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Putting Power into Practice: Administrative and Political Capacity Building in the European Parliament's Committee for International Trade

1 Abstract

As the formal powers of the European Parliament increased with successive treaty changes, its committees' administrations have seen a parallel growth. We argue that such administrative capacity is necessary but not sufficient for acting on those formal powers. Administrative capacity has to be combined with political capacity in order to muster policy impact in European Union decision-making. By differentiating between intra-institutional administrative and inter-institutional political capacity, we offer a fine-grained conceptualization of policy capacity while broadening the theoretical and empirical understanding of the European Parliament's administration as an organizational structure of (in)formal working practices, intra-institutional coordination and inter-institutional relations. Based on expert interviews, document analysis and participant observation, the case of Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership illustrates how societal politicization of a specific policy issue triggered the European Parliament to exploit the latent potential of its post-Lisbon administrative capacity, by transforming it into a more readily-deployable political capacity.

2 Keywords

Administration, Policy Capacity, European Parliament, Committee, European Union

3 Introduction

Throughout the years, successive changes in the Treaties of the European Union (EU) have redistributed competences between institutions and formalized previously informal working practices. Such shifts in institutional balance then caused changes inside EU institutions (Gungor, 2009; Häge & Naurin, 2013; Kreppel, 2003; Naurin & Rasmussen, 2011). For the European Parliament (EP), the impact of the extension of its co-legislative powers after the Lisbon Treaty on its internal organisation and administrative apparatus has received relatively little scholarly attention (Dobbels & Neuhold, 2014). This is even more surprising considering that the EP's 'capacity to develop strong institutions' is a prerequisite to have an impact in the decision-making process (Roederer-Rynning & Greenwood, 2017, p. 735). In addition, several studies have observed that an interest in a specific, clearly defined and politically salient policy issue motivates the EP's willingness to invest resources in that policy issue (Auel & Christiansen, 2015; Brandsma, 2012; Dür & Mateo, 2014; Jančić, 2016; Naurin & Rasmussen, 2011). Yet we still lack insight into why this happens and how the EP turns those resources into actual policy influence.

Therefore, our central question is: *how do formal treaty changes and societal politicization affect the development of EP policy capacity for influencing EU decision-making?* Policy capacity is understood as a 'set of skills and resources - or competences and capabilities - necessary to perform policy functions' (Wu, Ramesh, & Howlett, 2015, p. 166). We argue that the EP's post-Lisbon administrative capacity is necessary but not sufficient for acting on formal powers (Kreppel, 2003). To do so, the EP has to transform its administrative capacity into political capacity. Administrative capacity covers the resources that affect the internal policy capacity of an institution (intra-institutional capacity), whereas political capacity refers to the relationship between the institution and other actors (inter-institutional capacity). While administrative capacity is of a stable and institutionalized nature – providing latent potential for deployment, political capacity has a more fluid and volatile but yet more readily-deployable and targeted

character. Taken together, both form the basis for the comprehensive policy capacity the EP needs to influence decision-making processes at the EU level.

Our empirical study illustrates how the formalization of the EP's role in the negotiation of international trade agreements triggered the development of internal administrative capacity in its Committee for International Trade (INTA), responsible for EU trade policy in the EP.

Moreover, by analysing EU-level decision-making processes during the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) negotiations, we show that it was the societal politicization of TTIP that prompted the willingness within INTA to turn its ability to oversee the negotiations into practice. Societal politicization is understood as '[t]he process through which issues become objects of public contention and debate [...]' (Calhoun, 2002, p. 369).

Our contribution is threefold. First, whereas the existing literature has generally adopted a narrow focus on administrative staff, we start from a wider organizational perspective at the committee level. Secondly, we offer a fine-grained conceptualization of policy capacity by differentiating between intra-institutional administrative and inter-institutional political capacity. With this, we provide a theoretical and analytical framework that can be used to study policy capacity in a wide variety of policy fields. The discussion offers some preliminary suggestions to this end. Finally, with our case study we contribute to the recently growing empirical literature about the EP's capacity to process information and its interaction patterns with other institutions (Author 2 reference; Dobbels & Neuhold, 2014; Egeberg, Gornitzka, & Trondal, 2014b; Hillebrandt, 2017; Rosén, 2016). Our empirical study shows that the baseline of the EP's policy influence is determined by the quality of information processing, rather than the quantity of information available (Brandsma, 2012; Dobbels & Neuhold, 2014; Hillebrandt, 2017).

In the first section, we identify a lack of insights about the broader organizational aspects of EP committee administrations. The theoretical section provides a coherent approach for analysing policy capacity. The empirical section then probes the plausibility of our argument by analysing in-depth the changes in policy capacity in INTA since the Lisbon Treaty. Our study relies on 17 semi-structured interviews, qualitative analysis of EU documents, and participatory observation via a five-month internship by one of the authors in the INTA secretariat (Table 4). We reflect on our findings and their implications in the discussion, where we also illustrate a similar development of policy capacity in other cases, and summarise our contributions in the conclusion.

4 State of the art

Similar to United States Congressional literature, research on the EP has evolved from a mainly descriptive exercise in the 1960s and 1970, to a more theoretically complex body of work by the early 2000s (Hix, Raunio, & Souly, 2003; Webb Hammond, 1996). This early literature focuses on the political functioning of the committees, taking Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and the political groups as its main subjects of study (see also Winzen, 2011). The EP's committees take centre-stage, as they are considered the 'legislative backbone' of the EP (Westlake, 1994, p. 191).

The administrative wing of EP committees largely escaped attention in this early literature, except for a few accounts that noted the relevance of committee secretariats for providing expertise on technical and political issues (Neuhold, 2001; Neunreither, 2002). This expertise provided a representative counterweight to the Commission as the executive bureaucracy, maintain stable contacts with other institutions, and provide continuity in the face of the quick MEP turnover (Costa, 2003). Nevertheless, EP administrative staff was at the time not considered to have significant impact (Costa, 2003).

Today, there is a general consensus that EP administration does play an important role for the EP's policy capacity – and consequently the EP's influence in EU decision-making – and that it therefore merits further study (Dobbels & Neuhold, 2012; Egeberg, Gornitzka, & Trondal, 2014a; Egeberg et al., 2014b; Egeberg, Gornitzka, Trondal, & Johannessen, 2013; Marshall, 2012; Neuhold & Dobbels, 2015; Winzen, 2011). The result is a recent empirical literature covering the daily functioning of EP administration.

However, this literature still suffers from two main gaps. Firstly, the narrow focus on administrative staff leaves other organizational aspects – such as the EP's internal organization and the way information is processed during the policy-making process – unaccounted for (Dobbels & Neuhold, 2014). Because 'the way in which the EP administration is organized significantly affects their role in EP decision-making', a wider focus on the whole administrative system is essential (Egeberg et al., 2013, p. 510). Secondly, '[...] the everyday inter-institutional

relationship between EU institutions has escaped wider attention and is poorly documented.’ (Egeberg et al., 2014b, p. 1; see also Author 1 reference; Brandsma, 2012; Hillebrandt, 2017; Rosén, 2016). While this second gap is increasingly being addressed, scope for refinement remains substantial.

In what follows, we address both of these elements by adopting the whole committee’s organizational structure as the unit of analysis. Addressing the EP’s policy capacity at the committee level allows us to broaden the empirical and theoretical understanding of the EP administrative apparatus beyond a narrow focus on staff, to include organizational variables such as (in)formal working practices, internal information-processing procedures and inter-institutional relations. The following theoretical section sets out the analytical framework we use to do this.

5 Theoretical framework

As the centres of ‘information, expertise, prestige and power’ (Ward, 1974, as cited in Bowler & Farrell, 1995, p. 221), the policy capacity within the EP’s committees is crucial for the EP’s influence in EU decision-making processes. In order to ensure a lasting impact for EP empowerment, ad-hoc changes in policy capacity need to go through an institutionalization process. We therefore combine insights from administrative capacity (Egeberg et al., 2013; Trondal & Peters, 2013) and institutionalization literature (Farrell & Héritier, 2003; Roederer-Rynning & Greenwood, 2017). The institutionalization of policy capacity comprises four elements: independence, intra- and inter-institutional integration, and co-optation of actors outside the organisation (Trondal & Peters, 2013). Administrative capacity covers independence and intra-institutional integration, whereas political capacity spans inter-institutional integration and co-optation. Table 1 contains the operationalization of these four indicators of policy capacity (Table 1). Both administrative and political capacity are a quality of the organizational entity as a collective. In our case, they refer to the availability of collective resources of the parliamentary committee.

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Evidence of institutionalization of policy capacity in the EP should point to the development of structures and processes that allow the committee to act independently from other EU institutions (Table 1, indicators 1-4), and the simultaneous creation of procedures for effective coordination within the committee (Table 1, indicator 5). On the other hand, evidence of institutionalization of political capacity should become clear in the creation of procedures for

inter-institutional integration (Table 1, indicator 6) between the committee and other EU institutions, and co-optation of external actors such as business and civil society stakeholders, and national parliaments and administrations (Table 1, indicators 7-8).

5.1 Administrative capacity

Studies of administrative capacity indicate that parliamentary actors need a certain degree of in-house expertise, supporting staff and resources for information processing in order to monitor the EU's legislative procedures effectively and in a timely manner. Hence, the concept of administrative capacity is centred on the idea of informational deficit and the ability to process information efficiently – quickly – and effectively – i.e. in such a way that it is readily deployable for enhancing parliamentary influence (Author 2 reference; Auel, Rozenberg, & Tacea, 2015; Dobbels & Neuhold, 2012, 2014; Judge, Earnshaw, & Cowan, 1994; Ringe, 2010; Romanyszyn & Neuhold, 2013).

In the case of EU external trade policy, the specific nature of negotiating procedures for EU trade agreements (the process of adapting mandates, negotiation rounds, ratification process) requires a certain level of administrative capacity if the EP wants to influence ongoing negotiations and vote in a timely and informed manner. Because the EP faces an informational deficit vis-à-vis the Commission during trade negotiations, INTA has continuously sought to receive more information from the Commission's Directorate General for Trade (DG Trade) about ongoing trade negotiations (Author 1 reference; Author 2 reference).

Earlier changes of the EP's rules of procedures – such as the introduction of direct elections – have been linked to increased administrative capacity through more complex administrative structures and higher staff numbers (Gungor, 2009; Neunreither, 2002; Westlake, 1994). With the formalization of the EP's right to be kept informed about ongoing trade negotiations, we expect that the increased influx of information has led to changes in the EP's administrative procedures since 2009. We refer to a formalization – rather than a complete overhaul – as the EP had already informally extended its influence in EU external trade policy long before the

Lisbon Treaty entered into force (Authors' reference; Van den Putte, De Ville, & Orbie, 2015). Despite the existence of such pre-Lisbon informal and ad hoc mechanisms, we argue that the formalization of the EP's role has necessitated their institutionalisation and thereby significantly updated the administrative capacity at committee level compared to the pre-Lisbon situation. If INTA developed its administrative capacity in the field of EU external trade policy after 2009, we first expect to observe an increase of the independence of INTA through development of structures generating independent expertise and enhancing internal information-processing. More specifically, we should see (a) an increase in the availability of capable individuals, (b) the development of processes for timely and systematically collecting and analysing data, (c) indications of evidence-based policy-making, and (d) the development of efficient information systems (Table 1, indicators 1 to 4). These expectations will be assessed based on analysis of INTA staff statistics, available data and documentation systems, rules of procedure, and internal communication, respectively.

Secondly, we expect stronger intra-institutional integration of INTA to support efficient information transfer within the committee. This internal integration is expected to take place through changes in the internal organisation and committee structure of INTA (Table 1, indicator 5). For this, we analyse the organigram, secretariat, frequency and format of internal coordination meetings, and internal decision-making rules and procedures. Both evolutions form the basis for the institutionalization of administrative capacity within INTA, offering a latent potential for the future development of issue-specific political capacity in support of formal treaty obligations.

5.2 Political capacity

We conjecture that the use of intra-institutional administrative capacity on the inter-institutional level is conditional upon the EP's willingness to invest precious resources in a particular policy issue in order to actively 'exploit' this administrative capacity (Bowler & Farrell, 1995, p. 220; see also Ringe, 2010). In other words, the latent potentiality created by the institutionalization of administrative capacity at the committee level is only valuable in terms of policy influence when transformed into political capacity.

Political capacity, in contrast to internal or in-house administrative capacity, refers to the committee's interaction and 'coordinative capacity' with other EU institutions and third actors (Farrell & Héritier, 2004, p. 1192). This political capacity builds on (1) mechanisms and procedures for coordination with other EU institutions and (2) co-optation of third actors. As policy influence is exercised at the inter-institutional level, a focus on intra-institutional

administrative capacity alone means that our understanding of what determines policy influence in EU level decision-making remains glaringly incomplete.

Next to inter-institutional relations, political capacity also involves co-optation of third actors, understood as bringing in actors into the institutional policy process and initiating interaction with the goal of building policy learning relations (see Radaelli, 2008 for a more detailed overview of policy learning). Hence, we do not consider instances of co-optation with the intention of pulling in third actors into the institution's sphere of influence (Trondal & Peters, 2013). Co-optation involves engagement with civil society, consulting of outside experts and stakeholders, as well as contacts with national governmental and parliamentary actors (Table 1, indicators 7-8). Such interaction with third actors enables the EP to develop a policy position based on a broad spectrum of information sources, thereby enhancing its chances of having a substantive policy impact at the inter-institutional level.

But what is it then, that triggers the willingness to exploit the latent potentialities of previously developed administrative capacity, by turning it into political capacity? In his study on comitology, Brandsma notes that 'the need to organize information flows in an accessible manner only arises when it is instrumental to a specific parliamentary right' (Brandsma, 2012). We therefore expect political capacity development in those instances where the EP has a specific and practical policy interest. This interest can either be inherently political thanks to party-political preferences (e.g. Hix et al., 2006) or it can be strategic in order to expand policy turf (Author 2 reference).

In both cases, the trigger for increasing political capacity is specific in the sense that it is linked to politicization of a specific issue. Politicization results from the combination of three processes: increasing salience, expansion of actors and audiences, and polarisation of opinion (de Wilde, Leupold, & Schmidtke, 2016). We earlier referred to *societal* politicization as '[t]he process through which issues become objects of public contention and debate [...]' (Calhoun, 2002, p. 369). We do not address thresholds of politicization: we assume that TTIP is a (sufficiently highly) politicised policy issue – as any remote observer of the negotiations will acknowledge, which is why we choose it as a case for our plausibility probe.

Several studies have found that issue salience is an important intervening variable in explaining the selectivity of parliamentary activity in EU affairs (Auel & Christiansen, 2015; Naurin & Rasmussen, 2011). In a similar vein, Dür and Matteo (2014) refer to the lack of incentive for politicians to follow public opinion on policy issues with a low level of public attention (See also Jančić, 2016). The reason for this relation can be found in a process of 'active judgment updating', where societal politicization of a policy issue triggers institutional actors to change their attitude in the policy making process, from previously non-contesting to actively contesting possible policy outcomes (Lenz & Viola, 2017, p. 20). We argue that when a previously technocratic and elite-driven policy issue becomes politicised, the EP faces an incentive to transform administrative capacity into political capacity in order to increase its own influence on policy making processes.

If we are to confirm the transformation of INTA's general administrative capacity into TTIP-specific political capacity, we first expect to find increased inter-institutional integration between INTA and the Commission's Directorate-General for Trade (DG Trade) with more extensive (in)formal coordination procedures (Table 1, indicator 6). This includes increased meeting frequency and new or improved procedures for oral and written information exchange. Secondly, we should find that INTA becomes more active in terms of co-opting actors from outside the EU institutions (Table 1, indicators 7 and 8). We therefore expect INTA to step up contacts with civil society organisations, business groups and national (EU and non-EU) institutional actors, with the aim of developing new or enhancing existing policy learning relations with these actors. Ways in which the EP can foster such co-optation are set out in Table 1. The following section discusses how the indicators and operationalization from Table 1 were analysed in the empirical research.

6 Methodology

The research design of this article is based on a plausibility probe (Eckstein, 2000) of our argument in a single, in-depth case study (Gerring, 2004). The plausibility probe into our argument serves to increase confidence in the theoretical conceptualization of administrative and political capacity and its connection to salience and politicization (Eckstein, 2000).

Regarding data gathering, we triangulated document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation (Becker & Geer, 1957). During a five-month traineeship, one author participated in the daily routines of the secretariat of INTA, gathered detailed data, and recorded

them by taking notes. The secretariat was aware of the research being conducted prior to and throughout the fieldwork. As a result, we draw on a unique set of first-hand information, as well as valuable follow-up contacts. Both authors carried out semi-structured interviews between February 2015 and October 2017 with 1 business organisation and 16 Commission, Council and Parliament officials (Table 4). We interviewed those officials that were directly involved in the issues under investigation: interviewees from the EP were directly involved in EU trade policy and the TTIP negotiations, and interviewees from the Commission, Council and the business organization directly interacted with the EP and INTA in the context of trade negotiations. We compared respondent answers to the same or similar questions between interviews to verify correctness of information and filter out biases. The interview material was coded according to indicators of administrative and political capacity as set out in Table 1. The following section contains the results of this empirical research.

Empirics: the Lisbon Treaty, TTIP, and the EP's policy capacity

6.1 Building administrative capacity since the Lisbon Treaty

After the Lisbon Treaty, the EP gained the formal right to ratification of international trade agreements. To support this formalization, the Treaty established a legally binding obligation on the Commission to immediately and fully inform the EP at all stages of the negotiation procedure (Articles 207§3 and 218§10). The 2010 Inter-institutional Framework Agreement concretizes this right (European Union, 2010). Has INTA's administrative capacity adapted to these new circumstances and do we observe a change in committee structures that promotes independent

information-processing (Indicators 1 to 4) and intra-institutional information transfer (Indicator 5)?

The top half of Table 2 provides a summary of our findings for both elements of administrative capacity in INTA since the Lisbon Treaty.

-----INSERT TABLE 2-----

Even though the EP had informally been involved in EU trade policy prior to the Lisbon Treaty, significant changes in INTA's administrative capacity only started to take place during the EP's 7th legislature (2009-2014). Starting out with only 3 administrators in 2009, the number of administrators in the INTA secretariat grew to 14 by 2014 (European Parliament, 2014a; European Parliament, 2015e; Interview 13, 17) (see Table 2, indicator 1). In addition, INTA has also been able to rely on the EP's in-house support services, which have grown steadily since 2009 (see Table 1, indicator 2). The EP Legal Service, the Policy Department of the European Parliament's Directorate-General for External Policies (DG EXPO Policy Department) and the more recent European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) were increasingly relied upon for providing legal advice and supporting analyses and studies of the technical and complex policy issues in the trade area (European Parliament, 2015e). For instance, the DG EXPO Policy Department initially found itself actively driving the demand for studies and proactively providing information to MEPs. By 2014, the growing demand from MEPs for more practically applicable proposals in studies and briefings resulted in a much more passive and 'responding' role (Interview 17). As a result, INTA has seen an impressive evolution in the degree and quality of its technical expertise and knowledge – both at administrator and MEP level. In addition, daily e-mail and telephone contacts between INTA administrators, MEP offices and political groups also greatly increased over this period, which enhanced the efficiency of INTA's information sharing system (Interview 12) (Table 2, indicator 3).

In terms of meeting frequency and formats, we observed two patterns that support our expectation of changes in INTA's internal organisation and committee structure in favour of intra-institutional integration (Table 2, indicator 5). First, the total number of meetings in INTA has seen a steady increase from 2010 to 2013 (Graph 1). A second, closer look reveals a decline in frequency of formal INTA meetings in favour of a steep rise in informal and monitoring group meetings (Graph 2).

On the one hand, the general increase in meeting frequency is an indication of the drastically heightened workload in INTA: from 69 files for the 2004-2009 period, to 200 files between 2009 and 2014 (European Parliament, 2014a). The specific growth in informal and monitoring group meetings, on the other hand, indicates a shift in the quality of the information that is discussed in INTA meetings. The growing technocratic nature of trade dossiers throughout the 7th legislature combined with a strict time-schedule necessitated a shift towards more informal meetings (Interview 9). This is very similar to developments in the Council structure, where 'Informal

Technical Meetings' were introduced during the trade negotiations with South Korea (Author 1 reference; Interview 3).

Monitoring groups were an initiative of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe group in June 2011, as a new mechanism to monitor ongoing negotiations for bilateral trade agreements (European Parliament, 2011a). Their functioning was guided by a set of General Principles (Interview 14) (Table 2, indicator 4). In September 2011, a main body of monitoring groups was established and by November a more detailed schedule of the monitoring groups showed a clear geographical division between designated Standing Rapporteurs amongst the INTA MEPs (Figure 1). An item 'Feedback from Monitoring Groups' was included in each INTA meeting, establishing a duty to inform between the two forums (Table 2, indicator 4). Over the course of 2012, several new monitoring groups were created (European Parliament, 2012c; 2012d; 2012e; 2012f). Early 2013, INTA chair Vital Moreira commented on the added value of the monitoring groups for the functioning of the INTA Committee as they collected information and expertise that otherwise would not have been accessible (Council of the EU, 2013a; see also Interview 2, 4).

At the beginning of the 8th legislature several changes were introduced (European Parliament, 2014b). The practice of monitoring groups was extended to include topical, pluri-, and multilateral negotiations (European Parliament, 2014c). As a result, the total number of monitoring groups was 38 by September 2014 (European Parliament, 2014d). After a trial period, an advance scheduling system for block-booking monitoring groups on Monday afternoons was introduced in November 2015; a clear indication that monitoring groups have become common practice (European Parliament, 2015b; 2015c). In addition, the INTA secretariat started collecting quantitative and qualitative data on attendance and content (European Parliament, 2016).

Today, INTA monitoring groups are headed by one Standing Rapporteur, who is an INTA member nominated by the political group that was allocated to the monitoring group based on the *d'Hondt* method. Other political groups can appoint Shadow Standing Rapporteurs in writing to the INTA secretariat (European Parliament, 2017c). Standing Rapporteurs are responsible for

organising and chairing monitoring groups, and have access to confidential information from the Council or Commission (Interview 14).

Monitoring groups have become the foundation for the development of expertise in INTA. They are mini-information-processing hubs, building expertise that is relied upon at the higher committee levels and even plenary meetings, as the members of a monitoring group ensure a stable base of interlocutors with the rest of the EP. Having a set Standing Rapporteur also ensures continuity for contacts with the Commission for specific geographical regions, as otherwise the contact person could change quite easily after the report or resolution has been voted in plenary (Interview 9; Interview 3). Frequent interactions with DG Trade in a monitoring group reduce the need for bilateral meetings between DG Trade and MEPs (Interview 9, 11). In sum, maintaining a detailed and expertise-based follow-up of the ongoing order of business in EU trade policy would be impossible without this kind of specialised administrative subdivision (Interview 1). In the next section, we address whether the politicization of the TTIP negotiations since 2013 triggered a transformation of this administrative capacity in favour of political capacity in INTA.

6.2 Developing political capacity in the TTIP negotiations

In order to confirm that INTA transformed its administrative capacity in the TTIP-specific political capacity, this section looks at whether we can observe a growing inter-institutional integration between INTA and DG Trade (Indicator 6) and whether INTA has developed new or enhanced existing contacts with external actors (Indicators 7-8). The bottom half of Table 2 provides a summary of our findings for both elements of political capacity in the case of TTIP.

Before assessing TTIP, it is worth mentioning that a few seeds had been planted with regard to inter-institutional coordination beforehand. The 2010 Framework Agreement concretized the extent to which the Commission would inform the EP about ongoing trade talks, relying on oral briefings and written information (European Union, 2010). The Commission also committed itself to providing INTA with all relevant trade policy documents that are shared with the TPC, including documents from third parties, whereas before this exchange was limited to documents originating from the Director-General for Trade (Observation, January 2017). Inter-institutional cooperation between DG Trade and INTA was reported to work positively and well-organized, also at staff level (Interviews 12, 14, 15).

Starting from 2011, a limited number of MEPs from INTA was allowed to consult the final negotiation directives in a secured reading room, supporting inter-institutional information exchange. Even though the practice of the Commission informing the EP about the draft recommendations for the directives for opening trade negotiations was already established since

the 1995 Code of Conduct (European Union, 1995; 2010), the EP had no official access to the amendments made to those draft directives by the Council: until 2011 INTA had to rely on an unofficial summary containing the main changes in the final directives, which was provided informally by the Commission (Interview 13, 14).

The same extent of interaction cannot be reported for the Council-EP coordination on the negotiation of international agreements. The lack of proactive information provision from the Council to the EP is a source of frustration and disappointment in INTA (Interviews 12 to 15; European Parliament, 2015d). The procedure is rather ad hoc (Interview 15) and the TPC (where the Council and the Commission coordinate on trade policy) remains a black box for the EP (Interview 12). It should be noted that the Lisbon Treaty did not introduce a direct duty to inform between the Council and the EP. This lack of EP-Council interaction on trade policy also motivates our choice to focus on the EP-Commission axis in this article.

Despite the above-mentioned arrangements, the most transformative changes have taken place since the start of TTIP negotiations, especially in relation to the inter-institutional integration between INTA and DG Trade (Table 2, indicator 6). Firstly, the final negotiation directives for trade agreements are made public since TTIP – instead of being only available to a select number of INTA members through a reading room system, which aids the EP's oversight task significantly (Interview 13). Secondly, from the end of 2013, the Commission started considering specific arrangements for access to TTIP documents in order to facilitate inter-institutional coordination (Council of the EU, 2013b).

Over the course of 2014 and 2015, DG Trade gradually increased the number of documents sent to INTA and changed the rules determining which MEPs were allowed to consult the different categories of documents (Author 1 reference; Interview 8). These documents provided by DG Trade belong to one of three categories: 'EU Limited', 'EU Restricted', and 'consolidated negotiation texts', with sensitivity increasing respectively. As a result, access to TTIP documents has been extended from a selected number of INTA members to all MEPs through a dedicated IT system ('TTIP Sharepoint').

Yet throughout this process of extending access to negotiating documents, it became clear there was a need to supplement written information with more explanatory interactions, to inform MEPs more thoroughly, and to improve the quality of discussions in the INTA Committee (Interview 5). Consequently, the third major change regarding inter-institutional integration was brought about in the inter-institutional meetings between DG Trade and INTA. The exchanges covering TTIP developed into an institutionalized and structured framework of INTA-DG Trade interaction, rooted in the monitoring group system (see also Author 1 reference). The INTA monitoring group on the US enjoys a special status amongst INTA monitoring groups. The US monitoring group is the only group that is open to participation by all MEPs (Interview 13, 14). Thereby, the monitoring group strengthens cross-committee coordination in the case of politicised policy dossiers (Secretariat of the Committee on International Trade, 2014). The US monitoring group is also the only one where there is a briefing by the Commission chief negotiator before each negotiation round (Interview 14, 15). In other monitoring groups, such debriefings only take place after the negotiation round with the external trade partner (Interview 9). This double debrief allows participants of the US monitoring group to have a more direct input in upcoming negotiations.

Compared to other INTA monitoring groups, the meetings on TTIP are the most structured, detailed, frequent and most highly attended (Interview 15; Author 1 reference). While the particularities of the US monitoring group often result in very high participation rates, with sometimes up to 50 participants, the flexibility of the format and lack of interpretation obligations still allows for open discussions. Nevertheless, at times the high participation rate has made the TTIP monitoring group a 'semi-public' event, which has resulted in the Commission chief negotiator becoming more diplomatic and cautious in his debriefing (Interview 15). In addition to monitoring groups, INTA can also rely on the practice of technical briefings to solicit more technical information from DG Trade (Interview 13, 15; see also Author 1 reference).

Next to inter-institutional integration, the EP was particularly active regarding the co-optation of third actors on the topic of TTIP (Table 2, indicators 7 and 8). Over the course of negotiations, INTA held seven hearings and two workshops with civil society groups, business organizations, and independent experts on TTIP (Table 3). Next to these formal events, business and civil society groups also have other access points through informal meetings with MEPs and political groups, as well as via the US monitoring group (Interview 16). In addition to targeted engagement with specific stakeholder groups, the EP also actively pushed the Commission to increase public transparency of the negotiations (Author 1 reference). One example is the joint initiative with the European Ombudsman (case OI/10/2014/RA), where they successfully pressured the Commission to introduce a TTIP transparency initiative (European Ombudsman, 2015).

INTA also stepped up cooperation with governmental and parliamentary representatives from the US and EU member states (Secretariat of the Committee on International Trade, 2014). The EP invited US representatives and negotiators to INTA meetings and plenary sessions (Interview 6). There were also informal visits – facilitated by the EP’s Liaison Office in Washington – by EP delegations to the US, where MEPs met with the US negotiating team (Jančič, 2016). The EP also coordinated extensively with the US Congress about TTIP (Jančič 2017, 203). With the creation of reading rooms containing all TTIP negotiation documents in EU national capitals in spring 2016, members of national parliaments were also given the chance to gather more detailed information (Author 1 reference). In 2015, an inter-parliamentary meeting took place on TTIP (Jančič 2017, 215). Finally, INTA organised a lunch meeting with national parliaments in November 2016 (Observation, November 2016). Through co-optation with external actors on TTIP, INTA has developed a way of balancing out information it receives from other institutional resources. It allows MEPs to solicit information from different external sources, thereby ensuring that the EP’s policy position is based on a wide perspective of the different angles in the debate (Interview 17).

7 Discussion

In our empirical analysis, we set out to assess (a) whether the post-Lisbon changes in the EP’s competencies in external trade policy triggered the development of an internal administrative capacity in the EP’s INTA committee throughout the 7th legislature, and (b) whether as a result of the politicization of the TTIP negotiations, INTA has transformed this into political capacity. We claimed that administrative and political capacity co-exist and both are essential for the EP to be a forceful actor in trade policy. Yet there must first be a steady, institutionalized level of administrative capacity before the EP’s INTA committee can develop any

kind of effective inter-institutional political capacity. The developments described above illustrate how INTA has done exactly this (see Table 2).

Our findings indicate that our expectations for an independent administrative capacity post-Lisbon were confirmed. From 2009 to 2014, INTA quadrupled the size of its secretariat, strengthened cooperation with EP in-house expertise centres, set up an efficient information sharing system, and established an organisational commitment to evidence-based policy making (Table 2, indicators 1-4). In addition, an extensive substructure of meetings and informal contacts has improved intra-institutional integration by ensuring efficient information transfer throughout the committee (Table 2, indicator 5). Apart from an overall increase in the number of formal and informal meetings, the establishment and expansion of monitoring groups turned out to be crucial for following trade negotiations effectively. Hence, INTA has significantly enhanced its administrative resources and organizational structure throughout the EP's 7th legislature, thereby institutionalizing its administrative capacity to ensure a systematic and evidence-based approach for trade policy making.

Further developing post-Lisbon administrative capacity into TTIP-specific political capacity was crucial in strengthening the EP's oversight role of the politicised TTIP negotiations. As DG Trade provided all negotiation documents to all MEPs, the quality and quantity of information on and involvement in the TTIP negotiations reached an unprecedented level. In addition to access to documents, the exceptionally high participation and meeting frequency between DG Trade and INTA supplemented the written information. Pre- and post-debriefings in the US monitoring group, technical briefings, and briefing meetings at administrator level ensure a high level of specialisation of MEPs and INTA administrators (Table 2, indicator 6). Because EP and Council coordination on trade policy has remained remarkably limited, we cannot make any claims regarding this particular inter-institutional relationship based on our study. Finally, the EP also greatly enhanced its political capacity on TTIP by co-opting external actors, enabling the EP to develop its position based on a broad spectrum of information sources (Table 2, indicator 7-8). As we found that our expectations were supported in the case of TTIP, we now turn to other instances of policy capacity development in the wake of treaty changes and politicization. By doing so, we demonstrate that our framework can be applied to several other cases and aim to motivate further research. Firstly, even though there are currently no trade negotiations with a politicization-level like TTIP, we have observed similar (or absent) increases in inter-institutional coordination and co-optation of external actors for trade negotiations with similar (or lacking) societal politicization. For instance, INTA has been introducing similar working practices for coordination with DG Trade for the Trade in Services Agreement (TiSA), which has seen its political saliency rise throughout 2016 (Interview 14; Observation, January 2017). In contrast, –

while still benefitting from INTA's enhanced administrative capacity – coordination between INTA and DG Trade on the (almost) non-politicised trade negotiations with Japan has remained much more low-key (Observation, February 2017). It is therefore too early to state that the development of a full political capacity is a general trend in INTA.

Our findings also shed light on developments for past trade negotiations. The negotiations of the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) took place while INTA's internal administrative capacity was still sitting in the starting blocks, and became politicised only at the very end of the negotiations. Combined with the reluctance of the Council and Commission to share information, MEPs resorted to extra-institutional sources of information (Dür & Mateo, 2014). The lack of both balanced information input and strong in-house resources for information-processing resulted in MEPs rejecting an agreement over which' implementation in EU domestic legislation they would have had complete control through the Ordinary Legislative Procedure (Interview 17). As there was no steady, institutionalized level of administrative capacity at this time, the EP was unable to develop and exploit effective inter-institutional political capacity. In hindsight, the ACTA case illustrates the importance of both administrative and political capacity at committee level in order for the EP to be an effective actor in EU trade policy.

Finally, we can also find similar developments in the EP's policy capacity in other policy areas. Existing studies have documented several instances where EP committees adapted to new formal rights and political events by establishing enhanced working practices (intra-institutional independence and integration), collaboration with EU actors (inter-institutional integration) or co-optation of third actors. First, Roederer-Rynning and Greenwood (2017) describe the EP's institutionalization in trilogues, where different committees developed their distinct internal organization and approaches. Secondly, the EP's Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs established procedures to interact with other EU institutions, like the European Central Bank in response to the Eurozone crisis (Fasone, 2014). Thirdly, the EP's Committee for Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs adapted to new formal co-decision rights by developing intra-institutional procedures and instruments vis-à-vis other EU actors (Ripoll Servent, 2012). Finally, the EP's Committee for Environment, Public Health and Food Safety enhanced its internal

working practices in response to the increased workload after the 2004 EU enlargement (Burns, Carter, & Worsfold, 2012).

8 Conclusion

At the outset of this article, we asked how formal treaty changes and societal politicization affect the development of EP policy capacity for influencing EU decision-making. In other words, we explored the extent to which the development of the EP's policy capacity – as a combination of administrative and political capacity – is linked to new formal rights and politicization of specific policy issues. To this end, we set out a theoretical framework consisting of a conceptual differentiation of policy capacity into four dimensions: independence and intra-institutional integration as measures of institutionalization of administrative capacity, and inter-institutional interaction and co-optation of third actors as measures of political capacity. We then used this theoretical framework for analysing policy capacity in the case of the EP's involvement in EU external trade policy and the TTIP negotiations.

Our findings provide support for the claim that formal changes in the EP's competencies and the inter-institutional balance generate changes at the intra-institutional level in terms of administrative capacity. This illustrates the importance of resources for information processing as a pre-requisite to have an influence on policy- and decision-making at the EU level (Kreppel, 2003). However, internal administrative capacity alone is not sufficient to act on formal competencies, as policy influence is exercised in the inter-institutional sphere. Therefore, we have argued that the EP also needs to develop issue-specific political capacity – understood as the capacity for coordination with other EU institutions and third actors. Whereas administrative capacity is of a generic nature – providing an institutionalized base of information processing ability, political capacity is issue-specific and involves specialization of administrators and MEPs involved in the policy dossier. Societal politicization of individual policy issues triggers a process of active judgment updating in the EP, thereby providing an incentive for the development of political capacity, which in turn is essential for the EP to have an impact in EU decision-making. Given that policy capacity at the committee level is a prerequisite for the EP's impact on policy outcomes, an enhanced understanding thereof also provides new insights for EP empowerment. The significant growth of the INTA Committee in terms of importance and power in the EP at large, makes the study of its policy capacity highly relevant for other policy fields where the EP has witnessed a post-Lisbon increase in competencies (e.g. agriculture and fisheries). By differentiating between administrative and political capacity, this article has also provided a more nuanced perspective of the assumption that 'information is power' (Hall & Taylor, 1996, as cited

in Hillebrandt, 2017, p. 63). It is not the amount of information the EP receives but rather the quality of intra-institutional coordination and inter-institutional exchanges used to process that information, which determines the baseline for the EP's policy influence.

As our empirical study is limited to the EP's INTA committee, this article is meant as a starting point for further exploration of policy capacity and ultimately policy influence within the EP. Our theoretical framework goes beyond the current literature on EP administration by combining a broad organizational perspective of the EP's committees with a fine-grained, two-level conceptualization of policy capacity. A more systematic comparative perspective across several policy fields using this theoretical framework would greatly enhance scholarly understanding of the daily functioning and institutionalization of the EP.

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