

Book Review

Matti Wiberg, ed., *Trying to Make Democracy Work. The Nordic Parliaments and the European Union*, Stockholm: Gidlunds Förlag, 1997, 124 pp.

For various reasons, the role of parliaments in European integration has lately come to the attention of politicians and academics alike. The introduction of the subsidiarity principle in Maastricht sharpened interest in where to draw line between national and supranational decision making; in the aftermath of Maastricht it was widely felt that the Union should now move closer to its citizens, e.g., by giving the national parliaments a greater role; and finally, the Union has enlarged to include countries like Sweden and Finland, which have instituted a firm parliamentary control of their governments' EU policies.

The present volume consists of papers from a seminar on the Nordic parliaments' handling of EU issues, in the case of Denmark, Sweden and Finland as members of the Union, in the case of Norway and Iceland as parties to the EEA (European Economic Area) Agreement. A member since 1973, the Danish *Folketing* has the broadest experience in handling EU matters and has also to some extent functioned as a role model for newcomer parliaments like the Swedish *Riksdag* and the Finnish *Eduskunta*. It is therefore natural that the volume starts with an article on the Danish European Affairs Committee written by Niels Christian Sidenius, University of Aarhus, and Bjørn Einersen and Jens Adser Sørensen, both officials of *Folketinget*.

The article traces the long history of the European Affairs Committee back to 1961, when a parliamentary committee was first established to oversee Denmark's relations with the then EEC, and follows it from there to the present. The authors argue that the scope of the European Affairs Committee has widened over the years. To its main task of controlling the Government's EU policies have been added aspects of openness and information and concerns about the efficiency of *Folketinget's* dealing with European affairs; recently legitimacy has been added to the concerns of the Committee. They also discuss some of the problems facing the Committee: a huge workload and an increasing information overload (which is largely a result of its own information policy). The major problem, however, is that the specialized parliamentary committees have not yet been fully integrated into the formulation of Denmark's EU policy, leaving the Europe Committee as the overworked main body of parliamentary control.

The role of the Finnish *Eduskunta* is the subject of two partially overlapping articles, one by *Eduskunta* officials Niilo Jäskenen and Tiina Kivisaari and another by Tapio Raunio and Matti Wiberg of the University of Turku. Jäskenen & Kivisaari note that Finland took the Danish system as a starting point, but added some modifications: The specialized committees have been given a more central role than in Denmark, and *Eduskunta* is involved at an earlier stage than *Folketinget*. A third difference is that the so-called Grand Committee, which is the main *Eduskunta* committee dealing with EU matters, can only express a view, not give a mandate like

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the Danish committee does; in fact, on two occasions the government has acted against the advice of the Grand Committee.

Raunio & Wiberg start by arguing that

the Finnish MPs are in a stronger position than their Nordic colleagues in dealing with EU-issues, because Eduskunta is both *pro-active* and because the *whole parliament . . .* is involved in preparing EU-policies before decisions are taken by the Councils of Ministers (p. 48f.).

This is a rather strong statement considering the limited duration of Finland's EU membership and the absence of concrete comparisons with other parliaments. However, the authors are probably right in pointing to the decentralization of the Finnish parliamentary process and the regular involvement of the specialized committees as a major strength of the Finnish system. The article also points out that EU membership has led to a major parliamentarization of Finnish foreign policy and weakened the old presidential prerogative.

The contribution by Hans Hegeland and Ingvar Mattson, both *Riksdag* officials, is an excellent, detailed account of the role of the Swedish *Riksdag*, supported by relevant statistics. Its main focus is on the participation of the standing committees, the EU Advisory Committee, the Parliament itself and the political parties. An important part of the analysis focuses on how *Riksdagen* can contribute to solving the problem of EU's failing legitimacy among the Swedish public.

As a whole, the volume is highly informative on how the Nordic parliaments have solved or tried to solve the question of parliamentary control. It is therefore certain to be read with avid interest by readers with an interest in the parliamentary aspects of European politics. However, it also has its limitations. The individual chapters are somewhat self-congratulatory and tend to view their national systems as models for others. The major deficiency, though, is the lack of comparative analysis. One could argue that this was a heaven-sent opportunity for comparative analysis which was somehow missed. A common framework to the national analyses plus a cross-national analysis of Nordic parliamentary responses would have added enormously to the usefulness of the book. Obvious subjects for comparison could have been the competences of the European Affairs Committee, the Grand Committee and the EU Advisory Committee in the making of Denmark's, Finland's and Sweden's EU policy. Another obvious subject for comparison could have been the balance between these committees and the other standing parliamentary committees. It would also have been interesting to see comparisons between the policies of openness and information pursued by the various Nordic parliaments. This will have to wait till another occasion, but in the meantime we have the present volume.

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