritarian regulators on a global scale (Coen and Thatcher 2005). The EU is no exception with its 'agencification' discussed extensively within the literature (Levi-Faur 2011). In this environment, a substantial part of policy-making and policy implementation is conducted by organizations that are not directly accountable to the public, and instead parliaments act as a final check, holding these organizations politically accountable (Bovens 2007). In the EU, the EP performs this activity by requesting annual performance reports, written questions addressed to agencies, and significantly, by inviting their representatives to inquiries into their activities.

Changes in economic and financial governance included the creation of the European Supervisory Authorities (ESAs), the European System of Financial Supervision (ESFS), and the procedure of the European Semester (ES) (among others) (Quaglia 2013; Amtenbrink and Markakis 2019). They are responsible for financial regulation, monetary policy, and fiscal planning – all of which fall under ECON's responsibility.

The EP is an important political player with a role in holding these agencies politically accountable on behalf of the electorate – ensuring that the 'means' of policy are decided by the agencies but that the 'policy ends' are decided by political authorities (Christiano 2012).<sup>1</sup> The committee has a clear incentive and responsibility to invite them to its hearings, and thereby maintaining its relevance as an accountability forum.

From the perspective of the agencies, accountability is about managing expectations (Busuioac and Lodge 2016), and so they have an incentive to participate in hearings as a way of bolstering their reputation by building relationships of trust with their political principal. As such, it is likelier that over time administrative authorities, especially from the EU level, participate in ECON's hearings.

Finally, we note that the committee may also seek to highlight its relevance to national electorates by side-lining political organizations from the national level. By doing so, the committee implicitly turns them into outsiders, diminishing their role in representing

voters at ground level. In simpler terms, along with the shift of policy power from national to the EU level, the EP may attempt to entrench its position within this system (Majone 2014; Olsen 2018) by inviting fewer national political authorities.

Therefore, ECON has gained significant policy-making authority whether as co-legislator, participant, or as a check on agencies and the ECB. We expect changes in the number of events and participants over time. First, the number of hearings and participants will increase. Second, the participants will change: in terms of interest groups, hearings will involve more: (i) companies (e.g. banks); (ii) research organizations (e.g. think tanks, universities); (iii) civil society bodies. In terms of institutional actors, more EU level executive organizations will participate: (i) the Commission; (ii) agencies; (iii) the ECB; and fewer national level political organizations: (i) ministries; (ii) government representatives; (iii) parliaments.

Nevertheless, it is possible that hearings remain an exceptional tool that pressed for time MEPs are reluctant to employ. This paper is interested in exploring committee hearings by assessing the typology of participants across time. In the following section, we discuss the research design.

### 3. Research design

To map and assess ECON's hearings across legislatures, we require information on the hearings held by the committee and the participants that attended them. Information on the processes and various events held by committees from 2001 onwards are available to the public through the EP's online archive.

This information is available in the form of scanned schedules/programmes of events turned into pdf or original pdf files. These files are in an unstandardized format making automated text analysis an unreliable data collection method. Moreover, to the best of our knowledge this is one of the first studies assessing the EP's committee hearings and their participants, across time. Because this study has exploratory characteristics, we chose to collect data through a directed content analysis of the hearings' schedules, focusing on the organizations participating and their classification (Hsieh and Shannon 2005; Krippendorff 2004). Since we are interested in assessing the EP's use of hearings over time, we examine hearings across two legislatures the 6<sup>th</sup> (2004–2009) and the 7<sup>th</sup> (2009–2014). We focus on ECON as a committee that is central to the EP, and has received increasing responsibilities over time.

Furthermore, we note that committees employ different forms of hearings that serve similar purposes; for example, committees employ 'exchange of views' with representatives of specific organizations. To ensure the study's external validity and reliability we decided to conduct meticulous archival work over the entire population of committee events. Below, we explain the data collection process in detail. On a smaller note, the complex and time-consuming process required to collect this information underscores key concerns on the difference between availability and accessibility to information on EU governance, and speaks to broader concerns with respect to the EU's transparency and accountability (Héritier 2003).

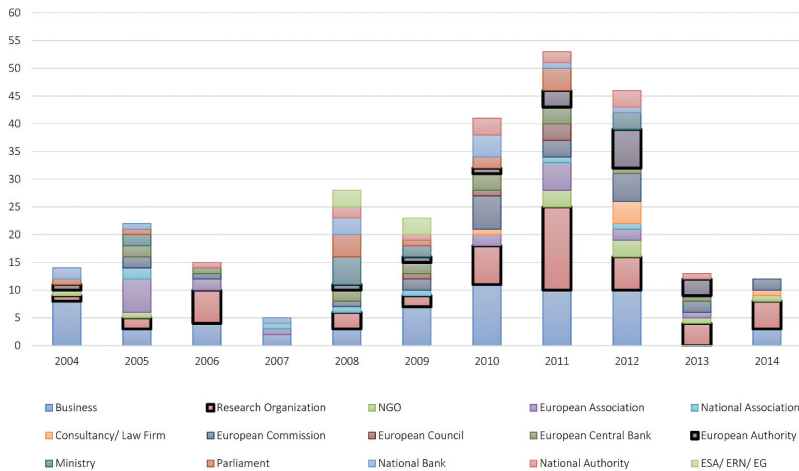
For the data collection, we gathered all the programmes and schedules available for hearings held by the committee for the entire 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> legislatures, covering the period between September 2004 and July 2014. Because different types of events can be classified

only after having read their schedule, we downloaded all the available documents. We proceeded by going through all the collected schedules and organising events based on their self-classification into three categories: (i) exchange of views; (ii) hearing; (iii) inter-parliamentary meetings. We outline the difference between types of events below.

*Exchanges of views* are events where the EP invites a specific institution such as the European Central Bank, while *hearings* involve broader panels of speakers that are often recorded on video and made available online. They are events that tend to be open to a broader audience outside of the committee, and the subjects addressed in their context are likelier to interest a wide-ranging crowd including citizens. Additionally, the panel will include a diverse set of speakers that comprises of interest groups, organizations, agencies, and others. *Inter-parliamentary* hearings are events where national parliamentary representatives interact with EP representatives.

We then proceeded to collect information on the speakers representing organizations, agencies and interest groups per hearing: their name, the organisation they represented, the title of the event, and its date; excluding speakers representing the EP. This process created an original dataset with the entire population of events (66) held by the committee, and speakers (290). Following that, we placed the organizations represented by participants into four categories: (a) interest groups; (b) national level authority; (c) EU level authority; (d) international authority. Following the theoretical discussion and our aim for a nuanced analysis of the participants, each category includes sub-categories, which we set out in detail below.

- (A) The interest group category includes organizations that are not state authorities or agencies, and has six sub-categories: (i) business organizations, such as banks, and companies (e.g. Deutsche Bank); (ii) research organizations, such as universities and think tanks (University of Oxford, Centre for European Policy Studies); (iii) civil society, such as NGOs (e.g. Finance Watch); (iv) European level associations, such as trade and professional associations at the EU level (e.g. Business Europe); (v) national associations, such as trade and professional associations (e.g. German workers' trade union); (vi) consultancies and legal firms (e.g. Roland Berger).
- (B) The national level authorities category includes four sub-categories: (i) national agency (e.g. German Federal Financial Supervisory Authority); (ii) national bank (e.g. Bank of France, Bank of Italy); (iii) parliament, which includes representative forums (e.g. French National Assembly, Polish Senate); (iv) ministry (e.g. Polish Ministry of Finance).
- (C) The EU level authorities category includes five sub-categories framing EU institutions and other bodies: (i) the European Commission (e.g. Directorate General on Competition); (ii) the European Central Bank; (iii) European Supervisory Authorities/ Supervisory Committees (e.g. Committee of European Securities Regulators, European Securities & Markets Authority); (iv) Council (e.g. Ecofin; Eurogroup); (v) High Level Expert Group.
- (D) The international level authorities (International Monetary Fund, World Bank) is a limited category representing less than 5% of speakers, and so we do not address it in our analysis. However, following broader discussions on the internationalization of economic and financial governance, international level authorities participated primarily in the 7<sup>th</sup> legislature.



**Figure 1.** Showing the absolute number of hearings' participants, per type per year.

Based on the data collected we conducted an analysis on the hearing's participants, comparing the speakers representing different categories.

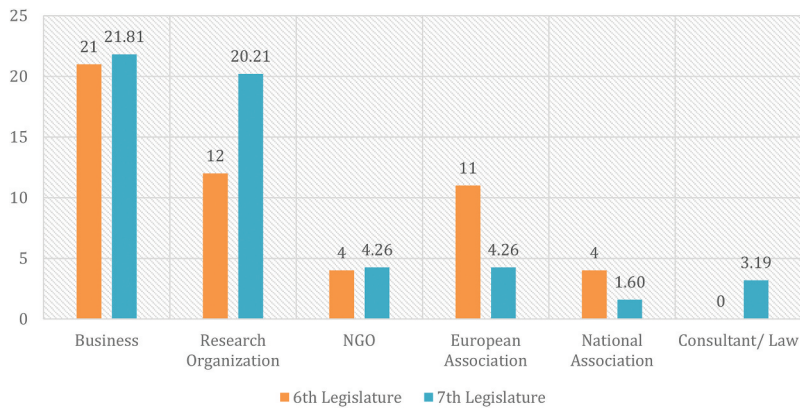
We assessed the percentage a category of participants represented relative to the total population of participants per legislature, and relative to their category, for each legislature. Because we were particularly interested in the change observed across legislatures, we also assessed the absolute change of participants per category across legislatures (6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup>), and compared it relative to the change of the total population of participants, and relative to their category change (see figures below, and tables in annex for details). The data and analysis provide the first mapping of committee hearings across time and a unique perspective into the EP's role in the EU's economic governance. To provide an overview we also provide the evolutions of participants per annum (see Figure 1).

#### 4. Analysis

We begin by assessing the aggregate image, examining the evolution of the hearings and their participants across time. The results show that hearings have become an important instrument in the committee's toolkit marking a substantial difference from their limited use in the late '90s and early 2000s (Bouwen 2004). The number of events and the number of participants increased from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> legislature, painting an image of a committee engaging in a greater number of discussions (see Table 1). Focusing on the type of event, we note that while the use of hearings doubled all other events decreased, indicating a change in the committee's preferences in favour of broader

**Table 1.** Committee's total number of events & speakers per legislature.

	6th legislature	7th legislature	Change
Exchange of Views	5	4	-1
Hearing	16	36	+20
Inter-parliamentary Meeting	4	1	-3
Total Events	25	41	+16
Speakers	101	189	+88



**Figure 2.** Hearings’ participants representing interest groups, as a percentage of the total participants per legislature.

discussion panels that are open to the public. Moreover, we highlight that the peak in the number of participants came in 2010, with most participants invited between 2009–2011, at the height of the financial crisis and the EU’s response to it. Conversely, while the number of inter-parliamentary hearings was limited during the 6<sup>th</sup> legislature, it decreased further during the 7<sup>th</sup>.

Research organizations and European Authorities in bold outline.

As such, from the outset of the analysis we observe that the committee has picked up on the use of hearings, amplifying its engagement with policy stakeholders and policy-makers. To gain a better insight on the hearing’s use we assess in detail the organizations represented across the two legislatures. We begin by assessing changes in participants from the interest group population. In agreement with research noting their intense mobilization across the EP’s committees (Coen & Katsaitis 2019b), interest groups are the primary organizations represented in hearings, accounting for slightly more than half of the overall speaker population across legislatures (see Figures 1, 2 and Table 1 in annex). Institutional actors and agencies cover the remaining population of participants.

Focusing on the interest group population, we make two notable observations. In contrast to our expectation that national associations would have a more prominent role than European associations during the hearings of the 7<sup>th</sup> legislature, business has been and remains the key protagonist. Conceptually, this goes against the assumption that European and national level associations have insider access in the EP across the board due to their information and expertise, and their organizational capacity (Bouwen 2004). That is to say, though we appreciate associations as parliamentary insiders their access is not equal across the board.

We underscore the importance of the nature of the policy field, which promotes single company action over collective action. Thus, companies’ preferential treatment is due to their limited incentive to co-operate under broader EU level associations in the field of financial policy. We point out that this dataset does not test informal activity; thus, bank associations may be better at engaging with the MEPs informally, but the nature of hearings requires participants that can represent with certainty the financial industry.

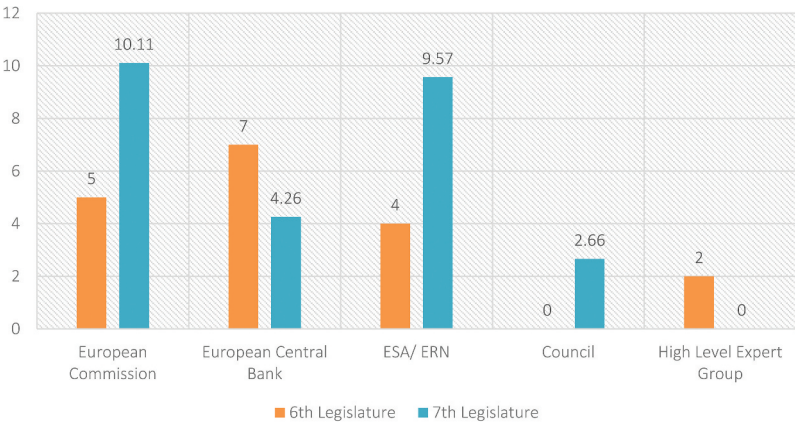
For example, the MEPs want to discuss market regulation with BNP Paribas, rather than French or European bank associations.

Significantly, the results lend support to the EP’s swelling demand for epistemic expertise, in the context of economic governance (Quack 2010; Dunlop and Radaelli 2016). As policy making has become more complex, MEPs have developed genuine expertise demands linked to the policy area they oversee (Coen and Katsaitis 2015). Participants representing research organizations, such as universities and think tanks, nearly doubled across legislatures becoming the second most prominent interest group participant next to business participants. These groups provide targeted expertise that is often linked to the committee’s commissioned studies.

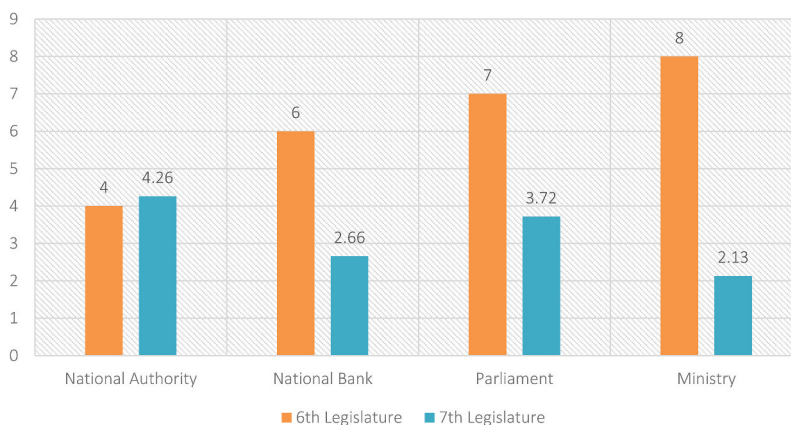
In sharp contrast, the results do not support the expectation that ECON’s hearings serve a public deliberative purpose. The committee does not attempt to engage in policy making with the people by giving access to public interest groups into formal debates. Following from discussions on the institutional maturity of the EP and its embedding within the core of the EU’s policy-making system (Westlake 2018), ECON demonstrates its role as monopoly of political representation by setting up a debate involving market actors and other institutional players directly, while excluding other public representatives (Schmidt 2014). This becomes clearer when also considering the institutional participants.

From a conceptual perspective, these results highlight the complex informational demands the field generates. At the same time, it points to the variety of access points open to different interest groups: specific types of interest groups can have prominent access into one type of policy-making procedure, policy field, or policy stage. However, it is less likely that they will enjoy equal access at every step and across the board (Coen, Lehmann, Katsaitis 2021). The role research organizations play in hearings contrasts with their mobilization intensity at the aggregate level. The EP holds a set of access badges that it distributes to different interest groups as its informational needs vary.

While interest groups represent approximately 52% (EP6) and 58% (EP7) of the total participants at the hearings (see Figure 1, and Table 1 in annex for details), the remaining



**Figure 3.** Hearings’ participants representing different EU level institutions and authorities, as a percentage of the total participants per legislature.



**Figure 4.** Hearings' participants representing National level institutions and authorities, as a percentage of the total participants per legislature.

population – a considerable 48% (EP6) and 42% (EP7) – are institutional actors. Focusing on EU level institutional actors, we note their increased participation across the board, high level expert groups being the only exception (see [Figure 3](#), and Table 2 in annex). In line with discussions on the 'unexpected' winners of new economic governance (Bauer and Becker 2014) the Commission saw its formal participation more than double across legislatures, as it engages with a co-legislator. We note however, that in contrast the Council saw a relatively small increase of its participation.

Similarly, integration in financial regulation led to the creation of agencies, who have also seen their participation double as they were invited either to provide their expertise in relation to specific legislative files, such as MIFID; or as the committee acted on its responsibility to hold the agencies' politically accountable. A substantive concern has been the committee's ability to respond to its evolving responsibility in time. That is to say, are the EP's and its committee's institutional reflexes up to speed? The results indicate that ECON has reacted in real time to address democratic concerns associated with executive accountability. We underscore that the actual impact or need to impact agencies decisions is a different normative debate.

Significantly, this image contrasts national level institutional participants, and provides a better overview of the committee's authority. Assessing national level institutions and authorities we observe a change in attitude towards the opposite direction (see [Figure 4](#), and Table 3 in annex). The only institutional actor to observe a minor increase in their participation, relative to the population, were national level agencies. We discuss the conceptual and research implications below.

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

In this paper, we aimed to explore the EP's hearings and their participants as an understudied area of European governance. We asked: which organizations participate in hearings? How has their composition changed across time? We focused on the Committee on Economic & Monetary Affairs (ECON), a central committee that has seen

a significant increase in its responsibilities over time. Hearings are diverse tool that allows the committee to complete different functions such as: legislating, holding agencies to account, and policy-making. Following meticulous archival work, we mapped the entire population of hearings and the participants in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> legislature (2004–2014); creating a unique map of the EP's interaction with institutions, agencies, and interest groups across time.

The analyses show that hearings' participants changed, quantitatively and qualitatively, over time. Highlighting the role hearings have come to play, the number of hearings and participants saw a dramatic increase. We note that in the period analysed (2004–2014), ECON's hearings appear to react to the 2008–2009 financial crisis, and the policy and institutional changes that came with it. The results demonstrate that the majority of participants across legislatures represent interest groups; underscoring the well-documented role interest groups have in Brussels and highlighting business' insider status. Business that mobilizes strongly across the field, also gains significant access within the committee. Nevertheless, national financial organizations gain greater access over European and national associations. Conversely, the limited participation of civil society and NGOs highlights what is often dubbed as a 'bias' in interest groups preferences, specifically in economic sectors.

Significantly, research groups and EU level executive bodies are the organizations that saw the most intense increase in participation from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> legislature. Specifically in the 7<sup>th</sup> legislature, research organizations share nearly the same number of participants as business. The committee may demand expertise that allows the MEPs to discuss common legislative goals in a complex field (Estlund 2009); as well as face information asymmetries vis-à-vis the agencies they hold to account. Interestingly these results reveal a type of interest group that has been less assessed by the literature, and provides a potential future space for research.

The committee has signalled it has institutional reflexes, with executive EU level institutions being central participants during the 7<sup>th</sup> legislature, observing an increase in participation nearly across the board. Acting as an accountability forum the committee has actively engaged with relevant executive institutions. In turn, the EU's agencies have attempted to manage their reputation by engaging with the EP as a political authority (Busuioc and Lodge 2016). Notably both agencies and committee have met as they attempt to attune their (mutual) responsibilities (Eriksen & Katsaitis 2020).

The committee's reaction demonstrates how the Europeanization of a policy field creates an opportunity structure where political order, including procedures, follow. However, it remains for future research to assess if hearings act as tool that allows the committee to demonstrate and generate political legitimacy. In this context, we would like to highlight that the monopoly of political representation within procedures lays with elected representatives, and from at least some normative perspectives risks the overall performance (Lord 2018).

This paper is a unique study of the participants at EP committee hearings across legislatures. It contributes to discussions on committee hearings as formal procedures, and specifically their role in the EU's system of governance. Taking into consideration the evolution of the policy field, the EP responded in time to political demands associated with the fast pace of economic governance. Further research combining the literature within democratic theory with empirical work on procedural legitimacy offers a potentially fruitful

and timely future research direction in governance studies. From a methodological perspective, content and/or text analysis would provide a better insight of actors' motivations, arguments, and positions in the deliberative sphere. In the context of EU governance, this would well complement the rich body of work that has taken legal analytic perspectives.

## Note

1. All three EU level agencies formed following the financial crisis are politically accountable to the EP. The European Securities and Markets Authority is one of the few EU level agencies with implementation powers (Moloney 2011) that notes that it is politically accountable to ECON on its website.

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