

22. Parliamentary deliberation in inter-regional relations: insights from the ACP-EU JPA

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This chapter examines the quality of deliberation in the European Union's oldest and most unique inter-regional parliamentary assembly, namely the Joint Parliamentary Assembly with the regions of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP-EU JPA). The chapter aims to build on and contribute to the academic interest in parliamentary diplomacy and inter-parliamentary cooperation. In this literature, three distinct but interrelated questions on the *added value*, *rationale* and *purpose* have led to interesting debates on the role and nature of European parliamentary diplomacy. In order to evaluate the role of inter-parliamentary institutions, we put forward an analytical framework based on the theoretical perspective of parliamentary deliberation. A deliberative approach to inter-parliamentary debate acknowledges the inter-regional parliamentary assemblies' role as promoters of dialogue and mutual understanding (Bächtiger 2014), as opposed to perspectives that evaluate these assemblies as decision-making bodies. Empirically, we focus on the ACP-EU JPA debates on the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) – arguably one of the most divisive subjects in EU-ACP relations – which the ACP-EU JPA nevertheless achieves consensus on, as evidenced in the numerous resolutions on the topic.

The EU-ACP Joint Parliamentary Assembly is one of three joint institutions outlined in the European Union (EU) and the ACP Cotonou Partnership Agreement (Art. 14 and 17). Its origins date back to the establishment of the Yaoundé Convention (1963) and the Parliamentary Conference of the Association (Grilli 1993; Delputte 2012, 2013). Despite its historicity and its uniqueness internationally, the ACP-EU JPA remains one of the most understudied parliamentary institutions. The fact that academic literature on the topic is so sparse does not reflect the potential understanding that can be gained by studying this institution for the field of parliamentary deliberation. Moreover, in the current context, a few

years shy of the end of the EU-ACP Cotonou Partnership Agreement in 2020, analyses are needed to ascertain the role of parliamentary deliberation in this particular institution and what role it could play in a post-Cotonou framework.

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows. The next section discusses the theoretical perspective of deliberation and develops an analytical framework to study deliberation in inter-regional parliamentary assemblies. The chapter then provides the background on the ACP-EU JPA and motivates the selection of this unique assembly as an illustration of parliamentary deliberation. The subsequent section presents the analysis based on document analysis, 37 semi-structured interviews and participatory observation. We conclude by reflecting on the results of our research and raise a few questions for future analyses on the topics of ACP-EU relations and parliamentary deliberation.

DELIBERATION IN INTER-REGIONAL PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLIES

As mentioned in the introduction, by adopting a deliberative perspective to assess the quality of the work of the ACP-EU JPA, we aim to contribute to the relatively new but burgeoning field of parliamentary diplomacy and interparliamentary cooperation (see Costa et al. 2013; Stavridis and Jančić 2016; Weisglas and de Boer 2007). This new attention follows from the fact that inter-regional parliamentary assemblies have been granted an important role in the EU's contact with other regions, and that inter-parliamentary institutions and conferences have rapidly expanded in recent years.

In this literature three distinct but interrelated questions related to the *added value*, *rationale* and *purpose* of European parliamentary diplomacy have led to interesting debates. First, what is the *added value* of parliamentary diplomacy? Does the EU through its parliamentary relations with third countries simply aim to promote its own model; and can parliamentary diplomacy in the EU context thus be considered as a mere reproduction of traditional diplomacy, or does it bring a specific added value to the diplomatic network of the EU? Second, what is the *rationale* of inter-parliamentary cooperation? Inter-parliamentary cooperation can be driven by a democratic rationale and a willingness to improve the monitoring and scrutiny of executives; but it can also be driven by a logic in which the focus is put on fostering trust and understanding across borders. Third, what kind of *purpose* does parliamentary diplomacy serve for the EU vis-à-vis its relations with third countries? In

other words, do ideas travel in reciprocal directions or only in a one-way direction?

This chapter focuses on the deliberative function of inter-parliamentary cooperation, which comes down to the promotion of dialogue and mutual understanding (Bächtiger 2014). Based on the theoretical perspective of deliberation, we aim to explore the value of parliamentary debate in inter-regional relations. In doing so, the chapter aims to overcome two major critiques, which label inter-regional parliamentary assemblies as mere “talking shops” amongst parliamentary elites.

First, from a purely rational perspective, inter-regional parliamentary assemblies are often criticized for being mere talking shops, mainly because they generally do not have decision-making power. Indeed, most of these assemblies are not designed as decision-making bodies but serve a wide range of other goals (Squarcialupi 2000; Weisglas and de Boer 2007, Šabič 2008; Costa et al. 2013). This chapter recognizes that these assemblies’ roles and functions are to be found in their objective to facilitate dialogue and mutual understanding between parliamentarians in the EU’s inter-regional relations. Specifically for this chapter, the Cotonou Partnership Agreement defines the role of the ACP-EU JPA in terms of “promoting democratic processes through dialogue and consultation”, “facilitating greater understanding between the peoples of the European Union and those of the ACP States” and “raising public awareness of development issues” (Art. 17), amongst others, by discussing, adopting resolutions and making recommendations. Given the centrality of talking in this role description, taking a deliberative perspective offers a well-suited framework to evaluate the quality of the assemblies’ work.

The concept of deliberation has become increasingly central in political science debates since Habermas’s discourse ethics (Steenbergen et al. 2003). Indeed, this has sparked much debate in the literature on discourse theory of deliberative democracy (Stie 2008). Today, it continues to be one of the most relevant concepts to assess the processes used to reach reasoned consensus by shedding light on blind spots in political analyses. In this chapter, we draw on the definition of deliberation by Steenbergen et al. (2003, p. 21), as a “process in which political actors listen to each other, reasonably justify their positions, show mutual respect, and are willing to re-evaluate and eventually revise their initial preferences through a process of discourse about competing validity claims”.

Second, some deliberative theorists would argue that inter-regional parliamentary assemblies cannot be considered as deliberative forums as they are exclusive to parliamentary elites and lack participation of the wider public. Here, the chapter points to the important distinction made in the literature between two general varieties of deliberative theory, namely

micro and macro perspectives (Hendriks 2009; Chappell 2010; Lafont 2015). This chapter adopts a micro deliberative perspective as it aims to learn from the procedural (and substantive) norms of deliberative processes in a structured forum “where relatively free and equal participants come together to decide on an agenda, reason and argue together, and settle on an outcome” (Cohen 1997, cited in Hendriks 2009, p.175). In such forums, a smaller number of participants aim for reaching a mutual understanding in view of the collective good. This micro deliberative perspective favors the reasoning dimension of deliberation over the criteria of public participation. This is in contrast to macro deliberative perspectives, which focus on large-scale debates in the public sphere. This chapter does not want to solve this debate between the macro-perspective focus on the criteria of participation and the micro’s perspective focus on ideal deliberation. Instead, it recognizes inter-regional parliamentary assemblies as micro deliberative forums, thereby accepting that they should ideally be connected to a wider deliberative system, bringing together the peoples of the European Union and those of the partner regions.

Importantly, this chapter employs the ideal type of deliberation as a heuristic tool, and starts from the assumption that a real political debate will never fully reach the ideal type of deliberation. In our approach to deliberation, we take into account both the procedural and the substantial dimension of ideal deliberation. According to Stie (2008, pp.3–4), “procedures of deliberation can ensure that not only the strong and powerful but also weaker and less resourceful groups can influence outcomes”. Substantially, deliberation is considered a prerequisite for a critical and rational debate between divergent views, interests or identities (Habermas 1998; Risse 2000).

Based on the existing literature on parliamentary deliberation, an analytical framework has been developed based on five main criteria identified for ideal deliberation in an inter-parliamentary cooperation setting. The first criterion, *participation*, concerns the inclusion of all relevant affected parties. Procedurally, ideal deliberation requires the continuous participation of elected representatives. Substantially, opinions of the actors should be representative and include the needs, interests, preferences and positions of all concerned parties (Stie 2008). Second, ideal deliberation should be characterized by *openness* in order to allow for a free and transparent public debate and scrutiny (Stie 2008). Procedurally, the openness should be institutionalized through open sessions and the accessibility of the policy documents, background information, verbatim records and not merely minutes, and voting results. Substantially, the public should be able to get a clear presentation of all the main dilemmas, visions and alternatives that circulate during deliberation. The third

criterion is the *common good*, and refers to whether there is a display of “empathy, other-directedness or solidarity that allows participants to consider the wellbeing of others and the community at large” (Steenbergen et al. 2003, p. 26) or purely narrow constituencies’ interests in deliberation. In line with Rawls (1971), we understand the common good in terms of references to the least advantaged in society, as opposed to Mill’s utilitarian definition based on the good of the greatest number of people (Mill 1998; Risse 2000). Fourth, deliberation should involve *constructive politics*. Risse (2000, p. 10) explains that “the goal of discursive interaction is to achieve argumentative consensus with the other, not to push through one’s own view of the world or moral values”. As such, constructive politics is linked to the ability to reach reasoned or argumentative consensus through empathizing and sharing a common lifeworld, as opposed to sticking to uncompromising positional politics. The fifth and final criterion refers to the presence of power neutralizing mechanisms, or, put simply, the *Rules of Procedure*. Risse (2000) highlights that the more that rules prescribe non-hierarchical behavior between actors, the more the rules should enable argumentation within the given framework. This is an important criterion to assess whether not only the stronger, more vociferous actors, but also the weaker and perhaps less powerful can effectively contribute to argumentation to balance the tables in a partnership, which seeks to be equal. Together, these five main criteria are necessary in order to arrive at valid norms (Habermas 1998) or legitimate outcomes (Stie 2008).

THE ACP-EU JPA: A UNIQUE INTER-PARLIAMENTARY INSTITUTION

This chapter aims to provide a deeper insight into the role of parliamentary deliberation by looking at the ACP-EU JPA. The ACP-EU JPA is characterized by a unique context, which brings together a transnational cohort of parliamentarians from the global North and South. This particular assembly was chosen for several reasons.

First, parliamentary deliberations have been held at the JPA in various forms since the 1960s, making it the oldest and most institutionalized parliamentary assembly (Delputte 2013). An equal number of parliamentarians meet up to four times a year on a rotating basis between the regions – twice for plenary sessions and twice for one of the three thematic Committee meetings on economic development, finance and trade; political affairs; and social affairs and the environment (Williams 2017).

Second, the ACP-EU JPA model has inspired other such parliamentary networks, including the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly

(EMPA), the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly (EuroLat) and the EU-Neighbourhood East Parliamentary Assembly (EuroNest). Therefore, we can expect this illustration to provide insights into possible best practices and lessons learnt, and to inspire more research, including comparative research, into such newer forums of parliamentary debate.

Third, the parliamentary dimension of the ACP–EU partnership has grown in importance over years, which makes it a non-negligible source of analysis. For example, in both 2005 and 2010 amendments of the Cotonou Agreement, the JPA’s role was strengthened with regard to political dialogue on the “essential elements” (Art. 8) and its oversight role respectively (Delputte 2013). In addition to this, the recent EP report on the future of EU–ACP relations also underlined the important and continued role for the JPA as a vestige of parliamentary relations between the regions (European Parliament 2016).

Fourth, and most important for this chapter, the power asymmetries and differences in world views, interests and identities amongst ACP and EU countries are often large and, in such a context, deliberation is all the more necessary to be able to agree on a common and valid normative framework (Risse 2000). While real dialogue in intergovernmental negotiations between the ACP and EU countries may remain difficult to achieve, the ACP-EU JPA may be an illustration of a forum where ideal deliberation between the different parties is more likely to be approached.

As stated before, the chapter puts the empirical focus on the ACP-EU JPA debate on the trade–development nexus, and more specifically on the EPAs. From the onset the EU and ACP regions had different expectations and ambitions for the EPAs. The EU adopted negotiating guidelines for very ambitious and comprehensive agreements that would include the liberalization of services, investment and government procurement and commitments on intellectual property rights, competition and data protection. The ACP countries adopted guidelines for EPAs that would be limited to securing market access for their exports and that would strengthen their institutional and productive capacities, and regional integration through enhanced cooperation (Maes 2014). A key obstacle in the intergovernmental negotiations related to the fact that there was no mutual understanding on what constitutes “development-friendly EPAs”, suggesting the absence of real deliberation amongst EU and ACP regions.

The analysis is based on document analysis, semi-structured interviews and participatory observation. More specifically, more than 40 JPA resolutions, 120 questions to the Commission and the Council, and the attendance lists of 29 JPA sessions over the period 2000–2016 have been analyzed. Second, 37 interviews were conducted in 2010 and 2016 with key ACP-EU JPA stakeholders, including JPA members and experts. Finally,

the insights also build on participatory observation during the three plenary sessions and four “Economic Development, Finance and Trade” Committee meetings in Brussels between 2008 and 2016.

ANALYSING DELIBERATION IN THE ACP-EU JPA

In this section we summarize the results based on the five main criteria in the framework of analysis of deliberation in the ACP-EU JPA.

Participation

On participation, research on procedural indicators – *continuity* of participation and *representation* of political groups – reveals that participation is problematic due to striking differences on the EU and ACP sides. On the EU side, there is more or less stable participation during each legislature, although there are turnovers when elections are held every five years. However, while this was not deemed to be an issue *per se*, there was unanimous agreement amongst all interviewees on the disparity in participation when the JPA is held outside of Brussels. Some interviewees highlighted that there is higher attendance in exotic places. This acknowledgment has previously led to criticism of the JPA as a forum for “political tourism”. An analysis of the attendance lists confirms this perceived imbalance. While the JPA sessions have gathered an average of 64 percent of the EU members of the JPA per session, attendance is indeed higher when JPA sessions take place in tourist destinations such as Cape Town (2002, 89 percent), Barbados (2006, 84 percent), Rome (2003, 84 percent) and Tenerife (2010, 80 percent).

On the ACP side, unlike the MEPs, attendance seems to be rather stable over the different sessions, and we found no peaks when the JPA took place in tourist destinations. The majority of ACP *countries* are also loyal participants: over the past 15 years, 77 percent of the ACP members have attended more than half of all the JPA sessions, and 61 percent have even attended more than 75 percent of the sessions. However, permanent participation is problematic as there are no permanent individual members, only permanent *country* members. Indeed, the list of JPA members consists of the names of individual EP representatives and the names of ACP *countries*. In formal terms, the ACP countries can delegate different MPs for each JPA session. Nevertheless, most of the loyal participating countries maintain a rather high degree of continuity within their delegations, sending the same MP to the JPA for several years, contributing to an enabling context for deliberation.

When it comes to *representation*, on the EU side there is a cluster of active and loyal MEPs who represent a nearly perfect reflection of the political groups in the EP. On the ACP side however, most participants represent their respective governments by being delegates of the majority parties, although there are a few exceptions – whereby the opposition is also represented. Moreover, Art. 1(2) JPA Rules of Procedure sets out the provisions whereby if a state might not be able to send parliamentarians due to *forces majeures* – if parliament is suspended or does not exist – a representative may be nominated via letter by the speaker of the given parliament. This touches on the crux of the issue in representative systems of whether parliamentarians engage in democratic or elite deliberations.

Despite issues of procedural participation, on the *substantial* indicators, it seems rather straightforward to grasp the variety of different actors' opinions on both the possible positive and negative implications of the EPAs, as well as the more critical positions in the debate from the sum of the empirical research. However, there is variation on what can be grasped from resolutions to the parliamentary questions individually. More specifically, the parliamentary questions reflect the variety of opinions more explicitly than the resolutions. In contrast to the resolutions, parliamentary questions overtly indicate variegated opinions on the EPAs, even questioning the fundamentals of the EU's neoliberal agenda.

Openness

The JPA's relatively good openness (publicly available documents, a dedicated website, etc.) is impacted by *procedural* impediments, which affect the accessibility of the Assembly. First, there are no detailed minutes, and explanation of the voting results is not published on the JPA website. Second, although JPA plenary and committee sessions are open to the general public, accreditation is needed and is not easily obtained, as experienced by civil society organization (CSO) stakeholders, especially in recent years.

These procedural issues did not significantly impact *substantial* openness as the documents reviewed displayed a full range of dilemmas, visions and alternatives, with the exception of the issue of ACP bloc voting. The ACP side of the JPA consistently votes as a bloc, which obscures the possibility to grasp the different substantial issues amongst the ACP parliamentarians themselves. However, in the resolutions and parliamentary questions, it is relatively straightforward to grasp the substantial issues on openness. For example, typical *dilemmas* concerning the trade–development nexus include the capacity constraints in ACP countries, regulatory barriers to trade and the impact of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy

reform. Similarly, the resolutions include both global EU–ACP *visions* in the EPA context, which refer to achieving the objectives of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement (with reference to the relevant articles), and more JPA parliamentary-specific visions. Additionally, several JPA resolutions have made outright reference to *alternatives* with reference to Art. 37(6) Cotonou, which states that the Community “will examine all possible alternative possibilities” vis-à-vis the EPAs. The overall perception from interviews confirms that openness is good.

Common Good

On the common good, the Assembly displayed continuing concern over the social impacts of Cotonou. There are consistent and widespread references to vulnerable or marginalized groups across all data reviewed.

Participatory observation in JPA debates revealed that there is a much more evident interplay of common good – expressed as empathy, solidarity and consideration of the other’s well-being – than narrow interests. Feedback from the interviewees confirmed this, as many conceded that this criterion ranges between good and satisfactory at the JPA. However, there was also evidence that the common good could be linked to local interests. For example, one interviewee pointed to a perversion of the common good by linking narrow national fisheries interests with the wider debate on sustainable development. This raises the question: the common good from whose perspective? Can the solidarity at the JPA bridge EU and ACP interests or is it a Euro-centric, or even Euro-selfish, construction of common issues? Finally, in comparison to the resolutions, the parliamentary questions are more explicit examples of how JPA members are concerned with the least advantaged and the well-being of the ACP regions at large. While the resolutions also refer to groups such as least developed countries (LDCs), vulnerable states, the poor, indigenous persons and ACP farmers, they do it to a lesser extent, and certainly less consistently than the parliamentary questions.

In general, this analysis of the JPA showed that the EP as an institution is capable of agreeing on common good issues with its ACP parliamentary counterparts, in stark contrast to the Commission and its ACP governmental counterparts. This can be explained by the nature of the JPA setting where, in contrast to intergovernmental negotiations, stakes are lower; and thus it allows participants to behave less strategically and to update their opinions based on arguments and new information. Moreover, in contrast to national parliaments, the JPA debates are less oriented towards voting or mobilizing constituencies, but more towards aggregating new information and arguments and weighing positions.

Constructive Politics

On constructive politics, it is evident that the JPA is able to reach a consensus on EPAs. There is also clearly consensus both within the resolution texts and across the texts over the years, especially on the “development dimension” of EPAs and possible risks for sustainable development. Yet, despite overwhelming consensus on the EPAs at the JPA, there were deeper, more problematic concerns that consensus happened at the expense of content and “ACP self-censorship”. This raises non-negligible issues relating to the qualitative elements of reaching argumentative consensus. First, the quality of debates has been deemed to be weak, based, in part, on the fact that only like-minded EU and ACP political parties meet each other and there is less of a constructive interaction with the entirety of political representatives. Second, the issue of self-censorship on the side of ACP parliamentarians has been raised, wherein they could not push their views too far because the EU side can call for a split vote: i.e. the EU and the ACP sides can vote separately, as opposed to voting together as one house, and both must have a majority on both sides of the house in order for a resolution to pass. For this reason, it is no surprise that country-oriented resolutions are harder to get consensus on and that, although LDCs are usually very nationalistic and less focused on the EU–ACP dimension, consensus is still reached. Linked to this latter critique, one interviewee described the JPA as “a structure for giving pretence of democratic legitimacy and ACP endorsement of the EU position”. From this perspective therefore, arriving at a rationally motivated consensus at the JPA is nevertheless based on EU preferences, an EU world view and EU moral values. However, there is a finer line of demarcation due to the limited display of “personal politics” wherein the majority of speakers make “mediating proposals” that are appropriate for the JPA agenda. This implies that, in general, members come to the Assembly with the *common lifeworld* spirit, less inclined to sit on their positions and less inclined to pursue openly argumentative deliberation since consensus is the given outcome.

Power Neutralizing Mechanisms

On power neutralizing mechanisms, institutional actors considered this criterion to be very good, in contrast to non-institutional EU and ACP experts who were more critical and expressly linked the Rules of Procedure to determining the outcomes and impact of the JPA deliberation. The JPA Rules of Procedure include 35 Articles – stipulating the Public nature of proceedings, the Adoption of the Agenda, Seating arrangements, Official

languages, Right to speak, Right to vote and methods of voting, Assembly resolutions and Amendments, Questions for written answer, Consultation with civil society, financial regulation amongst others – and four Annexes, and have been revised eight times since their adoption on 3 April 2003. Overall, they can be considered to be clear and transparent. Indeed, interviewees largely considered the Rules of Procedure to be between satisfactory on the low end to very good on the high end. Even a more critical viewpoint explains that: “It is difficult with the EU and the ACP because there is mistrust and agenda setting . . . Yet, there is nothing that obstructs expressing opinion.”

A closer look at the JPA Rules of Procedure *de jure* shows that the power neutralizing mechanisms nevertheless preserve asymmetries between the parties. For example, Art. 10 JPA Rules of Procedure on seating arrangements was identified by one interviewee as perpetuating asymmetries between EU and ACP parliamentarians whereby the former are referred to by their name and the latter by their country. Similarly, Art. 19 on amendments also states that “[a]n ACP representative with the right to vote, a political group or ten members may table amendments” – which also underlines this difference between the ACP “representative” on the one hand, and MEPs who represent their political groups on the other. In addition, in Art. 20 and 21 on “Questions for written answer” and “Question time” respectively, there is a burden on the European Commission (and the ACP-EU Council of Ministers) to respond, but no equivalent burden on the ACP side to respond to issues raised at the JPA. However, in practice, the ACP Secretariat is not an equal vis-à-vis the Commission, and indeed there is no equivalent follow-up on the ACP side. This additional obligation to follow up on the EU side, and lack of it on the ACP side in practice, gives concessions to the ACP and underscores the inequality of the partnership as opposed to a partnership of equals.

A closer look at the Rules of Procedure *de facto*, that is mastery of these rules, shows that in practice it is a double-edged sword. For example, in committees, all members are equal vis-à-vis speaking time, but in the plenary session the D’Hondt method is applied. Therefore, larger groups on the EP side have more speaking time. However, the ACP side is larger overall and has the decisive vote. As such, the power at the JPA is equivalent to the ACP voting as a bloc – which is consistently the case – regardless of the difference in speaking time. Indeed, stakeholders on both the EU and the ACP side have recognized the JPA Rules of Procedure as a benefit to the ACP, and, by extension, some believe this guarantees a “debate between equals”. From this perspective, the Rules of Procedure mean that the ACP side does not merely rubber-stamp the resolution on the table because working methods mean that both sides must work

towards compromise. The only way around this, whereby a resolution does not pass, is when a majority vote occurs through a vote by separate EU and ACP houses – the so-called split vote. One interviewee perfectly summed up: “Rules of Procedure are important in political process and they can advantage or disadvantage parties but it is the mastery of these rules that matter.”

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter aimed to assess the quality of deliberation in the ACP-EU JPA to shed light on the value of parliamentary deliberation in inter-regional relations in general, and between the EU and developing countries specifically. By adopting a deliberative perspective, we aimed to show that talking can be a legitimate objective in itself, provided it takes place under the required conditions. Hence, we developed and applied an analytical framework to evaluate the quality of debate in inter-regional parliamentary assemblies.

The analysis shows that, although, there is overwhelming consensus on EPAs, JPA dialogue on EPAs struggles to approach the ideal type of deliberation. A substantial number of recurrent critical issues across the five criteria impact deliberation. First, participation differs between MEPs in political parties compared to ACP country representatives. Second, ACP bloc voting blurs the substantial openness of deliberation. Third, the Euro-selfish construction of common issues and the existence of narrow interests may pervert the common good. Fourth, the split vote may threaten constructive politics; and, finally, some Rules of Procedure reinforce difference as opposed to neutralizing it. These factors fundamentally impact the quality of parliamentary deliberation at the JPA.

Nevertheless, our evidence points to the fact that the ACP-EU JPA as an illustration of deliberation can be considered an added value for inter-parliamentary cooperation between the EU and the ACP, even if some interviewees conceded that it is the EU promoting its own model, as any international actor would do. The JPA is clearly driven by the rationale of building trust and understanding. Even if ideas do not always travel in reciprocal directions, it serves the purpose of maintaining relations between parliamentarians in the EU and ACP countries.

Leading up to the expiry of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement in 2020, it will be essential to contextualize the procedural and substantial aspects of parliamentary deliberation raised here, as the ACP-EU JPA will be under the spotlight as a non-negligible institution in the negotiations. Indeed, any future partnership, regardless of its final design, should not

be quick to dismiss the enduring *raison d'être* of the ACP-EU JPA as a form of inter-parliamentary cooperation designed to “discuss issues” and “facilitate greater understanding between the peoples of the European Union and those of the ACP” (Art. 17 Cotonou).

Finally, while the results of this research may be specific to the ACP-EU JPA, the analytical framework can be applied to other cases of inter-parliamentary cooperation. As we have indicated, the ACP-EU JPA model has inspired other such parliamentary networks, including the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly and the EU-Neighbourhood East Parliamentary Assembly. Future research, including comparative research, could look into these newer fora of parliamentary debate, taking into account the lessons learnt from the ACP-EU JPA.

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