

Democracy and Accountability in the Enlarged European Union

Issues for Reforming the EP's Control Powers and Commission/Parliament Relations

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As Dr Rittberger has discussed, the European Parliament actually possesses a considerable range of powers already - on p. 6 of his paper he asserts that 'the EP - as far as the **types** of its powers are concerned - has reached its pinnacle'. Thus whether it requires more powers or should rather use those powers that it already has more effectively is one that needs to be considered rather carefully. This is as true in the area of the EP's powers of control as it is elsewhere. In terms of the EP's relations with the Commission, the situation is rather different, depending as it does on the interests of member states in the IGC, who will put forward competing views of the best form of inter-institutional relations.

In terms of control I shall argue that the EP has sufficient powers but that in some cases it needs to be more willing to use those powers. One exception to this is the lack of any power to censure individual Commissioners. This is only partially rectified by the letters given by Commissioners-Designate to President Prodi to the effect that they would resign if they were brought under suspicion. Yet, while a power of individual censure might be desirable in terms of 'control' it can be argued to breach the concept of 'collective responsibility' - thus it is debatable whether the EP should demand this additional power.

As far as EP/Commission relations more generally are concerned the outcome of the Convention (or rather the Intergovernmental Conference that will be opened in June). If a decision were taken that the Commission or Commission President should emerge as a result of the outcome of EP elections, the relationship between the Parliament and the Commission would be broadly analogous to that between the parliament and government in parliamentary democracies. This could have the further result of making EP elections (and the EU generally) more relevant to the public and could certainly render the Commission more accountable. However, if the Council President were to be elected as well as the Commission (President), this would render the inter-institutional relations profoundly complex. It is probable that the Commission would become more accountable to the Commission as in the first model but there would certainly also be tensions between the Council and the Commission; what this would imply for the overall institutional balance is far harder to predict - I for one would hope that we don't have to find out!

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