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THE SWEDISH RIKSDAG AND THE EARLY WARNING SYSTEM

A Policy Shaper or Marginal Player

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Abstract

This thesis examines whether the Swedish Riksdag functions as a Policy Shaper, an actor able to influence legislation, or a Marginal Player, with no influence, within the European Union's Early Warning System (EWS). These terms are introduced and developed in the thesis as ideal types, derived from theories of deparliamentarization and parliamentarization. By defining these perspectives, the thesis builds a renewed analytical framework for assessing parliamentary influence. Using this framework, the study analyzes both legislative case documents and interviews with EU and Swedish officials, applying qualitative content analysis. This framework and these methods are used to evaluate the indirect influence of national parliaments through the EWS. The empirical findings show that the Riksdag predominantly occupies the role of a Marginal Player, where its Reasoned Opinions have no influence on final legislative outcomes. However, exceptions exist: in a minority of cases, the Riksdag contributes to substantive policy amendments aligning with the Riksdag's concerns, illustrating that the Riksdag sometimes exerts influence. The findings also identify Marginal Player characteristics through key administrative, institutional, and interpretive constraints such as centralized processing, filtering mechanisms, and divergent understandings of subsidiarity — all of which may limit effective parliamentary input. However, the thesis also identifies potential ways to exert indirect influence through the Governments or the European Commission's position. These findings challenge binary theoretical perspectives on deparliamentarization and parliamentarization, instead suggesting a dynamic, context-dependent landscape of parliamentary influence.

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1. Introduction

The European Union (EU) has faced significant challenges during the 21st century, including the Euro crisis and the war in Ukraine. In response, the EU has progressively expanded its policymaking capacities, centralizing decision-making powers (Kriesi 2025: 13, 76; Schmidt 2020: 293; Zürn 2019: 977). This ongoing centralization has raised concerns about democratic accountability (Auel & Christiansen 2015: 262; Hettne et al. 2014: 4). In turn, these concerns are frequently linked to rising populism (Schmidt 2020: 264, 293; Zürn 2019: 977), public skepticism toward EU institutions, and a growing divide between citizens and EU decision-makers (Raunio 2011: 315; Zürn 2019: 977). Within this debate on what is often referred to the EU's democratic deficit, defined as the lack of democratic accountability, national parliaments are often portrayed as the primary losers of European integration. Yet, national parliaments are also considered a remedy to address the democratic deficit (Hettne et al. 2014: 36).

Responding to these democratic concerns, EU policymakers sought ways to enhance national parliament's involvement, notably through the Lisbon Treaty and its introduction of the Early Warning System (EWS) (Borońska-Hryniewiecka 2021: 2; de Wilde 2012: 3; Raunio 2010: 2, 3, 11). The EWS granted national parliaments the right to scrutinize EU legislative proposals and to issue a Reasoned Opinion if they consider that a proposal violates the subsidiarity principle (Viola 2021: 3 4). Yet, 15 years later, the central question persists: Can national parliaments shape EU policy through the EWS or do their efforts remain marginal?

Existing research presents conflicting perspectives on the influence of the EWS. Several studies highlight their limited impact, arguing that parliamentary opinions rarely lead to legislative changes, and thus positioning national parliaments as marginal actors (Auel 2019: 7, 8; Fromage 2015: 7). Conversely, Cooper (2019: 921) questions this view by claiming that national parliaments actively use the EWS to indirectly shape policy in final legislative output, while van Gruisen and Huysmans (2020: 469) show that individual parliamentary interventions affect governments and the European Commission's behavior, hereafter Commission.

This debate on the EWS suffers from two critical research gaps. First, although previous studies implicitly portray national parliaments as either Policy Shapers or Marginal Players, these terms remain vague and lack systematic criteria. Second, the administrative dimension has been overlooked. How EU institutions receive, process, and respond to Reasoned Opinions is decisive for whether parliamentary interventions are taken seriously or are consistently dismissed, yet little is known about these practices. Without this perspective, it is impossible to fully assess whether national parliaments shape policy or are confined to symbolic participation.

Statistics show a decline in collective engagement in the EWS which deepens the uncertainty about whether national parliaments act as Policy Shapers or Marginal Players. During the last Commission mandate, no proposal received more than two Reasoned Opinions, compared with up to 14 in previous mandate (European Commission 2024). The Commission's report on competitiveness also stressed that national parliaments make little use of the EWS and called for an EU-wide inquiry into the causes (Draghi 2024: 68). Against this background, the Swedish Riksdag stands out, consistently engaging with the EWS and recognized as one of Europe's institutionally strongest legislatures (Cornell Jonsson 2016: 295; Rozenberg 2017: 25). Yet, the Riksdag's Committee on the Constitution noted this decline and raised concerns about whether the EWS is perceived by national parliaments as ineffective (Riksdagsförvaltningen 2025: 80). In summary, the developments of the EWS and gaps of the literature makes the Riksdag a crucial case to study for reassessing not only whether national parliaments act as Policy Shapers or Marginal Players, but also what role national parliaments can play within the EWS.

1.2. Aim

The aim of this thesis is to contribute new insights into whether, and how, an individual parliament can have an indirect impact on the EU legislative process through engagement with the EWS. Here, "indirect" refers to the complexity of EU decision-making, which makes it impossible to attribute legislative outcomes directly to a single actor. The thesis focuses on the Swedish Riksdag and develops a refined theoretical framework that distinguishes two distinct ideal types: The Policy Shaper, whose interventions shape legislation, and the Marginal Player, whose inputs remain symbolic. As these roles have only been vaguely applied in previous research and lack systematic definitions, this thesis specifies their defining characteristics and associated forms of influence, thereby addressing a research gap.

The framework will be systematically applied to categorize each intervention of the Riksdag in the EWS as either Policy Shaper or Marginal Player, and will be used to examine the distinctive characteristics and context related to each ideal type. This thesis combines analysis of legislative documents with insights from EU officials. Thereby, it contributes theoretically and empirically to the underdeveloped research field on national parliaments' engagement in the EWS, particularly when they act individually rather than collectively. Clarifying both the Riksdag's role and the EU administrative practices provides broader insights into the democratic potential and limitations of national parliaments in the EU.

To capture this complexity, the thesis includes a dual approach with distinct but complementary dimensions. The first dimension focuses on the Riksdag's influence on EU legislation, while the second examines how the current administrative organization enable or restrain the influence of Reasoned Opinions. This approach is necessary because legislative output alone does not reveal or trace indirect influence, while institutional practice alone does not show concrete outcomes. By combining both, the thesis offers a comprehensive analysis of the Riksdag's role in the EWS. This aim translates into two research questions:

-How does the Swedish Riksdag act within the EU decision-making process through the EWS: as Policy Shaper or Marginal Player?

-How do the administrative organization and institutional practices of EU institutions enable or constrain the Riksdag's capacity to act as Policy Shaper or Marginal Player?

2. Previous research

This section aims to provide an overview of previous research on the debate about the EU democratic deficit and its connection to national parliaments, ultimately moving on to the influence of the EWS. It concludes by illustrating the research gap and summarizing the contribution of this study.

2. 1. National parliaments and the EU

The European Union (EU) has long been at the center of debates surrounding its perceived democratic deficit, a concept referring to the gap between EU decision-making processes and democratic legitimacy (Follesdal & Hix, 2006: 534). According to some, the centralization of legislative authority to the EU level has led to a sense of detachment for citizens, who traditionally engage with politics at the national level and through their parliaments (Raunio, 2011: 303, 304). The consequences of citizen detachment have been compounded by the complexity of EU governance, leading to a continuous decline in public trust in EU institutions and the rise of populist parties (Auel & Neuhold, 2017: 1551; Auel 2019: 1; O'brennan & Raunio 2007: 12).

The democratic deficit stems from the process of European integration which has meant shifts in national sovereignty to achieve common goals amongst the member states, meaning legislative powers from the national parliaments have been pooled to the EU level (Wetter & von Sydow 2019: 6; Raunio 2011: 304). Furthermore, governments represent member states at EU level where they often bypass their domestic legislatures, creating information asymmetries between governments and their parliament which further weaken parliamentary oversight (Auel & Christiansen, 2015: 261). The delegation of authority from national to EU level has weakened the legislative authority of national parliaments (Raunio, 2011: 304) – a phenomenon described as *deparliamentarization*. In short, this theory suggests that deepened EU integration has eroded national parliaments' control over the executive (ibid 2011: 304). As a result, the role of national parliaments has become central to debates on the lack of democratic accountability and legitimacy in the EU.

National parliaments play a crucial role in representing citizens and upholding democracy, although their contributions to these functions tend to vary. With changing political

landscapes, national parliaments are adapting in order to effectively scrutinize their governments, engage with the public in new ways, and actively participate in transnational cooperation such as the EU (Beetham 2006: 1, 2). Despite the long unrecognized role of national parliaments within the EU framework (Auel 2019:2; Auel & Christiansen 2015: 261), this very role was altered through the Lisbon treaty. The treaty aimed to address the growing concerns about EU legitimacy and accountability (Wetter & von Sydow 2019; Borońska-Hryniewiecka 2021: 2). Through the treaty national parliaments were formally given influence and a role in contributing to democracy in the EU, the good functioning of the EU and in protecting the subsidiarity principle (Auel & Christiansen 2015: 261, 262; Treaty of Lisbon).

With these changes, Cooper (2006: 282; 2012: 554) and Sprungk (2013: 551) claim that national parliaments regained powers and contributed to the alleviation of the democratic deficit in several ways. Firstly, the introduction of the EWS brought a parliamentary and public scrutiny of EU decision-making, secondly, powers were given back to national parliaments that had previously been lost, and thirdly, parliaments were given the responsibility of controlling subsidiarity compliance through the EWS, and this mechanism required a direct constructive dialogue between National Parliaments and the EU:s institutions. These arguments can be categorized as parliamentarization theory, which in the EU context refers to the Europeanization and greater involvement of national parliaments, such as the institutional ability to scrutinize EU affairs and shape policy (Gheyle 2019: 228, 234). The debate between deparliamentarization and parliamentarization theory shows that the role of national parliaments in the EU system is not only an institutional question, but also a fundamental issue of democratic legitimacy and accountability. The contested nature of these theories, further discussed in chapter 3, is central to this thesis.

In summary, the perceived lack of democratic accountability in the EU led to formalized roles for national parliaments to exert influence in the EU arena. Furthermore, as the democratic deficit became acknowledged to a wider extent, national parliaments increasingly became considered as actors that could add democratic accountability through their involvement. As a result, the Lisbon Treaty formalized a role for parliaments in contributing to EU decision-

making, mainly through the EWS. The next section introduces the EWS and describes the aims of the mechanism; this will be followed by a discussion on its impact.

2. 2. The Early Warning System: Aims and influence

2.2.1. The Subsidiarity principle and Early Warning System

The principle of subsidiarity is outlined in the treaties: described as the intent to ensure that decisions are made as closely to the citizens as possible (Lisbon treaty 2007). This principle mandates that the EU should act only when objectives cannot be sufficiently achieved by Member States alone but can be better accomplished at Union level (ibid 2007). Hence, it is a tool to determine which level (local, regional, national or international) is appropriate to adopt specific legislation, with the aim to work against unnecessary centralization and to ensure that influence over the decision-making process may be exerted at the relevant levels. Nevertheless, it remains unclear how to interpret its aims and application in specific cases (Hettne et al. 2014: 15; Cornell Jonsson 2016: 297, 298).

The principle of subsidiarity can be applied in both narrow and broad terms. A narrow, legalistic approach focuses on whether a proposal is better handled at the EU or national level (Cornell Jonsson 2016: 298). Broader interpretations understand the principle as a political tool for parliaments to resist EU integration or defend national interests (Goldoni, 2014: 101). Kiiver (2011: 541) claims that national parliaments should define the principle's scope based on their own priorities. The lack of consensus leaves room for varied interpretations, from technical checks to political contestation. The debate on the principle's application should not be overlooked, as it can affect national parliaments influence (Cornell Jonsson 2019: 294, 298). However, the scope of this thesis is limited and does not examine how different scholars or actors define or interpret the scope of subsidiarity, since the more tangible measure of parliamentary influence lies in legislative output.

In order to protect the principle of subsidiarity and add democratic legitimacy to the EU, the Treaty of Lisbon introduced the Early Warning System (EWS), which grants national parliaments the authority to monitor proposed EU legislation for compliance with this principle (Auel & Christiansen, 2017: 267). National parliaments can issue Reasoned Opinions if they consider that a proposal is in breach of the subsidiarity principle (Viola 2024:

4). If a third of EU parliaments raise concerns (one fourth in the area of freedom, security and justice) the objection reaches the threshold known as a "yellow card", in analogy with football players being booked. Then, the Commission must review the proposal (Ibid 2021: 4). Despite this review and reconsideration of the proposal, the Commission can maintain the original text in spite of objections from national parliaments. If more than half of the national parliaments have objections (rendering an "orange card"), the Commission must provide clear justification for its decision but can still continue without changing the proposal. At this stage, both the Council and the European Parliament can block the proposal: the former through a qualified majority (55% of votes and 65% of EU population) and the latter by a simple majority vote (Ibid 2021: 4). The threshold for an orange card has never been reached, while the yellow card procedure has been triggered on three occasions.

In summary, through the EWS national parliaments gained a new role to influence EU policy by collectively testing whether proposed EU legislation are indeed poised to be taken as close to the citizens as possible, and by issuing Reasoned Opinions when they do not find this to be the case. When the opinions reach certain threshold, the Commission must respond with a motivation, but can still adhere to its proposal. However, yellow cards have only occurred on three occasions during the last 15 years of applicability of the EWS, and have split the research field, with some researchers questioning the system's effectiveness, and others highlighting the possibility that even individual parliaments may function as important signals in the legislative process. These debates are described in detail in the following section, which deals with the studied influence of the EWS.

2.2.2. Influence through the EWS

The influence and effectiveness of the EWS has received a lot of attention and remains highly contested, both among researchers and parliamentarians (Cornell Jonsson 2016). Auel (2019) argues that the mechanism has little to no impact on the legislative process. Over time, this perception may have contributed to parliaments participating less in the mechanism, with fewer parliaments engaged in the mechanism at all (Rozenberg 2017: 7; European Commission 2024). However, van Gruisen & Huysmans (2020: 468, 469) and Cooper (2019: 937) contradicts this view, showing that the EWS plays an important role as a signaling tool and Policy Shaper that influences EU decision-making indirectly. Both authors also argue that

Reasoned Opinions can shape legislative proposals even when the yellow card thresholds are not met.

The set-up of the EWS as a determinant of influence?

Some scholars argue that the limited impact of subsidiarity scrutiny is inherent in its set-up and in political realities of parliamentary democracy. Raunio (2009:12) argues that national parliaments rarely take positions that contradict those of their governments. Additionally, EU institutions seldom violate the subsidiarity principle, while the diversity in political affiliations and institutional traditions among national parliaments makes it unlikely that they will reach the necessary thresholds (Raunio 2011: 12). Taken together, Raunio (2010: 2) finds that the EWS is unable to overcome existing political constraints, leaving subsidiarity checks a comparatively weak instrument of parliamentary influence.

However, other scholars argue that despite its limitations, the EWS has strengthened national parliaments' role as gatekeepers and networkers in EU decision-making (Raunio 2011; Sprungk 2013: 551). By collectively reviewing EU proposals, national parliaments not only coordinate their scrutiny efforts but also engage with EU institutions and each other. This interparliamentary cooperation represents an evolution of their traditional role, reinforcing their institutional relevance within the EU system.

While these debates offer valuable insights into the mechanism's theoretical potential, they rely heavily on assumptions about parliamentary behavior and institutional dynamics. To move beyond speculation, this thesis argues for a more practical, outcome-oriented approach, focusing on concrete legislative processes to determine whether national parliaments achieve measurable influence. The next section focuses on how previous scholars have used process-tracing and typologies to practically assess the influence of the EWS.

The Yellow Card Procedures and Parliamentary Influence

Research on the EWS's effectiveness has focused primarily on the three cases where the yellow card threshold was met (in 2012, 2013 and 2016). Through interviews and a process-tracing analysis Cooper (2015: 3, 28) studied the first case concerning the proposed Monti II regulation in order to determine whether the EWS can be considered a harmless procedure or a lever of parliamentary influence. The author finds that the yellow card and the subsequent

withdrawal of the legislation illustrates how the EWS can influence the EU legislative process, even without any formal veto power. Similarly, Fabbrini & Granat (2013: 115) highlighted the influence of national parliaments through the procedure and noted that the Commission may unintentionally have empowered national parliaments to challenge legislative proposals on a broader level since their review concerned not only subsidiarity, but also substance. However, studies using process tracing methods on the second and third yellow cards challenge this perception. In these cases, the Commission did not redraw the legislation despite parliamentary objections.

Furthermore, various authors highlight that the fact that the threshold has only been met on 3 occasions, and interpret this to mean that the EWS has no influence. However, Fromage (2015: 7) argues that this instead demonstrates the success of the EWS since it has not blocked legislation, but rather been employed when a subsidiarity breach has occurred and caused engagement with the Commission.

These findings raise questions about whether the mechanism is a meaningful constraint on EU policymaking or merely a consultative tool (Fromage & Kreilinger 2017: 125). While existing literature extensively examines yellow card cases and their potential to induce the Commission to withdraw proposals, it remains narrowly focused on collective action and withdrawals of legislation. Furthermore, the structure of the EWS relies on the collective action of national parliaments, meaning that several chambers must submit Reasoned Opinions on the same proposal, o challenge and potentially influence legislative proposals to ensure compliance with the subsidiarity principle. However, as most Reasoned Opinions during the last commission mandate were adopted individually rather than collectively, there is a growing need to examine whether individual parliaments have any ability to influence. The reason behind the decrease in engagement could be a result of the fact that national parliaments found other, more appropriate ways of communication, such as the use other instruments like the Political Dialogue, of which the number of submissions is slowly growing (Rozenberg 2017: 6; Kreilinger 2023: 1). If not, it raises questions about why actors such as the Swedish Riksdag continues to engage in the process. This leaves a significant research gap: the influence of individual parliaments acting alone remains largely unexplored.

Other Cases and Reviews of the EWS

Auel (2019: 1) explores the role of national parliaments in the EU, arguing that their potential to influence the legislative process is minimal, with no direct impact at all. The conclusion is based on the cases of yellow card and other research. The author further argues that the complexity of EU governance — with its network of institutions — makes it inherently difficult to trace legislative output back to influence back to parliaments, a challenge also acknowledged by the Commission. Even national parliaments with strong scrutiny systems face difficulties in exerting systematic influence. Additionally, the author shows that national parliaments often align with their national governments' positions, making the EWS function more as a tool for supportive 'position-taking' vis-à-vis their governments than as an independent check on EU policymaking. Hettne et al. (2014: 51) examined this alignment by focusing on the Riksdag's engagement with the EWS during 2012, and found that only 4 out of 20 opinions diverged significantly from the government's assessment. This close alignment suggests that the national parliaments may function as a supportive extension of government preferences rather than an independent actor in subsidiarity scrutiny. While this alignment partly stems from shared political majorities between the government and parliament, it raises concerns about whether national parliaments actually provide any value and influence on the legislative process. Auel (2019: 8) thus argues that national parliaments influence in the EWS have remained marginal – without specifically categorizing them as Marginal Players.

While Auel (2019: 1) brings a compelling critique of the research field on influence of the EWS and the complexity of EU governance, the recent decline in active parliamentary engagement with the EWS underscores the need for further investigation. This decline raises critical questions about the mechanism's effectiveness, specifically whether it serves its intended purpose of empowering national parliaments to influence EU legislation. Moreover, Auel's analysis relies primarily on existing literature and yellow card cases, but lacks a direct examination of how parliamentary opinions are processed and whether they influence legislative output.

In contrast, van Gruisen & Huysmans (2020: 469) challenge this skepticism, arguing that the EWS functions as an important signaling tool that influences EU policymaking. Through a quantitative model, the authors demonstrate that national parliaments can use the EWS to convey concerns about legislative proposals, even if the yellow card threshold is not met.

Their findings indicate that the submission of Reasoned Opinions by national parliaments plays a significant role in shaping the decision-making process, because it signals potential issues early on, prompting the Commission to reconsider or amend its proposals. The authors also find that the adoption of Reasoned Opinions is a strong predictor of government opposition in EU negotiations and that the Commission is more likely to withdraw a proposal if national parliaments submit at least one Reasoned Opinion. Evidently, van Gruisen and Huysmans (2020: 452, 469) demonstrate that individual parliaments do in fact contribute to the legislative process even under the yellow-card threshold, underscoring the need for qualitative studies on individual parliamentary opinions.

Adding to this debate, Cooper (2019: 920, 921) investigates whether the early warning mechanism can be considered to have contributed to democratic legitimacy through parliamentary influence. The study focuses on 16 cases, including yellow cards and cases close to the yellow card threshold between 2010–2017. Cooper develops a typology for whether parliaments engage in Political Bargaining (blocking legislation – Commission withdrawal of proposal) or Policy Shaping (changing legislative output). The author finds that there have been a few cases where national parliaments have actually blocked legislation, but he does find evidence that they have affected legislative output, positioning themselves as Policy Shapers. Furthermore, Cooper (2019: 920) highlights that the EWS has encouraged policy dialogue between national parliaments and EU institutions, allowing parliaments to exert indirect influence through their governments. This, he argues, enhances the democratic legitimacy of the EU by embedding national parliaments more firmly into the legislative framework.

However, Cooper's (2019: 929) conclusions require critical reassessment. His typology relies heavily on secondary literature of each legislative case, without systematically tracing parliamentary opinions in relation to legislative output. This raises concerns about the validity of his findings — particularly about whether national parliaments' influence is driven by the EWS or whether it emerges from other political dynamics, such as broader institutional pressures. By not directly linking Reasoned Opinions to legislative changes, Cooper's analysis risks overstating the role of national parliaments as Policy Shapers, not leaving room for a more nuanced picture.

In summary, the research on the EWS describes national parliaments either as Marginal Players, unlikely to affect EU legislation, or as Policy Shapers, which may indirectly alter legislative output collectively, and in some cases also individually – when a single parliament submits a Reasoned Opinion on its own. There is also a critique of this research area, as it has struggled to trace legislative changes directly to the interventions of national parliaments or to demonstrate concrete evidence of their influence on EU legislation.

2. 3. The Research Gap

The existing literature on national parliaments in the EU presents a divided and incomplete view of the EWS and national parliamentary influence, leaving several gaps for further investigation.

First, the literature on parliamentary influence through the EWS remains divided between two competing roles: Policy Shaper and Marginal Player (Cooper 2019: 921; Auel 2019: 8). The contradictory findings underline the need for further exploration, as they carry important implications for democratic accountability and legitimacy. Yet the roles themselves are not clearly defined in previous research. This lack of a systematic theoretical framework and terminology makes it difficult to analyze and assess what impact national parliaments genuinely have on EU decision-making.

Second, most studies evaluate the EWS through arguments, secondary literature, or its formal design, rather than examining how it functions in practice. Few authors have systematically applied primary data such as parliamentary opinions or the perspectives of EU officials. My own preliminary review of Commission replies to National Parliaments suggests that these opinions are often dismissed in standardized terms, raising questions about how seriously they are administrated. Without greater transparency on how Reasoned Opinions are handled, it is impossible to know whether parliamentary input makes any difference. This gap underlines the need to apply the Policy Shaper and Marginal Player roles to new forms of empirical data.

Third, previous studies focus heavily on collective parliamentary action while overlooking the reality that parliaments now act predominantly individually. As collective engagement declines (European Commission 2024), the contribution of individual actors such as the Swedish Riksdag remain largely unexamined. This shift makes earlier findings less relevant,

underlining the need to further investigate how and whether individual parliaments may exert influence through the EWS.

This thesis addresses these gaps in three ways. Firstly, it builds on Cooper's Policy Shaper perspective and contrasts it with Auel's Marginal Player argument, refining both into clearly defined ideal types with systematic criteria. Secondly, it applies these ideal types to new primary data such as Reasoned Opinions and interviews with EU officials. Thirdly, it situates the analysis on the case of the Riksdag, making it possible to assess whether a parliament, often considered institutionally strong, can shape EU legislation when acting alone. In doing so, the thesis contributes with theoretical clarity and empirical evidence to the debate on national parliaments in the EU.

3. Theoretical Framework

In essence, the development of European integration and national parliament's ability to exert influence are described by two contrasting perspectives: deparliamentarization and parliamentarization. (O'Brennan & Raunio 2007: 3, Raunio 2011: 304; Gheyle 2019: 228, 234). Both theories address how European integration affects parliament's ability to influence their governments and shape EU legislation, yet they arrive at distinctly different conclusions.

Deparliamentarization claims that the development of European integration has led to loss of parliamentary control over the government (Raunio 2011: 304). These claims are based on interpretations of constitutional and political dynamics. According to O'Brennan & Raunio (2007: 3, 4) the constitutional dynamics have meant that national parliaments have relinquished legislative powers in some areas, in which laws are instead produced at EU level, and where governments represent their member states in the role of co-legislators. Deparliamentarization theory substantiates its claims by arguing that the political dynamics at EU level mean that neither national parliaments nor the European Parliament are sovereign bodies (O'Brennan & Raunio 2007: 3–5). Instead, qualified majority voting makes it harder for national parliaments to demand that their governments should make detailed commitments before EU decisions. And even if the European parliament may be considered a strong co-legislator, this would still not compensate for the lost legislative powers of national parliaments. As an indication of the lost powers of the national parliaments' lost ability, scholars note to which extent national parliaments are sidestepped in EU policy making. Cygan (2021: 421, 422) notes that although efforts were to address developments according to deparliamentarization theory, the theory still holds since instruments like the EWS cannot be determined to have improved democratic accountability or legislative legitimacy. Extending this theoretical perspective, democratic and legislative legitimacy can be tied to Marginal Player literature, where the EWS is claimed to have no influence whatsoever on the legislative process.

In contrast, parliamentarization (or reparliamentarization), refers to the development where national parliaments have regained or taken back influence over its governments (Capaul 2024: 4, 9). This development originates from the observation that national parliaments have been given or have for themselves carved out new roles to actively engage with EU-policy

making (Gheyle 2019: 228, 234). This parliamentarization can either occur through national adjustments, for example as Dyevre (2011:1) shows that constitutional reforms of the French parliament provided instruments to monitor policy-making and exert stringent scrutiny over its government, and in this way was able to take back powers which had been relinquished to the EU level via the government. Furthermore, several initiatives at EU level have also been implemented to support parliaments, such as the political dialogue (Kreilinger 2023: 1, 2). Most notable, however, are the changes made by the Lisbon treaty, among other things establishing interparliamentary cooperation and the EWS. This has meant that the role of national parliaments at the EU level has expanded over time (Ibid 2023: 1, 2). These initiatives have also been seen by parliamentarization theory as a means to recognizing national parliaments as players at the EU which are able to influence the legislative process. Cooper (2012: 441) even argues that national parliaments collectively can function as a "third chamber" and bring democratic accountability and legitimacy to the EU. When examining whether national parliaments can exert influence, previous research has focused on the EWS as a key instrument. Despite the trend toward individual action, this line of work aligns with the Policy Shaper literature, indicating that national parliaments may still exert indirect influence through the EWS even when acting alone (Cooper 2019: 937; van Gruisen & Huysmans 2020: 469).

After reviewing the literature, the findings are generally underpinned by either deparliamentarization or parliamentarization theory. However, as these perspectives are unspecific and only abstractly related to the EWS, this thesis builds two distinct ideal types: the Policy Shaper and Marginal Player, each directly derived from the theoretical traditions, but adapted for the specific and analytical needs of this study. These ideal types serve as a tool to assess whether each intervention of the Riksdag in the EWS can be considered to translate into indirect influence. Although other ideal types relating to the EWS exist, such as Political Bargaining, defined as parliaments ability to influence legislation to the extent that it gets withdrawn (Cooper 2019: 927). Empirical evidence suggest that such outcomes are rare when multiple national parliaments act collectively (Ibid 2019: 932), and thus even more unlikely where individual parliaments are concerned.

3. 1. Developing Ideal Types: Policy Shapers or Marginal Players

Drawing on the parliamentarization versus deparliamentarization theories, this thesis develops two distinct ideal-typical roles. The Policy Shaper ideal type derives from the parliamentarization perspective which views national parliaments as increasingly empowered through scrutiny rights, networking, and indirect influence. Conversely, the Marginal Player ideal type reflects the deparliamentarization perspective which argues that integration and centralization sideline national parliaments, leaving their interventions largely symbolic. This section describes the reasoning behind extending the ideal types from the theories to establishing their defining characteristics, and eventually tests these types on empirical data.

Following Weber, ideal types are heuristic devices that simplify reality by reducing it into analytically distinct categories, allowing researchers to compare empirical cases against theory (Collier et al. 2012: 217). Their value lies does not lie in capturing empirical reality in full, but in providing conceptual clarity and making competing theoretical logics explicit. As Auel (2019: 1) highlights, it is impossible to identify direct causal mechanisms in the EU legislative process since various actors are involved and negotiations are held behind closed doors. Therefore, the author suggests that the study of direct parliamentary influence should be avoided. As a response, the use of these ideal types answers the critique and they provide a descriptive tool for classifying parliamentary interventions and indirect influence as either Policy Shaper or Marginal Player.

By summarizing insights from the parliamentarization/deparliamentarization literature and EWS research, the next section specifies the defining characteristics of each ideal type. These characteristics provide systematic criteria for evaluating Riksdag interventions, which I will return to, in later chapters.

Policy Shaper

The Policy Shaper ideal type reflects certain theoretical assumptions about what characterizes parliamentary participation and scrutiny of the EU legislative process. National parliaments adopt this role strategically to utilize Reasoned Opinions within the EWS to exert indirect influence on EU legislation. A fundamental assumption about this ideal type is that legislative output is partially or fully aligned with national parliaments concerns. If this is not the case,

indirect influence is not possible. This typology is mainly built on Cooper (2019) who has also examined the fundamental assumption, but is also coupled with van Gruisen & Huysmans (2020), and Sprungk (2013) who present three main characteristics together with administrative organization that underpin the Policy Shaper ideal type:

- **Signaling and Agenda Setting:** Parliaments influence EU decision-making indirectly through signaling objections, prompting reconsideration or amendments even when formal thresholds (yellow/orange cards) are not reached (van Gruisen & Huysmans, 2020: 468, 469).

- **Policy Dialogue and Bargaining:** Cooper (2019) highlights how parliaments engage in bargaining, using the leverage of Reasoned Opinions to initiate dialogue with the Commission, or to pressure their national government to adopt tougher positions in negotiations in the Council, ultimately influencing legislative output indirectly.

- **Networkers:** The EWS has strengthened national parliaments by assigning them the role of networkers in the integration process. Parliaments cooperate with each other, as well as with the Commission and the European Parliament. This cooperation makes them take on the role of networkers. This activity can in turn influence the legislative process to increasingly include parliamentary concerns (Sprungk 2013: 556, 557).

- **Administrative Influence:** EU decision-makers and officials treat parliamentary inputs seriously and integrate them into broader administrative and decision-making processes. For example, by circulating them among the actors involved in the legislative process so that parliamentary concerns are indirectly voiced and can shape legislative output throughout the process.

This thesis applies the Policy Shaper ideal type to the Riksdag's Reasoned Opinions and to examine whether they indirectly influence legislative output, and whether the administrative organization of EU institutions enables the Riksdag to exert such influence.

Marginal players

Conversely, the Marginal Player ideal type captures theoretical assumptions characterized by minimal or purely symbolic involvement without meaningful legislative influence. A fundamental assumption for the Marginal Player ideal type is that the parliamentary concerns expressed through the EWS are not aligned with legislative output – meaning that parliamentary input is not considered in the final adopted act. The Marginal Player perspective is predominantly raised by Auel (2019) describing the influence of national parliaments as marginal, but also by Raunio (2009) and de Wilde (2012), who argue that national parliaments play a limited role in shaping EU legislation through the EWS. These are the characteristics of the Marginal Player ideal type:

- **Institutional Constraints:** Structural complexity within EU governance severely restricts the capacity for individual national parliaments to exert traceable influence. Even those with strong scrutiny systems struggle to exert direct, traceable influence on output (Auel, 2019: 1). An example of institutional constraint is the 8-week deadline (Rozenberg 2017: 18).

- **Government Alignment:** National parliaments often align with their governments' positions, meaning their input may merely reinforce executive preferences rather than allowing the parliament to function as an independent check (Auel 2019; Hettne et al. 2019). This supportive position-taking serves more as a political statement than as a means of shaping legislation.

- **Formalistic view:** The structure of EWS fundamentally depends on collective parliamentary action. Individual objections rarely influence legislative proposals unless coordinated action meets clearly defined thresholds. Consequently, the Commission’s commitment to respond to formal role to respond to Reasoned Opinions becomes relevant only when these thresholds are met; until that point, it is under no obligation to address or act upon isolated parliamentary concerns (Auel 2019: 7; Viola 2021: 3, 4).

- **Administrative marginality:** The administrative reception of Reasoned opinions suggests that EU officials and decision-makers frequently handle Reasoned Opinions as routine administrative formalities, responding in a standardized, procedural manner without incorporating substantive parliamentary concerns into legislative deliberations. This perspective considers that the administrative treatment of Reasoned Opinions primarily serves bureaucratic purposes rather than fostering substantive legislative change.

This thesis applies the Marginal Player ideal type to explore whether the Riksdag's engagement with the EWS serves symbolic purposes, functioning as domestic political signaling rather than effectively shaping EU policy. It investigates whether there is evidence that the Riksdag's Reasoned Opinions are not considered in legislative output and whether EU administration constrains the Riksdag's ability influence the legislative process.

3. 2. Applying both perspectives

This thesis does not treat the Policy Shaper and Marginal Player ideal types as static or mutually exclusive. A single parliament may, across different legislative cases or at different points in time, act as either a Policy Shaper or a Marginal Player depending on the proposal, policy area, and institutional context. The inclusion of the administrative dimension and defining characteristics makes it possible to situate individual cases within their broader context and to understand why a parliament is categorized in one way or the other. The dual framework does therefore not intend to merge the two roles into a hybrid type, but rather to apply them as distinct descriptive categories for classifying empirical evidence on a case-by-case basis.

Importantly, the framework does not assume that one ideal type is more likely than another in the analysis of the empirical material. Instead, it anticipates that both roles may be observed across different legislative cases. Thus, the different types are mapped and categorized in order to provide a nuanced understanding of the Riksdag's engagement in EU-policymaking through the EWS.

4. Method and material

This study employed a qualitative research design centered around an in-depth case study of the Swedish Riksdag's influence on the EU legislative process through its engagement with the EWS. The thesis combined data from written sources and interviews, with a typology operationalization and a qualitative content analysis. The material and methodology aimed to provide a nuanced, comprehensive assessment of the Riksdag's influence as either a Policy Shaper or Marginal Player while addressing potential critiques. The next section introduces the material and case selection.

4. 1. Material

4.1.1. Selected Material

In the EU legislative process, when the Commission proposes a draft legislative act in an area outside exclusive competence, the EWS applies. Once all language versions of the draft are published, national parliaments have an eight-week deadline to conduct subsidiarity checks. If concerns are identified, parliaments submit a Reasoned Opinion to the EU institutions. These Reasoned Opinions are usually a one-paged PDF where the Riksdag starts by welcoming the legislation and thereafter lists concerns on subsidiarity, proportionality or lack of proper impact assessments. Subsequently, the Commission engages in negotiations with the Council and the European Parliament, each of which adopts positions through readings until a final legislative text is agreed upon. These procedural steps generate key documents relevant to decision-making and the role in the process of national parliaments. Thus, the following material was selected for the empirical analysis:

- **Reasoned Opinions:** Official documents reflecting parliament's formal positions.
- **EU Legislative Documents:** Draft and final legislative texts from the Commission and Official Journal to trace changes in response to parliamentary opinions.
- **Interviews with EU Decision-Makers and Officials:** Direct insights from officials managing, responding to parliamentary inputs, or involved in EU negotiations.

Reasoned Opinions have been selected for analysis as they directly illustrate parliamentary concerns. Draft legislative acts are reviewed to identify specific measures that trigger parliamentary objections, while the final legislative texts are examined to determine if legislative changes have aligned with these concerns. This analysis enables the categorization of national parliaments as either Policy Shapers, where legislative adjustments reflect parliamentary concerns, or Marginal Players, when no such alignment occurs. Additionally, the administrative organization within EU institutions are explored to understand how parliamentary opinions are received throughout the legislative process and whether they enable or constrain parliamentary influence. Therefore, interview material from officials and EU decision-makers was selected to examine whether the administrative conditions and experiences from respondents align with describing the Swedish Riksdag as a Policy Shaper or a Marginal player. Employing multiple data sources as Reasoned Opinions, EU legislative documents, and insights from EU officials—allowed for cross-validation and strengthened the robustness and trustworthiness of the findings, also known as triangulation. Furthermore, triangulation provides a comprehensive view of the Riksdag's influence in the EU legislative process, and enables the ability to compare the different results as a way to safeguard potential biases (Lilleker 2003: 211).

Other documents, such as the Commission's replies, Council positions, and European Parliament positions, could further clarify the influence exerted on EU legislation. However, a preliminary analysis of Commission replies suggests they typically dismiss parliamentary concerns or defend existing positions, adding little value to this thesis. In addition, institutional standpoints could provide additional context regarding which co-legislator that is more receptive to engage with parliamentary input. Previous research indicates that the European Parliament tends to adopt a more federalist approach, whereas the Council is generally more likely to reflect national parliamentary concerns. Nevertheless, the selected material is suitable for this study as it traces the potential impact of the Riksdag's Reasoned Opinions on final legislation, whereas assessing relative institutional cooperation with national parliaments lies beyond the scope of this thesis.

Table 1. Summary of selected material[1]

YEAR	REASONED OPINION	COM PROPOSAL	FINAL ADOPTED ACT (CELEX NUMBER)
2019	No opinions adopted		
	2019/20:FiU63	COM(2020) 445	32020D2053
	2020/21:AU6	COM(2020) 682	32022L2041
	2021/22:MJU11	COM(2021) 568	32023R0955
	2021/22:NU9	COM(2021) 557	32023L2413
	2021/22:SkU12	COM(2021) 823	32022L2523
	2021/22:JuU48	COM(2021) 851	32024L1203
	2021/22:MJU19	COM(2021) 706	32023R1115
	2021/22:MJU32	COM(2022) 304	32024R1991
	2021/22:MJU33	COM(2022) 305	*Proposal withdrawn.*
	2021/22:NU28	COM(2022) 71	32024L1760
	2021/22:AU16	COM(2021) 762	32024L2831
	2022/23:FöU2	COM(2022) 349	32023R2418
	2022/23:NU10	COM(2022) 459	32024R2747
2024			No final adopted acts

Note: In 2019 the Riksdag did not adopt any Reasoned Opinions and in 2024 no proposed legislation was completed.

Time period

The period 2019–2023, coinciding with to the latest Commission mandate 2019-2024, was deliberately selected to ensure both timeliness and comparability with ongoing academic and policy debates. Notably, while previous studies, such as Cooper (2019), focused on EWS activity until 2017, this study captures the most recent patterns of parliamentary engagement and influence. This is particularly important given significant external events during this mandate, such as the war in Ukraine, the COVID-19 pandemic and the launch of the European Green Deal, which have heightened both legislative activity and the political salience of national parliamentary scrutiny.

Moreover, this time frame marks a shift from the collective action and yellow card episodes that characterized the EWS's early years until 2017. Recent cycles are defined by national

[1] The following Reasoned Opinions during the last Commission mandate are not considered since the legislative act is yet to be adopted: 2020/21:SKU3, 2021/22:KU45, 2021/22:FiU:31, 2021/22:SkU32, 2021/22:SkU34, 2021/22:JuU50, 2023/24:SkU9, 2023/24:SkU10, 2022/23:JuU33, 2022/23:JuU33, 2023/24:CU18, 2023/24:SkU16, 2023/24:SkU17, 2023/24:CU18, 2023/24:JuU30, 2023/24:NU16, 2023/24:TU21, 2023/24:AU11.

parliaments increasingly submitting Reasoned Opinions on an individual basis, rather than as part of coordinated campaigns. This trend aligns directly with the central research interest of this thesis, namely, the influence of parliaments acting alone within the EWS. By focusing on 2019–2023, the study attempts to cover a full legislative mandate departing from the available material. Nevertheless, the study provides a contemporary and robust assessment of the EWS.

Case Selection

The Swedish Riksdag

The Swedish Riksdag was selected due to its active engagement and robust institutional framework for EU scrutiny, characterized by decentralized committee structures and systematic assessment of all EU legislative proposals (Cornell Jonsson 2016: 295, Hettne et al. 2014: 44). This persistent activity increases the likelihood of the Riksdag's concerns being noticed, even if they act as an individual parliament. The systematic, high-frequency participation helps build a reputation as a reliable institutional actor, which could strengthen its ability to shape legislative debates indirectly by signaling sustained opposition or concern. Unlike most other national parliaments, which only issue Reasoned Opinions sporadically, the Riksdag submits a comparatively high number each year. This continuity generates a broader set of cases for systematic analysis, allowing the study to trace patterns and identify pathways of potential influence that would be difficult to generalize from more infrequent parliamentary interventions.

The study provides insights into the Riksdag's use of the EWS but its findings have limited generalizability due to the focus on only one country, a specific legislative period, and varying institutional contexts. However, the cases can be generalizable to other parliaments that applies the same strategy to focus on political dialogue or the EWS. In addition, the use of the typology framework and deparliamentarization/parliamentarization theory enhances the study's broader applicability and provides a transferable analytical tool for examining parliamentary influence across other Member States.

Respondents in Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with EU decision-makers involved in the processing of Reasoned Opinions. The rationale for including interviews was to gain insights into the administrative conditions for Reasoned Opinions and perceived influence from decision-makers and officials that receive parliamentary inputs, aspects that the textual analysis alone might overlook since it is unsure if the changes aligning with the Riksdag can be traced back to the Riksdag as many players are involved.

In line with interpretative research principles, semi-structured interviews were used because they allow participants to explain their worlds in their own words, revealing personal and cultural meanings that would be difficult to access otherwise (Magnusson & Marecek 2015:6). Such insights are particularly important in this study, where the attribution of influence to the Riksdag within a multi-actor EU decision-making process requires understanding not only textual alignments but also the perspectives and reasoning of those involved in handling Reasoned Opinions.

The selection of respondents followed a purposive sampling strategy (Magnusson & Marecek 2015: 35), targeting individuals whose positions and responsibilities aligned with the research questions. This approach is consistent with interpretative research, which specifies groups likely to have the experiences or perspectives of interest (Magnusson & Marecek 2015: 34, 35). This approach guided the selection of Respondents drawn from three key institutional settings: The Commission, the Council Secretariat, and the Swedish Government's Representation in Brussels.

Commission officials were included because the Commission is the primary recipient and evaluator of Reasoned Opinions. It holds the formal responsibility for assessing subsidiarity concerns under the Early Warning System (EWS).

Council Secretariat Officials were interviewed to understand how Reasoned Opinions are disseminated to member states and whether they are considered during Council negotiations.

Swedish Government Representatives in Brussels were included to capture how national government actors engage with parliamentary concerns during negotiations in the Council.

Given that national parliaments do not participate directly in EU-level negotiations and whether they indirectly can advocate parliamentary concerns.

This selection was also shaped by practical constraints, including respondent availability and the need to ensure confidentiality and mitigate institutional bias. Nevertheless, the range of institutional perspectives allowed for a triangulated understanding of how the Riksdag's inputs are treated in the legislative process.

I also did pilot interviews about interparliamentary cooperation in Brussels with different types of staff in May 2023, in preparation for my upcoming thesis. These experiences pointed overall to the fact that the European Parliament administration seems less interested in pushing interests of national parliaments, other than in a way to advance its institutional position. Rather the European Parliament advocates increased involvement of national parliaments in order to strengthen its own position in comparison to the commission or the council, and ultimately revise the treaty. However, while interesting, this is not for this thesis to uncover, which intuitively guided the selection as time constraints were evident and different perspectives in the Council would be more interesting combined with several perspectives from the Commission.

First, I studied the set-up of the institutions to target relevant departments. In parallel, I finished the content analysis and contacted a DG and a Commissioner's cabinet to answer specific cases which were examined, however, these declined participations. I also contacted the Swedish government's permanent representation in Brussels. After this initial screening, I received three key interview participants. During one of the interviews another official participated, and after the government interviewee I got forwarded to another contact. Thus, the sample of interviews includes a total of 5 interviewees from two EU institutions and the government. While the selection would have benefited from another interviewee from the Commission to balance the sample and institutional perspectives, this was not possible due to declining responses. As Magnusson & Marecek (2015: 36, 37) emphasize, qualitative research prioritizes the richness and relevance of perspectives over numerical balance, and samples are often shaped by feasibility and access. Within this logic, the interviews conducted still provide sufficient depth to address the research question.

Table 2. Interviews with EU officials and decision-makers

	Institution/body
Interviewee 1	**Swedish Government Representative in Brussels**
Interviewee 2	**Swedish Government Representative in Brussels**
Interviewee 3	**Council Secretariat Official**
Interviewee 4	**Council Secretariat Official**
Interviewee 5	**Commission Official**

4. 2. Method

This study employs a qualitative research design utilizing a mixed-methods approach with qualitative interviews and qualitative text analysis. It is centered around an in-depth case study of the Swedish Riksdag's influence on the EU legislative process through its engagement with the Early Warning System (EWS). The integration of these methods allowed for a more nuanced understanding of parliamentary influence as a Policy Shaper or Marginal Player, overcoming some limitations inherent to studying the field of national parliaments in the legislative process.

4.2.1. Semi-structured interviews

An interview protocol was prepared to maintain consistency across interviews while allowing flexibility to explore specific administrative practices and individual perceptions of influence. The Interview guide draws on Magnusson and Marecek (2015: 51–55) and can be found in appendix 1. The interviews are transcribed where the text will be used as evidence to categorize parliamentary behavior as Policy Shapers or Marginal Players.

4.2.2. Qualitative Content Analysis

A qualitative content analysis was used to systematically examine the content from written sources such as parliamentary opinions and interview data from EU institutions and turn them into results. This method is effective for analyzing written documents and identifying patterns in data, while requiring methodological rigor (Kuckartz, 2013: 10; Cohen et al. 2017: 668). There are different forms of content analysis, however, as this paper takes a deductive approach, it applies a directed content analysis with the goal of validating the theoretical framework through coding and categorizing according to existing theory (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005: 1281). Cohen et al. (2017: 670) illustrates how content analysis starts with selected material that is then broken down into smaller components, coding the units to fit the categories. Another part of the process is to operationalize each category of the ideal types, presented in the section below on operationalization of ideal types (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005: 1281).

In line with Hsieh and Shannon's (2005: 1281) approach, coding of the content analysis goes in line with the two ideal types: Policy Shaper and Marginal Player serving as the main categories. Following Weston et al. (2001: 382, 383), the structured codebook is developed in the operationalization chapter, to define each category operationally.

The analysis of written data began with identifying thematic concerns in each Reasoned Opinion. Each concern in the Reasoned Opinion was then traced in the corresponding draft proposal and final adopted act by locating relevant sections (e.g., if the concern related to timing, all clauses on timing were located). These sections were compared with the original concern to determine alignment with the theoretical expectations:

- Policy Shaper: Concern incorporated partially or fully into the final act.
- Marginal Player: No change or change contrary to the concern.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded deductively using the same theoretical categories (Hsieh & Shannon 2005: 1282). In two cases, participants preferred hand-written notes, a common adaptation in qualitative research to respect interviewee conditions and maximize data quality (Magnusson & Marecek 2015: 40, 41). These notes, while not yielding direct quotations, were systematically coded and analyzed alongside the transcripts. Open-ended questions were designed to elicit views on the Riksdag's role as a Policy Shaper or

Marginal Player and the characteristics of each ideal type described in chapter 3. Statements were categorized under the relevant ideal type or characteristics, and any data not fitting predefined codes were ignored. Only in a couple of cases was information included as it fitted the underlying assumption, without applying to individual parliaments, while noted to not apply to individual parliaments.

Finally, each finding was qualified using a three-point ordinal scale (weak, some, or strong evidence), following Cooper's (2019: 929) approach to grading case findings. This was applied to both the main ideal type classification and the defining characteristics. Ordinal measures are well suited to ideal type analysis as they convey degrees of fit without overstating precision (Collier et al. 2012: 216) and add analytical nuance to directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon 2005: 1281, 1282). The results are finally summarized in a table, providing a concise overview for later discussion.

4.2.3. Operationalization of Ideal Types

Building on the Policy Shaper and Marginal Player ideal types developed in Chapter 3, this section specifies the criteria used to classify cases. Following Weber, a typology requires explicit and transparent indicators (Collier et al. 2012: 216). The roles are therefore operationalized using coding and evidence from two sources:

1. **Written sources:**
    - **Policy Shaper:** Identified when at least one of the Riksdag's concerns expressed in a Reasoned Opinions is reflected in legislative outputs (e.g., exemptions, amended formulations, or removal of provisions).
    - **Marginal Player:** Identified when no discernible influence of the Riksdag's concerns can be observed in legislative output.

2. **Interview data:**
    - **Policy Shaper:** Identified when the administrative organization of the Council, Commission, or Swedish government process Reasoned Opinions in ways that enable indirect influence on legislation. Evidence is categorized under the defining characteristics of this ideal type, such as administrative influence and pathways

showing how parliamentary input shape government positions or how Reasoned Opinions were considered during negotiations.

- **Marginal Player:** Identified when administrative organization constraints the ability of national parliaments to exert influence. Evidence is categorized under the defining characteristics of this ideal type, such as practices where opinions are acknowledged but dismissed, filtered out of subsidiarity checks, or treated as irrelevant in the decision-making process.

The first component, based on legislative alignment, closely follows Cooper's (2019) framework. Importantly, however, the construction of the Policy Shaper and Marginal Player roles and their grounding in the literature represent my own contribution. While earlier research has discussed parliamentary roles within the EWS, this study is the first to introduce explicit operationalizations, enabling a clearer and more systematic categorization of empirical findings. This framework not only allows the identification of instances of Policy Shaper or Marginal Player behavior but also captures the contextual conditions under which the Riksdag assumes these roles.

The operationalization is designed to support systematic comparison with prior studies while remaining flexible enough to capture hybrid or context-dependent roles. By setting out explicit criteria, it enhances both transparency and replicability, making it applicable for future research in different contexts and ensuring reliability. At the same time, it acknowledges the dynamic and process-oriented nature of parliamentary engagement, recognizing that the Riksdag's role may shift across legislative cycles or policy areas.

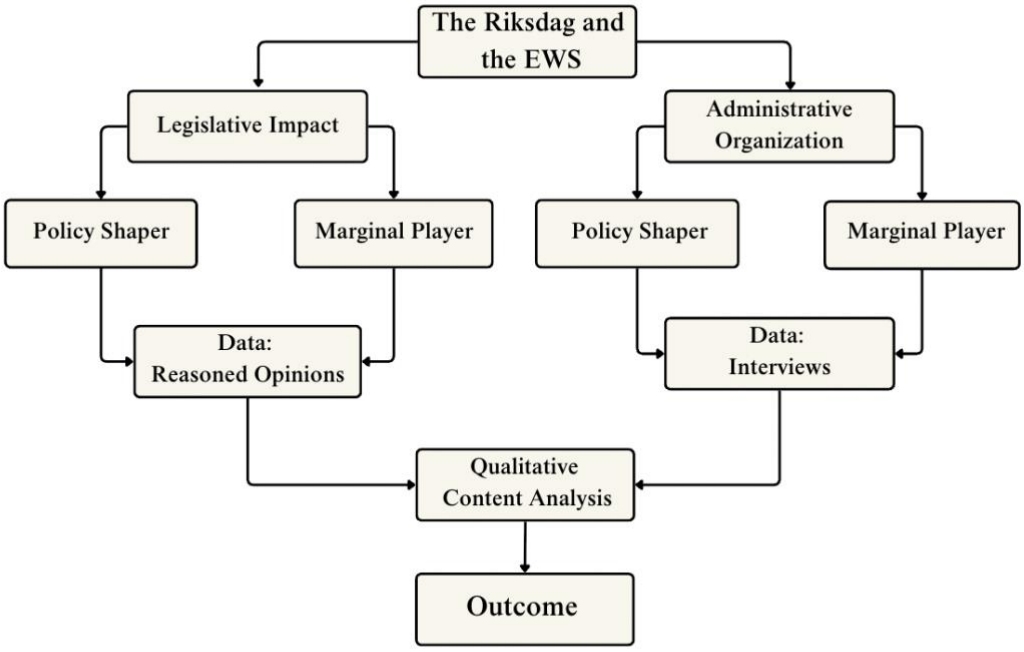
Finally, the approach strengthens methodological rigor by clearly defining the categorization process. Qualitative analysis inevitably involves interpretation, so some subjectivity cannot be eliminated; to safeguard quality, researchers should make their procedures and methodological principles explicit. In this study, I do so by setting out coding rules and ideal types (Bryman 2016: 10; Kuckartz 2013: 6)

4.2.4. Summary of Operationalization

This framework connects legislative alignment (following Cooper 2019) with administrative practices, thereby addressing Auel's (2019) critique that previous studies understate the complexities of tracing parliamentary influence. By combining document analysis with interviews, the operationalization allows for a transparent, systematic, and replicable assessment of the Riksdag's role in the EWS.

While ideal types inevitably simplify reality (Collier et al. 2012: 216), they provide a clear structure for identifying how and under what administrative organization the Riksdag is enabled or constrained to act as a Policy Shaper or a Marginal Player. This summary thus bridges the conceptual framework with the empirical analysis that follows. The following figure illustrate the steps in which the operationalization combines the ideal types, data and methods in order to get an outcome to answer the research questions.

Figure 1. Summary of Operationalization.



Note: For detailed description of each step, please visit previous section.

4.2.5. Methodological Critique and Reflections

A central methodological challenge was to establish indirect causality between parliamentary inputs and legislative outputs. EU-decision-making is complex and involve multiple actors and competing interests, making definitive attribution difficult. Although triangulation through interviews provided additional context, contradictions sometimes emerged: textual evidence indicated influence, while interviewees did not perceive it, or vice versa. This complexity required careful interpretation and openness about uncertainties.

Given that most previous studies have relied either solely on interviews or on content analyses of secondary literature, this study's combined design strengthens validity by integrating document analysis and interviews. Applying methodological triangulation in this way enhances trustworthiness in directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon 2005: 1282) and helps reduce potential bias in interviews (Lilleker 2003: 211).

Another potential critique concerns the complexity of the theoretical framework. Since it develops new ideal types and specifies underlying assumptions that are tested across both textual and interview data, the framework may initially appear demanding. Yet this complexity mirrors the phenomenon under study. EU governance is characterized by overlapping institutions, diffuse influence, and multi-level interactions, which cannot be captured adequately by simple models. The framework and methods are therefore a necessary response to the research question, allowing for more nuanced conclusions.

Reliability was supported by systematically documenting each analytical step, clearly defining operational criteria, and maintaining consistency in coding decisions. Despite these procedures, qualitative research inevitably involves interpretation (Bryman 2016: 383, 384). To mitigate this, potential biases and methodological limitations were acknowledged openly, in line with Bryman's (2016: 389, 390) emphasis on transparency as a way to strengthen reliability.

Additionally, the choice of focusing on the Swedish Parliament and the selected legislative period (2019–2024) inherently limited generalizability. The Swedish Riksdag's exceptional institutional strength and high engagement might result in findings not easily transferable to

other national parliaments with different scrutiny systems. Consequently, caution is necessary when applying these results broadly. However, employing a clear theoretical framework enhances the potential for broader application, as the underlying logic of parliamentary influence remains relevant across contexts.

4.2.6. Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations for this thesis followed the principles outlined by Magnusson and Marecek (2015: 56) and the four guidelines of the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet 2024: 57, 58): informed consent, confidentiality, the right to withdraw, and avoidance of harm. Document analysis relied on publicly accessible Riksdag opinions and EU legislative texts, ensuring no additional personal data were disclosed. For interviews with EU officials, participants were provided with full information about the study's purpose, their rights, and the use of their contributions. Informed consent was obtained before each interview, and participants were reminded of their right to decline questions, withdraw, or end the session at any point.

To protect confidentiality given the small pool of officials, identifying details such as departmental affiliations were withheld, and potentially sensitive quotations were paraphrased collectively (Magnusson & Marecek 2015: 46, 47). Interviews were also structured to minimize discomfort and risk of professional repercussions, for example by including warm-up questions and adjusting phrasing when hesitation was observed. All procedures, selection criteria, and analytical steps were documented to ensure transparency and integrity. Overall, the study reflects a commitment to ethical responsibility in line with established standards of academic research.

5. Results

This chapter presents findings from two sources: a content analysis of the Riksdag's Reasoned Opinions in fourteen EU legislative acts, and interviews with EU officials. Cases are classified as Policy Shapers when at least one parliamentary concern is reflected in the adopted legislation, and as Marginal Players when no impact is be observed. The cases are presented thematically, beginning with Marginal Player outcomes. The second part draws on interviews to contextualize the findings from the content analysis and to present evidence in line with the defining characteristics of each ideal type, thereby shedding light on the administrative mechanisms that shape parliamentary influence.

5. 1. *How does the Swedish Riksdag act within the EU decision-making process through the EWS: as Policy Shaper or Marginal Player?*

5.1.1. Cases where the Riksdag acted as a Marginal Player

In eight of the fourteen analyzed cases, the Riksdag's concerns had no discernible impact on the legislative outcomes. These cases proceeded with an equal or even broader scope in the final legislative acts compared to the Riksdag's objections to the initial drafts. In a few cases the legislative output was slightly adjusted to alleviate the concern, however, as the critiqued measures remained, they were categorized as cases of Marginal Player.

The clearest example is the Minimum Wage Directive (Case 2, Table 3). Here, the Riksdag argued that the EU lacks competence in wage formation, asserting that this area should remain under national jurisdiction. Additionally, it cautioned that binding regulations could undermine the Swedish collective-agreement model and insisted definitions related to minimum wages and collective bargaining were best determined nationally. Despite these objections, the directive retained its original legal basis, continued to avoid explicitly imposing statutory wages, maintained the initial definitions, and even increased the threshold at which member states must provide action plans if collective bargaining coverage falls below 80%, up from 70% in the original proposal. Thus, not only were the Riksdag's concerns disregarded, but the directive evolved contrary to their requests, marking the Riksdag's role as marginal.

Similarly, in the Platform Work Directive (Case 11), the Riksdag expressed several concerns: the employment presumption could undermine the established concept of employment, the proposal was fundamentally flawed, it risked negative impacts on national tax and social insurance systems, and it would impose excessive administrative burdens on businesses. The final directive retained the employment presumption, along with transparency and algorithmic-management obligations that the Riksdag had argued would create administrative burdens. Although the fixed list of employment presumptions was removed and the algorithmic-management obligations were qualified by referencing national law, the core concerns persisted, making the Riksdag to again act as a Marginal Player.

In the Pillar Two Directive (Case 5), aimed at establishing a minimum effective corporate tax rate, the Riksdag emphasized the necessity of an impact assessment and highlighted concerns about safeguarding national tax sovereignty, especially regarding direct taxation. Nonetheless, the final directive omitted any reference to an impact assessment and evaluation without introducing any amendments to address the Riksdag's concerns about tax sovereignty. Consequently, the Riksdag's input was effectively ignored, reinforcing its status as a Marginal Player.

Regarding the Renewable Energy Directive (Case 4), the Riksdag objected to the excessive detailed regulation concerning bioenergy, notably the cascade principle. It emphasized the importance of preserving national competence over forestry and avoiding unnecessary administrative burdens on businesses. Yet, the adopted directive increased detailed bioenergy regulations, introducing stricter measures such as a ban on support for saw-logs (Art. 3(3)) and lowering size thresholds for biomass sustainability. Although the directive included some derogations allowing member states to deviate from the cascade principle for energy-security needs or local industrial constraints, the main concerns persisted, confirming the Riksdag's marginal influence.

In the Social Climate Fund (Case 3), the Riksdag argued that income support measures were not climate-effective, emphasizing that income-linked transfers related to the EU budget should remain a national competence. Although the final act introduced a ceiling limiting income support to 37.5% of total expenditures (Art. 8(2)) and clarified that income support

should be temporary and linked to structural investments for the targeted households (Art. 4(3)), these adjustments did not substantially alter the core instrument opposed by the Riksdag. Thus, despite minor modifications, the Riksdag's fundamental concerns remained unaddressed, positioning it as a Marginal Player.

Concerning the Instrument for the Reinforcement of the European Defense Industry through Common Procurement (EDIRPA) (Case 12), the Riksdag criticized the absence of an impact assessment, the risk of excessive Commission control based on unclear criteria, and non-compliance with proportionality principles. The final regulation addressed transparency slightly by increasing the award criteria from seven to ten and adding two provisions (Art. 11 (2) and (3)). Nevertheless, no impact assessment or proportionality safeguards were implemented, leaving core transparency and governance issues unresolved. Thus, the Riksdag's acted as a Marginal Player.

In the Internal Market and Resilience Act (Case 13), the Riksdag considered the entire proposal incompatible with the subsidiarity principle and found the provisions on strategic goods and services unclear relative to the directive's legal basis. While the final act added minor clarifications, such as Recital 11 emphasizing proportionality and non-interference with member-state competences, the primary concerns of the Riksdag persisted. Therefore, this case represents an instance where the Riksdag functioned as a Marginal Player.

Finally, regarding the Nature Restoration Regulation (Case 8), the Riksdag emphasized safeguarding national autonomy in forestry, criticized the excessive detail in regulation, questioned the directive's legal basis, and highlighted the absence of EU forestry competence within the treaties. Initially requiring member states to demonstrate positive trends across six biodiversity indicators within three years, the final regulation allowed member states flexibility by permitting choice among indicators and extending the reporting period to six years. Despite these adjustments providing some relief, the fundamental regulatory obligations criticized by the Riksdag remained intact, signifying it as an act of Marginal Player.

5.1.2. Cases of the Riksdag acted as a Policy Shaper

Six of the fourteen cases demonstrated that the Riksdag acted as a Policy Shaper. In these instances, changes were made between the draft proposals and the final legislative acts that aligned with the Riksdag's concerns. These cases either meant that at least one concern was addressed or that most or all concerns were reflected in the final output.

The Own Resources Decision (Case 1) serves as an example where one concern was addressed. The Riksdag emphasized that EU recovery support must be temporary, that no new own resources should be introduced, borrowing should not be used for operational expenditure, and the overall borrowing volume was too large. In response, the final act introduced a clause stating that the "Commission shall manage the borrowing so that no new net borrowing takes place after 2026" (Art. 5 §1) and added Recital 15, which set a deadline of December 31, 2023, for commitments—where previously, no deadline existed. Hence, the concern that EU recovery support must be temporary was met. Despite that only one of the Riksdag's concerns was addressed, it is a significant alteration aligned with its position, showing that the Riksdag can act as a Policy Shaper.

In the Due Diligence Directive (Case 10), the Riksdag criticized provisions related to variable remuneration, directors' duty of care, and oversight of due diligence actions. While the latter two concerns were not addressed, the provision regarding variable remuneration was removed entirely, deleting references that companies must consider due diligence obligations when setting such pay. This substantive change aligned with the Riksdag's position, qualifying the case as another example of the Riksdag as a Policy Shaper.

In DAC 8 (Case 14), the Riksdag emphasized the importance of maintaining national sovereignty in direct taxation, particularly regarding penalty design for infringements of national rules. The concern on penalty design was addressed in the final directive as it was deleted, confirming the Riksdag's role as a Policy Shaper.

In the Regulation on Products Associated with Deforestation and Forest Degradation (Case 7), the Riksdag raised concerns over definitions, such as "forest degradation" and "sustainable harvesting operations", which it argued imposed detailed regulation, on the area of national

forestry and agriculture, breaching subsidiarity. It also objected to delegations of power to the Commission. The final regulation revised the definitions significantly: references to clear-cutting and sustainable harvesting were removed, and the scope of "natural forest" was replaced with "other wooded land" (Art. 2(7)). Although some Commission powers were retained, the Riksdag's core concerns were addressed, indicating it acted as a Policy Shaper.

In the Directive on the Protection of the Environment through Criminal Law (Case 6), the Riksdag objected to a provision mandating that individuals convicted of environmental crimes be temporarily banned from holding elected office, arguing this breached subsidiarity. The final act amended this from a mandatory to an optional measure, changing "shall include" to "may include" (Art. 5 §3(f)). This fully aligned with the Riksdag's position and reinforced that the Riksdag can act as a Policy Shaper.

Finally, the case of the Plant Protection Regulation (Case 9) is an exceptional instance. Following criticism from the Riksdag, the proposal was withdrawn by the Commission—a rare occurrence according to Cooper's analysis of parliamentary behavior. Although the exact reasons for the withdrawal remain unclear, and the responsible DG at the Commission declined to comment, the withdrawal closely reflected the Riksdag's concerns. Despite probable influence from other actors, the alignment suggests that the Riksdag had an impact. As such, it is categorized as a case where the Riksdag acted as a Policy Shaper.

In all of the presented cases, the ideal types are expected to work in line with the defining characteristics of each ideal type. For instance, through Policy Shaping the Riksdag is expected to have influenced the final legislative act through administrative influence and bargaining. Same applies that the Marginal Player cases assume administrative marginality and formalistic views. While these reasonings could have been introduced in the presentation of the cases, it would rather function as speculation. However, as the next section further will find evidence for each of the ideal types defining characteristics and illustrate the administrative process, that section will also show how the Riksdag acts in these cases.

Table 3. Summary of selected material and ideal type classification

CASE	REASONED OPINION	COMMISSION PROPOSAL	FINAL ADOPTED ACT (CELEX NUMBER)	POLICY SHAPER/ MARGINAL PLAYER
1	2019/20:FiU63	COM(2020) 445	32020D2053	PS
2	2020/21:AU6	COM(2020) 682	32022L2041	MP
3	2021/22:MJU11	COM(2021) 568	32023R0955	MP
4	2021/22:NU9	COM(2021) 557	32023L2413	MP
5	2021/22:SkU12	COM(2021) 823	32022L2523	MP
6	2021/22:JuU48	COM(2021) 851	32024L1203	PS
7	2021/22:MJU19	COM(2021) 706	32023R1115	PS
8	2021/22:MJU32	COM(2022) 304	32024R1991	MP
9	2021/22:MJU33	COM(2022) 305	*Proposal withdrawn.*	PS
10	2021/22:NU28	COM(2022) 71	32024L1760	PS
11	2021/22:AU16	COM(2021) 762	32024L2831	MP
12	2022/23:FöU2	COM(2022) 349	32023R2418	MP
13	2022/23:NU10	COM(2022) 459	32024R2747	MP
14	2022/23:SkU23	COM(2022) 707	32023L2226	PS

Note: Each hyperlink in the table leads directly to the empirical material examined for the respective case.

The fact that the Riksdag influenced certain legislative outcomes in line with the Policy Shaper ideal type, despite acting as a Marginal Player in most instances, demonstrates its ability to shape policy. If the Riksdag were solely a Marginal Player, its influence would be negligible across all cases. It is important to acknowledge that the Riksdag operates within a broader, multi-actor policymaking environment, and such changes cannot always be directly attributed to its input alone. Nonetheless, where amendments closely reflect its stated concerns, this indicates that the Riksdag functioned as a Policy Shaper—exerting indirect influence indirectly through other actors. In order to further understand how these indirect channels of influence can look like, how these opinions are treated by EU institutions during the decision-making process and how officials interpret their influence, the next section treats the administrative mechanisms and practices receiving the opinions through interviews with officials operating within the EU sphere.

5. 2 How do the administrative organization and institutional practices of EU institutions enable or constrain the Riksdag's capacity to act as a Policy Shaper or Marginal Player?

This section explores how Reasoned Opinions are administratively received, processed, and interpreted within EU institutions. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with officials from the European Commission, Council Secretariat, and with Swedish government representatives, the analysis provides evidence for both Marginal Player and Policy Shaper roles. The subsections below align with the characteristics of each ideal type described in Chapter 3.

5.2.1. Administration of EU institutions and evidence that the Riksdag acts as a Marginal Player

Interview data strongly suggests that Reasoned Opinions from individual parliaments, as the Riksdag, are administratively processed by EU institutions in a way that points to minimal substantive engagement and influence, implying characteristics of Marginal Player, described in chapter 3.

Administrative marginality

The interviews consistently highlight a centralized and streamlined approach, which contributes to administrative marginality. Interviewee 5 described the existence of a centralized unit within the Commission that manages the reception and dissemination of Reasoned Opinions and also handles all questions regarding national parliaments. As one Commission official noted, a centralized unit to be intended to function as "the masters of getting the machinery rolling as it should", emphasizing the unit's control over the administrative reception of Reasoned Opinions (Interviewee 5). The unit utilizes an IT system to inform relevant actors, such as line services (directorates), about Reasoned Opinions (Interviewee 5). Moreover, the unit controls the quality and dissemination of the Commission's replies, with Commissioner Šefčovič being "empowered to adopt alone the replies to national parliaments", bypassing the full College of Commissioners (Interviewee 5).

This centralized administrative structure suggests that there is little room for substantive discussion of individual parliamentary input.

Additionally, Reasoned Opinions are administratively treated in an identical way to opinions submitted through the political dialogue, reducing their distinct legal significance. A filtering mechanism distinguishes subsidiarity and proportionality claims (Interviewee 5). If an argument in the Reasoned Opinion is considered to have a proportionality character, it is regarded as part of the political dialogue rather than the EWS (Interviewee 5). Interviewee 5 exemplifies this by stating, “If you start your opinion by saying 'we welcome the Commission's proposal,' then you're already out of subsidiarity.”. Since Reasoned Opinions from the Riksdag often contain proportionality claims, their ability to exert influence through the EWS decreases, as these arguments receive limited consideration within the administrative filtering mechanism.

Furthermore, Interviewee 5 expressed skepticism about the ability of individual parliaments to amend legislative proposals adopted by the Commission, arguing, “It’s simply not realistic... that the Commission would take back the proposal or amend it.”. This perception underscores administrative marginality, since individual Reasoned Opinions appear unlikely to influence the legislative process at all. Instead, Interviewee 5 suggests that these opinions are directed at the co-legislators, such as the Council.

The administration of Reasoned Opinions within the Council Secretariat also demonstrates administrative marginality. Interviewee 3 described the Secretariat’s role as administering and disseminating information on Reasoned Opinions to all member states by converting them into Council documents. Furthermore, all Reasoned Opinions and opinions within the political dialogue are treated in the same way, and are converted into Council documents and sent under generic cover notes. As noted above, this equal treatment decreases the opportunity to influence legislation through the EWS. Thus, the role of the Council Secretariat is limited to filing and forwarding the documents, with no interaction with their content (Interviewee 3). While Council engagement is formally possible, the Secretariat neither anticipates nor records

whether Reasoned Opinions are discussed. In this sense, the administrative setting constrains the visibility of national parliaments' input ahead of Council negotiations.

In addition, Interviewee 3 reiterated that the legislative process is complex, and that the Secretariat handles various opinions from a great number of actors and stakeholders, which are distributed in a manner similar that of Reasoned Opinions. However, opinions from national parliaments constitute a very small part of the overall documents and process (Interviewee 3). This implies that the potential for individual Reasoned Opinions to influence the legislative process is marginal, since they are administered equivalently alongside a variety of other documents, and the large document flow makes them less likely to stand out. Interviewee 3 also describes the role of the Council Secretariat is to prepare the Council and to engage with the European Parliament as the co-legislator – not with individual national parliaments. Instead, parliamentary engagement often goes through the national representatives (governments) (Interviewee 3). Therefore, it is necessary to understand how national representatives receive and use Reasoned Opinions during negotiations.

From a government perspective, Reasoned Opinions seem to be treated as according to administrative marginality during Council negotiations. A government representative described that, while Reasoned Opinions from national parliaments are distributed to member states via the Delegates Portal, they are seldom used in practice and rarely influence negotiations (Interviewee 1). However, when legislative processes are traced and reported back to government, it can occur that Reasoned Opinions are attached to these files (Ibid). Nevertheless, the interviewee concludes that the prevailing interpretation of subsidiarity tends to follow the Commission's position rather than those expressed by an individual parliament such as the Riksdag (Interviewee 1). This interpretation can partly explain the statement by interviewee 2: "No one looks at the Reasoned Opinions after they've been sent in… it's not something anyone picks up.", emphasizing how marginally important Reasoned Opinions are in the Council's perspective on the legislative process. The perceived lack of interest in Reasoned Opinions was also noted: "It is marginally interesting for Sweden if the Czech Parliament has filed such an objection." (Interviewee 1). The view that opinions from other individual parliaments are only marginally interesting was reinforced by both interviewees. Interviewee 1 noted that "I've seen Reasoned Opinions from other parliaments distributed to us, but I can't think of any concrete case where they made a decisive impact." Interviewee 2

explicitly concluded, “During the years I have been involved, Reasoned Opinions have practically had no impact.”. These findings provide strong evidence for administrative marginality. The interviewee also noted, “It is not our role to represent national parliaments.”.

In summary, the main focus of the administrative units is to disseminate information about Reasoned Opinions and in the case of the Commission also to reply. However, none of the interviewed subjects considered it their unit’s or institution’s responsibility to implement or substantively engage with Reasoned Opinions from individual parliaments like the Riksdag. For instance, the Commission official pointed to the co-legislators, the Council Secretariat to the government, and national representatives consider their job to represent the government and not the national parliament. This perception of and approach to dissemination of information suggest that the reception of Reasoned Opinions from individual parliaments is characterized by administrative marginality, corresponding to the ideal type characteristics according to which national parliaments act as Marginal Players.

Formalistic view

The interviews describe a formalistic perception among EU and national officials regarding Reasoned Opinions. Officials pointed out that individual national parliaments are unable to exert influence, as also noted in the previous section. Instead, influence occurs when several parliaments voice the same concerns and formal thresholds are met. This perception closely mirrors the formalistic view described in Chapter 3 by Auel (2019).

Almost all interviewees (Interviewees 1, 2, 3, and 5) noted that Reasoned Opinions gain significance and political relevance only when voiced by several parliaments and when formal thresholds are reached. When national parliaments are coordinated through the EWS, they can build alliances and prompt action within the Council (Interviewees 1 and 2), serve as a warning light (Interviewee 3), and become significant for the Commission (Interviewee 5). For instance, Interviewee 5 noted, “A criticism expressed by ten national parliaments has a far bigger punch than one.” This emphasis on the possibility to exert influence was reinforced by Interviewees 1 and 2, who both noted that when several parliaments make similar objections, it can lead to government coordination, a blocking minority, or Council delegates raising these concerns. In other words, this evidence closely supports the formalistic view that

numbers, rather than arguments, are important for substantive influence by national parliaments through the EWS.

Furthermore, several interviewees suggested that a formal threshold must be reached for national parliaments to influence the legislative process. When Interviewee 3 was asked about parliamentary ability to exert influence, they noted, “The last case that we have of a yellow card was almost 10 years ago… for the orange card we are still waiting for the first one.” In other words, as thresholds are rarely met, institutions are not expected to respond to individual opinions. Interviewee 5 also supported this idea, noting that the threshold for an aggregate reply of seven opinions, which would mean greater significance as the document would be responded to with a formal communication, has not been reached since it was introduced. Furthermore, almost all interviews noted that it is rare to have more than one or two opinions on the same legislative proposal and that overall, opinions are too few to reach any of these thresholds. Thus, the view of threshold-dependency closely reflects the formalistic view: concerns only matter after coordination by many.

Finally, Interviewee 1 noted that Reasoned Opinions are formalistic rather than substantive in their treatment as formalities in Council negotiations, but also that the opinions themselves “are very formalistic in their construction.” In other words, Reasoned Opinions can sometimes be perceived as formalities that do not have any real influence, and their structure and language can be viewed as formalistic and unimportant. As the word "formalities" is used explicitly, it points clearly to a formalistic view.

Government alignment

There is limited evidence that the position of the Riksdag coincides with that of the government. Interviewee 1 noted, “The Swedish government almost always agrees with the Commission… But on the margins, we have had shared concerns with the Riksdag,” thus not supporting any view that Reasoned Opinions consistently align with the government position. Politically, the Riksdag and government generally move together and remain close, as would be expected. Interviewee 2 elaborated by describing the full process of how the Riksdag and the government interact during the legislative process. For example, when the government changes its position, it needs to anchor the view through mandates in the EU Committee. However, the interviewee concluded that this process of aligning standpoints has less to do with the Reasoned Opinion itself and more with the broader cooperation between the Riksdag

and the government. In conclusion, no sources indicate that the positions in Reasoned Opinions and government positions consistently coincide, even if it can occasionally occur.

Institutional Constraints

The interviews identified several structural and procedural constraints that limit individual national parliaments' ability to influence EU legislation, contributing to their role as Marginal Players. For instance, Interviewee 3 noted time constraints within the EWS structure, as Reasoned Opinions must be submitted within an eight-week deadline. "That is an issue in particular for urgent files because from time to time we don't have eight weeks." This highlights how urgent procedures can lead negotiations to proceed so quickly that opinions from national parliaments are not considered, since they may be submitted after discussions have already concluded. This was also emphasized by Interviewee 1, who noted, "The faster things go, the harder it is to comply with all the steps in Protocols 1 and 2." In other words, urgency may cause the EWS to be neglected. Furthermore, Interviewee 5 mentioned that the Commission is aware that the eight-week deadline is too narrow, as national parliaments consistently request ten or twelve weeks instead. This suggests that national parliaments may struggle to complete their subsidiarity checks within the current timeframe. Additionally, Interviewee 1 noted how the Commission's simplification agenda has resulted in legislation being adopted without proper impact assessments, coupled with urgent legislative processes and rapid adoptions in the Council, especially in areas such as industry, arms to Ukraine, and Omnibus legislation. However, this risk undermining the influence of national parliaments, as several complaints have already been made to the European Ombudsman according to Interviewee 1. Therefore, time constraints, the nature of legislative proposals, and urgent procedures present central institutional constraints, placing national parliaments into the Marginal Player ideal type.

The interviews also highlighted diverging views on subsidiarity and differences in administrative capacities as further constraints. Interviewee 5 emphasized the heterogeneous understanding of the subsidiarity principle by stating, "We don't have a shared definition of subsidiarity, everyone scores with their own ruler." These diverging interpretations are also reflected in the Commission's approach, which, as described in the section on administrative marginality, differs significantly from the Riksdag's approach that includes a proportionality test within the subsidiarity check. The Commission, in turn, interprets this as political

dialogue arguments. Additionally, Interviewee 1 stated that EU legislation is treated differently in different member states, leading to varying interest in mechanisms such as the EWS. This point was also emphasized by Interviewee 5, who noted that variation in national administrative capacities further limits impact. In other words, different views on subsidiarity, differences in administrative capacities, and varying approaches to EU legislation all function as institutional constraints. These factors limit the ability of national parliaments to exert influence through the EWS and cause them to act as Marginal Players.

Interviewee 3 also noted a minor institutional constraint of information asymmetry. The Council Secretariat sometimes struggles to know when the proposal was made available and when the subsidiarity deadline occurs. As a result, they must make their own calculations, which can potentially create an institutional constraint. A lack of information about subsidiarity deadlines may reduce the ability to exert influence.

Furthermore, another institutional constraint on the influence of national parliaments is the lack of explicit and consistent political signals from the von der Leyen Commission. Interviewee 5 highlighted that recent political guidelines and formal documents of the new Commission lack any specific reference to national parliaments, unlike previous Commissions. This has upset several national parliaments, as the absence of formal commitments can discourage parliamentary involvement in mechanisms such as the EWS. Although Interviewee 5 noted that actual engagement between the Commission and national parliaments, such as participation in parliamentary meetings and visits, remains important, the lack of formal commitment in official texts might also signal to Commissioners to deprioritize parliamentary issues. This can further limit the influence of the EWS and make national parliaments feel unimportant within this mechanism, which in turn leads to decreased engagement and exchange.

5.2.2. Administration of EU institutions and evidence that the Riksdag acts as a Policy Shaper

Interview data provides some evidence to suggest that Reasoned Opinions from individual parliaments, like the Riksdag, in some cases can shape policy indirectly and exert influence on the legislative process in a substantive way, implying abilities and certain pathways for individual national parliaments act as Policy Shapers.

Despite such marginalization, specific administrative mechanisms and strategic dynamics allow the Riksdag to function as a Policy Shaper in certain contexts. Interviewee 1 from the

Swedish Ministry noted that Reasoned Opinions form "the foundational instructions upon which governmental positions are shaped." This statement directly indicates that the Riksdag indirectly shapes EU policy through the Swedish government's negotiation mandates. Interviewee 2 further elaborated on these dynamics, explaining: "The Riksdag primarily influences in two critical stages beyond the initial Reasoned Opinion. Before establishing a general approach in the Council, and again during the trilogue stage when substantial changes occur, the government must confirm alignment with the Riksdag's established positions.". The interviewee clearly stated that while Reasoned Opinions themselves do not drive changes, the ongoing parliamentary-governmental interaction and scrutiny process effectively shape the Swedish government's position in negotiations. Thus, the Riksdag is enabled by the administrative organisation to act as a Policy Shaper indirectly through structured national processes.

Interviewee 5 from the Commission confirmed that the visibility of a Reasoned Opinion, particularly from the Riksdag, signals potential political friction during negotiations. This serves as an early indicator to the Commission of future negotiation challenges, indirectly influencing the negotiation dynamics.

Administrative influence

Interview data provides some evidence to suggest that Reasoned Opinions from individual parliaments, such as the Riksdag, can in some cases shape policy indirectly and exert substantive influence on the legislative process. This implies that there are certain abilities and pathways for individual national parliaments to act as Policy Shapers. Despite the prevailing marginalization, specific administrative mechanisms and strategic dynamics can enable the Riksdag to function as a Policy Shaper in particular contexts. Interviewee 1 from the Swedish Ministry noted that Reasoned Opinions form "the foundational instructions upon which governmental positions are shaped.". This statement directly indicates that the Riksdag indirectly shapes EU policy through the Swedish government's negotiation mandates.

Interviewee 2 further elaborated on these dynamics, explaining that the Riksdag primarily influences in two critical stages beyond the initial Reasoned Opinion. Before establishing a general approach in the Council, and again during the trilogue stage when substantial changes occur, the government must confirm alignment with the Riksdag's established positions. The

interviewee clearly stated that while Reasoned Opinions themselves do not directly drive changes, the ongoing process of parliamentary-governmental interaction and scrutiny effectively shapes the Swedish government's position in negotiations. Thus, the administrative organization enables the Riksdag act as a Policy Shaper indirectly through structured national processes. If the government ultimately aligns with the Reasoned Opinions, the Riksdag and its input have indirectly shaped legislation. At times, interests can also coincide.
Interviewee 5 from the Commission confirmed that the visibility of a Reasoned Opinion, particularly from the Riksdag, signals potential political friction during negotiations. This serves as an early indicator to the Commission of future negotiation challenges and can indirectly influence the dynamics of negotiation.

Signaling and agenda setting

Some evidence shows that individual national parliaments can function as signals or warning lights; however, most interviews emphasize that this is especially the case when national parliaments act collectively. Interviewee 2 noted that when the government discussed a specific act with the Commission, the latter had perceived this as a warning signal from the Reasoned Opinion. It serves as a warning signal because the Swedish Riksdag and the government are closely aligned politically. Therefore, the Commission can interpret the Reasoned Opinion as an indication of potential problematic areas for Sweden during negotiations. This perspective fully aligns with the theoretical assumption on signaling, and the interviewee provided a concrete example of when this occurred during negotiations, which strengthens the evidence.
Other interviews, however, noted that Reasoned Opinions act as signals or warning lights primarily when several parliaments coordinate their opinions on the same proposal (Interviewee 1). Interviewee 5 supports this by noting that "a significant number of Reasoned Opinions, then automatically this has a certain higher significance because it’s a warning light," meaning that they become a true signal only when a significant number of opinions are submitted. Thus, individual parliaments can serve as signals, but their impact is much stronger when their concerns are echoed by other national parliaments.

Policy Dialogue and Bargaining

The interviews highlighted potential ways for Reasoned Opinions to indirectly influence EU

legislation. For instance, Interviewee 3 noted that the Council itself does not engage with the content of Reasoned Opinions. It is up to member states' governments to consider and elevate parliamentary positions in negotiations. As a result, the Riksdag is able to exert intermediated influence through the Swedish government. In this way, national parliaments can indirectly shape legislation through policy dialogue and bargaining. Even though Interviewee 2 noted that the government rarely picks up Reasoned Opinions, Interviewee 1 suggested that "the Reasoned Opinion forms the basis for the government's position." In other words, the Reasoned Opinion of the Riksdag can inform the government and serve as a foundation for the position the government adopts in negotiations, which gives the Riksdag indirect influence. Through this process, the Riksdag can act as a Policy Shaper via policy dialogue and bargaining.

Interviewees 2 and 3 also noted that national parliaments can exert influence through the negotiating mandate, known as the parliamentary reserve. Interviewee 2 described in detail that the Riksdag influences the government in two stages since the government's position must align with the stance agreed with the Riksdag. The first stage occurs before the Council agrees on a general approach, and the second takes place after trilogues if substantive changes occur. In these cases, the Riksdag, through negotiations with the government, can delay or condition the government's position using the reserve. In this way, the initial views of the Riksdag from its Reasoned Opinion can resurface later in the negotiations. Although this parliamentary reserve is not purely connected to the EWS, it can be used for strategic bargaining and dialogue in order to indirectly shape EU policy.

Furthermore, Interviewee 5 noted that the EWS can inform, influence, and shape policy outcomes by providing national and regional perspectives. Since the Commission often lacks data about local or regional contexts to assess how proposals fit in different countries, it needs this information. Thus, national parliaments can actively inform the Commission and co-legislators through the EWS. This information helps ensure that "the final result of the legislative process can take account of what can be done best at which level." Interviewee 5 described this process of providing information early on as active subsidiarity. This is a clear example of how the Riksdag initiates a dialogue that can result in changes to legislative outcomes. Furthermore, Interviewee 5 noted that an individual parliament can influence

legislation indirectly if its argument is strong enough, which further supports the idea that the Riksdag can bargain and initiate dialogue in order to act as a Policy Shaper.

Interviewees 2 and 5 also noted that individual parliaments could exert further bargaining and dialogue influence on the legislative process if they intervene early. Interviewee 5 stated that “a good argument can prevail regardless of whether it comes from a big or small national parliament.”. This supports the idea of policy dialogue through the EWS, but the interviewee also described it as dependent on timing, specifically "when the Commission is still reflecting and is still on the drawing board." This means that arguments must come before the Commission adopts its proposal, so national parliaments cannot exert influence in this way through the EWS, since their opinions are sent after the proposal is made. Interviewee 2 emphasized the increased potential for influence if the Riksdag and the government deliberate and take positions before legislative proposals are adopted. Thus, there could be increasing opportunities for national parliaments to influence EU legislation, but not primarily through the EWS. As Interviewee 5 put it, "The earlier national parliaments express themselves, the higher the likelihood is that it still has a bearing on the legislative process."

It is also recognized that what actually happens during inter-institutional negotiations is difficult to trace – ”it is a black box” (Interviewee 5). Despite this, the evidence provides some pathways for individual parliaments to exert influence.

Networking and gatekeeping

Limited evidence supports the idea that networking and gatekeeping are used to exert influence through the EWS. However, Interviewees 4 and 5 noted that they follow and participate in interparliamentary conferences and meetings such as COSAC, and that IPEX—a website for the exchange of EU documents—is frequently used. Interviewee 5 observed that "the intensity of exchange where it happens is often extraordinary," indicating that a great deal of networking occurs between national parliaments and EU institutions. For example, Interviewee 5 noted that the Commission participates in COSAC meetings and that contributions and concerns raised at these meetings are read and considered. Therefore, in line with networking theory, national parliaments have opportunities to meet and discuss EWS-related or specific legislative issues, which could potentially be used to advocate for particular legislative files. Nevertheless, even if intensive networking takes place, there is no evidence

that parliaments use this to exert further influence through the EWS. Thus, the evidence for networking and gatekeeping is limited.

However, some parliaments use networking as a way to influence legislation, such as the Bundestag. Interviewee 5 described that "many national parliaments now use alternative channels," meaning that parliaments use meetings and informal contacts to push national interests instead of relying on the EWS and formal mechanisms. This shows that national parliaments could promote their agenda in Reasoned Opinions through informal means, but it appears to be an alternative rather than a complement, since the evidence indicates this approach is used instead of the EWS and helps explain the Bundestag's low engagement. Thus, networking does not typically serve to advance ideas from an individual parliament within the EWS framework.

Interviewee 5 also notes that parliamentary engagement through the EWS cannot be viewed as gatekeeping. The interviewee emphasized that the EWS does not function to block legislation, especially since so few national parliaments are active. As a result, the EWS cannot prevent legislation from being adopted, which conflicts with the traditional view of gatekeeping.

5. 3. Summary: A Marginal Player with Policy Shaping Capacities

Across the fourteen legislative cases, the Riksdag was categorized as a Marginal Player in eight cases and as a Policy Shaper in six cases. The overall pattern points toward marginalization, though the number of policy-shaping cases demonstrates that parliamentary influence also is possible.

The interview evidence reinforces this distinction. For the Marginal Player role, respondents consistently described structural and administrative constraints, including formalistic procedures and limited institutional responsiveness, which were noted as strong support for this categorization. By contrast, evidence for the Policy Shaper role was less extensive where officials highlighted certain pathways that enabled the Riksdag to act as a Policy Shaper. For instance, Reasoned Opinions shaped government positions in the Council or supplied missing information in the Commission, which allowed the Riksdag to exert indirect influence.

Taken together, the findings show that the Riksdag's role is not fixed but context-dependent. Marginalization dominates, yet occasional policy-shaping occurs when favorable conditions align. This duality provides the foundation for the following discussion, which situates the results within wider debates on parliamentary influence and EU democratic accountability.

Table 4. Summary of Evidence on Ideal types

Ideal types and characteristics	Fulfillment of ideal type (Strong/ some/ weak)	Summary of why
Marginal Player	Strong evidence	-Majority of legislative cases are Marginal Player and all interviews provide strong evidence for Marginal Player characteristics.
Legislative alignment	Strong evidence	-8 of 14 legislative files are marginal.
Administrative marginality	Strong Evidence	-Administrative processes view Reasoned Opinions as marginally important -The Commission centralizes their reception to a unit and a Commissioner, -No institution feel responsibility to address or implement Reasoned Opinions into legislation
Formalistic View	Strong Evidence	-Formal thresholds are required for influence.
Government alignment	Weak evidence	-Government alignment can happen, but it rather tends to align with the Commission's view.
Institutional restrictions	Strong evidence	-Several restrictions such as time constraints, urgent procedures, lack of political will etc.
Policy Shaper	Some evidence	-Some legislative cases of policy shaping and some mechanisms point to the possibility of policy shaping.
Legislative alignment	Some evidence	6 out of 14 are in partial or fully aligned with Reasoned Opinion.
Administrative Influence	Some evidence	-Administration ensures that all actors are involved which potentially could lead to influence.
Signaling	Some evidence	-A specific case showed that signaling occurs, however, it is described predominantly described to happen when multiple parliaments engage.

Policy Dialogue and Bargaining	Some evidence	-Government can adapt their position -When the Commission lacks data or receives good arguments, it is able to influence legislative output.
Networking	Weak evidence	-Networking occurs, however it is not described to directly alter the influence of Reasoned Opinion.

Note: This table summarizes the evidence found in the results section from textual evidence described in the legislative alignment column, and the other administrative organization which then are summed into each ideal type.

6. Discussion

This thesis set out to assess whether the Swedish Riksdag acts as a Policy Shaper or a Marginal Player within the EU's Early Warning System (EWS). By employing a renewed ideal type framework and analyzing both documentary evidence and interviews, this study captures the complexity of EU legislation and parliamentary engagement. The analysis of this process demonstrates that, while individual national parliaments are mostly marginalized and considered Marginal Players, certain conditions allow them to shape legislation indirectly. Thus, the Riksdag exhibits characteristics of both ideal types, varying from case to case and challenging previous literature that consistently frame these roles as explicit.

6. 1. Summary of Key Findings

The empirical analysis reveals that the Riksdag predominantly functions as a Marginal Player in the EWS, with some exceptions. In the majority of legislative cases examined, Reasoned Opinions from the Riksdag were not reflected in the final legislative outcomes. In prominent cases such as the Minimum Wage Directive and Platform Work Directive, Riksdag objections were not only disregarded, but the final results moved in the opposite direction from the Riksdag's concerns. Interviews with EU officials and government representatives further clarified that administrative mechanisms, institutional constraints, and formalistic views largely explain the marginalization of the Riksdag. Almost all interviews presented strong evidence that individual national parliaments act as Marginal Players. For instance, administration treated Reasoned Opinions as having minor importance with no concrete institutional respondent, while several institutional constraints such as the eight-week deadline, urgent legislative procedures, and the formalistic view that calls for certain thresholds to be met in order for the EWS to have any effect were highlighted.

Nevertheless, the findings also reveal notable exceptions where the Riksdag exerts indirect influence on the legislative process. In examples like the Own Resources Decision and Due Diligence Directive, Riksdag concerns were partially or fully addressed. Interview data further illustrated indirect pathways for such influence, such as laying the foundation for the government's position, providing timely information, or offering substantive arguments that the Commission lacks. This demonstrates that while marginalization is the norm, the potential

for policy shaping persists, though it depends on the context and specific conditions being fulfilled.

6. 2. Relating Findings to Previous Research

These results complicate and support earlier scholarship discussed in Chapter 2. The pattern of Marginal Player behavior echoes the arguments of Auel (2019), Raunio (2011), and de Wilde (2012), who all advocate that the EWS is largely symbolic, procedurally routinized, and only marginally important, as national parliaments have limited influence on the legislative process. Most findings relate back to this foundational view, as both the legislative cases and interview evidence strongly support this position. Nevertheless, this thesis provides more detailed and specific findings than previous authors, utilizing legislative cases and interviews to move beyond the secondary literature or structural explanations typically relied upon. For example, while Auel argues that the complexity of EU governance and its network of institutions provide constraints to influence, this thesis identifies specific institutional constraints such as time pressures and the effect of urgency on parliamentary influence, supported by primary data.

However, the thesis also finds instances where the Riksdag acted as a Policy Shaper, supporting Cooper (2019) and van Gruisen & Huysmans (2020), who suggest that national parliaments can shape EU legislation indirectly through signaling and bargaining. Notably, this study offers new evidence that certain contexts allow individual parliaments like the Riksdag to exert indirect influence when the Commission requires data, when strong arguments are provided, and when the government's position is affected. This extends Cooper's (2019) focus on collective action to the individual level and justifies the view of van Gruisen & Huysmans (2020) that Reasoned Opinions from individual parliaments can work as signals.

6. 3. Marginal Player Characteristics

Cases that predominantly demonstrated Marginal Player behavior reflect deeper structural dynamics within the legislative process. The interview data describes several key findings that systematically constrain parliamentary influence.

First, the thesis found that divergent views on subsidiarity structurally constrains parliamentary influence. For example, the Commission adopts a narrower interpretation of the subsidiarity check than the Riksdag. In Riksdag opinions, the inclusion of positive statements, such as "we welcome this proposal," leads the Commission to categorize concerns as proportionality rather than subsidiarity, filtering them out of the EWS and into political dialogue. The Riksdag, on the other hand, sees the subsidiarity check as including proportionality. This interpretive gap alters the ability of national parliaments to exert influence through the EWS and is reinforced by the Commission official who noted that a wide array of interpretations among parliaments functions as an institutional constraint. This finding aligns with Cornell Jonsson (2016) but is based on new, primary data.

Second, almost all interviews described institutional constraints that reduce the influence national parliaments can exert through the EWS. The findings are unique in the sense that they provide detailed insights into how institutional constraints such as the eight-week deadline, urgent procedures, and the simplification agenda can limit influence. National parliaments acting alone are of minor importance. While Rozenberg (2017) also describes timing as a potential constraint, and Auel (2019) describes inter-institutional constraints, this thesis supports and expands on these observations by offering further details based on recent EU developments.

Third, strong evidence for administrative marginality showed how centralized and streamlined procedures distribute opinions, but these are rarely picked up during negotiations, and none of the institutions consider themselves responsible for implementing the views unless a number of parliaments voice similar concerns. This supports the formalistic view that certain thresholds must be met for influence. Previous research has paid little attention to these administrative settings; thus, this study fills a significant gap regarding how Reasoned Opinions are received and perceived, helping to understand why national parliaments mostly act as Marginal Players.

6. 4. Conditions for Policy Shaping

Despite structural constraints, the thesis identifies specific conditions that enable policy-shaping behavior. The six successful cases, together with interviews, highlight that individual parliaments like the Riksdag can exert influence indirectly in exceptional cases.

First, there is evidence that the Riksdag's position in the Reasoned Opinion can form the foundation for the government's stance. This finding contradicts authors such as Hettne et al. and Rozenberg, who suggest the Riksdag most often aligns or copies the government's position. This contradiction may be due to differences in data and the passage of time since Hettne's study. Secondly, Reasoned Opinions can work as signals, especially when voiced by several parliaments, which supports van Gruisen and Huysmans' findings that even individual parliaments can serve a signaling role. Third, the Commission sometimes lacks information about national and regional contexts, allowing national parliaments to shape legislation by providing needed data, especially if arguments are provided early. This kind of indirect influence through argument quality rather than formal thresholds is a new finding, contradicting the more formalistic perspectives of Auel. Thus, under certain conditions, the Commission can be a constructive collaborator with national parliaments, and arguments matter, not only numbers.

While it is not possible to fully exclude that other actors, such as the government or other stakeholders, contributed to policy changes, the evidence still supports that the Riksdag had an indirect effect. These factors, while limiting the study's ability to draw broader causal conclusions, still strengthen the validity of the policy-shaping findings.

6. 5. Implications for Debates on Democratic Deficit and future research

A central insight from this study is the ambiguity that arises when relating the findings back to deparliamentarization and parliamentarization literature. On one hand, the dominance of Marginal Player outcomes, the decline in collective engagement, and the administrative handling of Reasoned Opinions all point to ongoing deparliamentarization of national parliamentary engagement in the EU. The Riksdag's experience underscores how formal mechanisms such as the EWS are intended to address the so-called democratic deficit, while still giving national parliaments minimal influence over subsidiarity in legislation.

On the other hand, the presence of policy-shaping cases, the importance of early and well-argued interventions, and the strategic role of parliamentary-government interaction show that parliamentarization is not entirely absent. Instead, parliamentary influence is conditional and activated under specific institutional and procedural contexts. This supports a more nuanced

perspective in recent scholarship, showing that both deparliamentarization and parliamentarization can coexist, even if the former appears to be more dominant.

These findings are limited by the study's sample size and cannot support sweeping conclusions on democratic accountability, which was not the primary aim. Still, if the deparliamentarization thesis holds, then mechanisms like the EWS—while intended to improve democratic accountability—may be insufficient. Ongoing issues such as declining citizen trust in EU institutions could worsen, potentially leading to further polarization or calls for greater centralization of legislative power. Conversely, from a parliamentarization perspective, the findings suggest that established mechanisms can provide some sense of accountability and that reforms might help further strengthen democratic accountability.

Future research

To advance debates on national parliaments and democratic accountability, future research could apply this theoretical framework to explore hybrid roles in a wider variety of contexts, including different countries, legislative periods, and institutional mechanisms such as the political dialogue, which could be systematically compared with the Early Warning System. Such comparative studies would deepen our understanding of the hybrid position between deparliamentarization and parliamentarization, clarifying the administrative organisation under which national parliaments act as Policy Shapers or Marginal Players. These findings would help either reinforce or challenge the conclusions presented in this thesis, while also shedding light on the relative effectiveness of different forms of parliamentary engagement.

There is also a need for further research into legislative mechanisms and internal negotiation pathways. This study was unable to include interviewees who had participated in trialogues, such as those from the Commission's Directorates-General. While the European Parliament's role was considered limited during the pilot study, several interviewees indicated that it could play a more significant role in shaping legislative outcomes. Future research should seek to open this "black box" by exploring the internal negotiation dynamics and perspectives within the European Parliament. Doing so could provide valuable insights into how and under what conditions national parliaments might exert influence, ultimately supporting more effective resource allocation and a stronger role in EU democratic accountability.

Finally, informal pathways of national parliamentary engagement remain largely unexplored. Only limited descriptive research exists on how interparliamentary cooperation and networking in Brussels may contribute to influence or democratic legitimacy. Future studies should examine how national parliaments use these informal opportunities, both to increase their capacity to shape legislation and to assess the actual value and significance of such cooperation for democratic accountability within the EU.

6. 6. Contributions, Limitations and Generalizability

The Policy Shaper–Marginal Player framework has proven useful for systematic analysis, but it also reveals the need for more nuanced or multi-dimensional typologies that could capture the varying degrees and types of parliamentary influence in EU governance. Future research might build on this by developing frameworks that go beyond binary classifications.

Attributing causality remains a key methodological challenge. The EU's complex and multi-level decision-making processes make it difficult to directly link policy changes to parliamentary influence. By focusing primarily on observable legislative changes, this study provides conservative estimates of parliamentary impact and likely understates more indirect forms of influence.

The interviews conducted offer valuable insider perspectives, contributing depth and context that would not be accessible from documentary evidence alone. However, these perspectives are shaped by the institutional positions and potential biases of the interviewees, which future research could address by drawing on broader and more diverse samples, or by employing ethnographic approaches to administrative processes.

While the thesis focuses specifically on the Swedish Riksdag, its findings are relevant to a wider context. The Riksdag's status as an institutionally strong parliament with high administrative capacity suggests that if it struggles to influence EU policy, parliaments with fewer resources or less capacity are likely to face even greater challenges. Nonetheless, the unique features of the Swedish case mean that generalizability should be approached with caution, and comparative studies across different national contexts are recommended.

6. 7. Policy recommendations

- **Enhance Strategic Framing of Reasoned Opinions**: To strengthen the impact of Reasoned Opinions, the Riksdag should reconsider using diplomatic or ambiguous language such as “the Riksdag welcomes these parts.” Instead, Reasoned Opinions should adopt a clearer and more assertive tone, particularly when raising subsidiarity concerns. Since the Commission notes COSAC contributions, it could be an arena where national parliaments discuss with the Commission a more unified and coherent interpretation of subsidiarity, aligned across national parliaments and EU institutions.
- **Leverage the Political Dialogue and Explore Additional Avenues:** The Political Dialogue could be used more proactively to engage earlier in the legislative process, potentially even during the agenda-setting phase. Similarly, mechanisms such as "Have Your Say" and informal tools, including parliamentary representatives in Brussels, should utilized. While constitutional constraints, legal interpretations of the treaties, and limited interest among MPs pose challenges, these could be reconsidered in light of the Riksdag’s broader role in EU affairs.
- **Prioritize and Coordinate Collective Action with Other National Parliaments**: The probability of the Riksdag acting as a Policy Shaper in isolation is low. Instead, collective efforts, particularly during the early stages of subsidiarity can increase influence. Coordinated action with other national parliaments is vital. Platforms like IPEX, monitored by the Commission and partly by the Council, should be used more strategically to signal shared concerns and facilitate coordination across parliaments.
- **Engage Earlier and More Substantively in the Legislative Cycle:** While the Riksdag recognizes that early engagement is essential, responses often arrive after the legislative procedure is already in motion. The Riksdag should aim to monitor and respond to Commission work programs and roadmaps more systematically and in a timely manner. When early engagement is lacking, influence diminishes, particularly when proposals have already been politically framed or presented by the Commission.

Conclusion

This thesis has shown that the Swedish Riksdag operates primarily as a Marginal Player within the EU's Early Warning System (EWS), while occasionally showing Policy Shaper capacity under specific conditions. These findings nuance existing scholarship by rejecting both overly optimistic and pessimistic expectations of parliamentarization or deparliamentarization theory, as strong Policy Shapers or complete Marginal Players.

The results demonstrate that parliamentary roles are not static but conditional and context-dependent. The Riksdag's ability to shape outcomes depends on the timing of its interventions, the substantive quality of its arguments, and the governments responsiveness to adopt the Riksdag's position. While most concerns were disregarded, these pathways allowed the Riksdag to exert indirect influence, for instance by providing missing data or shaping negotiation mandates.

The findings also highlight structural limitations of the EWS. Despite its promise to enhance democratic accountability, the mechanism frequently sidelines national parliaments, as the Commission retains the dominant role in assessing subsidiarity. The marginal treatment of Reasoned Opinions risks undermining the credibility of the system and leaves the democratic deficit only partially addressed.

By operationalizing the Policy Shaper and Marginal Player roles into explicit ideal types, this thesis makes a conceptual and methodological contribution to the study of national parliaments in the EU. Unlike earlier research, which often remained abstract, the framework developed here enables systematic classification of parliamentary interventions and clarifies the conditions under which influence can be constrained or observed. This approach provides analytical transparency and can be applied in future studies to further examine democratic accountability and provide findings from comparative cases and mechanisms.

In sum, while the EWS does not resolve the EU's democratic deficit, it does create limited but real spaces for parliamentary voice and sets expectations of accountability that matter over the long term. The Swedish Riksdag's experience serves as a microcosm for broader patterns of parliamentary engagement, illustrating both the challenges and the possibilities for strengthening democratic governance in an evolving European Union in the 21st century.

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Appendix

Annex 1. Interview Guide.

1. Introduction and Background

- Could you briefly describe your current role?
    - Have you been involved in receiving, processing or responding to Reasoned Opinions from national parliaments? If yes, please describe your specific responsibilities in this area?

2. Administrative Handling of Reasoned Opinions

- How are Reasoned Opinions from national parliaments administratively managed within your institution (government/Commission/Council)?
    - Are there established internal procedures or guidelines for registering, evaluating, and disseminating these opinions internally?
    - How do you view the role of Reasoned Opinions in the EU legislative process?
- Are Reasoned Opinions discussed at internal meetings during the legislative process? If yes, in what contexts or at which stages?
- Are Reasoned Opinions typically discussed in inter-institutional dialogues between the Commission, European Parliament or the Council? Could you elaborate?
- How would you evaluate your institutions (government/Council/Commission) overall engagement with national parliaments regarding Reasoned Opinions? What informs your evaluation?

3. Interpretation and Perceptions of Influence

- In your experience, how influential are individual Reasoned Opinions from national parliaments in shaping legislative output?
- Can you recall specific examples where a Reasoned Opinion from a single parliament directly led to the reconsideration or modification in the legislative output?
- The number of national parliaments actively using the Early Warning System has decreased during the last Commission mandate. Have you noticed any changes in how impactful Reasoned Opinions have been compared to previous mandates?

4. Reasoned Opinions as Policy Shapers

- Have you observed instances where Reasoned Opinions have functioned as early indicators, signaling potential political controversy or substantial opposition? Could you provide examples?
- Do Reasoned Opinions typically initiate informal dialogues or exchanges between institutions or within the Commission?

5. Reasoned Opinions as Marginal Players

- In your experience, do you perceive Reasoned Opinions as procedural formalities, or as valuable contributions to the decision-making process? Please elaborate.
- If legislative adjustments occur in alignment with subsidiarity concerns, are these typically influenced more by government-level negotiations or directly by the Reasoned Opinions itself?
- Could you identify specific institutional or structural barriers that limit the ability of parliamentary concerns expressed in Reasoned Opinions to effectively shape EU legislation?

6. Concluding Reflections

- In your experience, are Reasoned Opinions from certain national parliaments taken more seriously?
- Can this depend on factors like their quality, frequency, or depth of argumentation?
- Is there anything else relevant to this topic that you would like to add or emphasize?