



Overview of parliamentary committees of inquiry (PCIs) in ECPRD member parliaments

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Outline of presentation

1 Introduction

2 A classification of PCIs

3 Practical aspects of PCIs



01.

Introduction

1. Introduction

PCIs in academic literature



A paradox:

- Parliamentary committees of inquiry are generally regarded as one of the most **powerful oversight tools** to Parliaments
- Yet there is **little academic literature** on this topic, with few comparative studies examining more than two or three countries.

1. Introduction

Definitions

Though common to parliamentary regimes, it lacks a **single, well-established definition** — especially in comparative terms.

“Committees of inquiry are bodies set up by parliamentary assemblies to gather information on specific issues or on the management of public services, enabling Parliament to fully exercise its oversight role over the Government.”

(Jean Gicquel, *Droit parlementaire*, 2008)

Temporary bodies established during the course of legislative term to investigate specific issues

(Elena Griglio, *Parliamentary oversight of the executives, Tools and procedure in Europe*, 2020)

1. Introduction

ECPRD requests on PCIs

Since 2000, approx. 20 ECPRD requests on PCIs related issues, among which 2 requests of a general nature:

2019, #4241, European Parliament	2025, #6043, French Senate
"Committee of Inquiry in National Parliaments"	"Parliamentary committees of inquiry in practice"
9 questions	12 questions
26 replies from 21 countries	46 replies from 35 countries (+ the European Parliament)

Changes since 2020: only 7 countries have made changes to their legal framework related to PCIs.



02.

Classification of Parliamentary Committees of Inquiry

2. A classification of PCIs

Parliament's power to establish PCIs

85 % of responding parliamentary assemblies can create PCIs

In **33 countries** (+ the EP) out of 35, PCIs can be set up.

In **6 countries**, PCIs can be set up by the **lower chamber** of Parliament only:

- Austria
- Belgium
- Czechia
- Germany
- Poland
- Slovenia

In **2 countries**, the Parliament cannot create PCIs :

- **Slovakia**
- **Sweden**

In 2 other countries, the creation of PCIs is theoretically possible but this power is not used :

- **Denmark** (since 1953)
- **Finland** (since 1968)

2. A classification of PCIs

Legal basis

Law or Rules of Procedure	Constitution	
Armenia	Albania	Latvia
Bosnia-Herzegovina	Austria	Luxembourg
Canada	Belgium	Moldova
Estonia	Bulgaria	The Netherlands
Norway	Croatia	North Macedonia
Serbia	Czech Republic	Portugal
United Kingdom	Finland	Poland
	France	Romania
	Germany	Slovenia
	Greece	Spain
	Hungary	Switzerland
	Ireland	Türkiye
	Italy	Ukraine
Total: 7	Total: 26	

79%
*of responding
 countries can
 establish PCIs in
 accordance to their
 Constitution*

2. A classification of PCIs

Some specific cases

The select committees model: UK

In the House of Commons :

20 departmental select committees + 3 other scrutiny committees in charge of scrutinising the executive

In the House of Lords :

Sessional investigative committees (13 out of the 36 select committees) + temporary special inquiry committees + possible follow-up inquiries by the Liaison committee

Bicameral committees of inquiry :

Italy, Spain, Romania

Joint PCIs consisting of both deputies and senators.

Different sorts of inquiry/investigative committees:

Greece (Examination committees and Ad Hoc Parliamentary Committees for Preliminary Investigation)

Granting PCI's investigative powers to standing committees:

France

2. A classification of PCIs

Parliament's power to establish PCIs

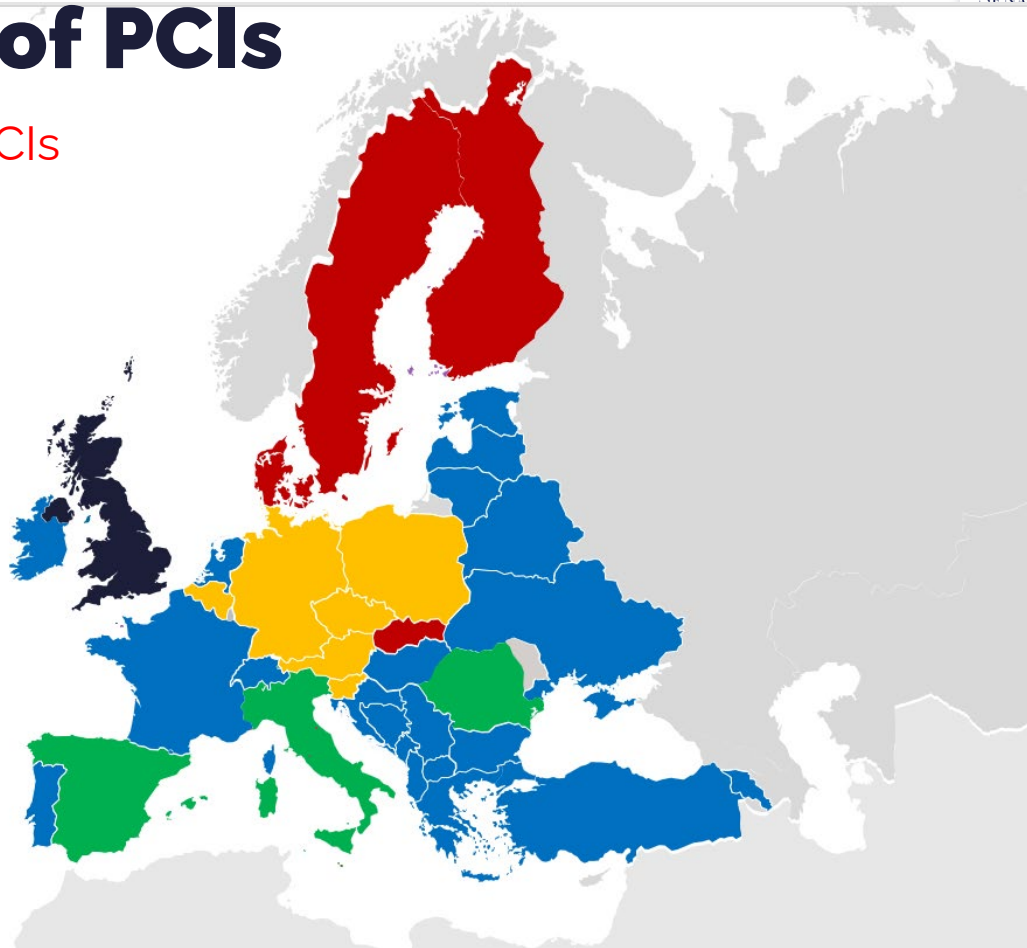
No PCIs possible
or not used

Select
committees

PCI possible only
in the lower
Chamber

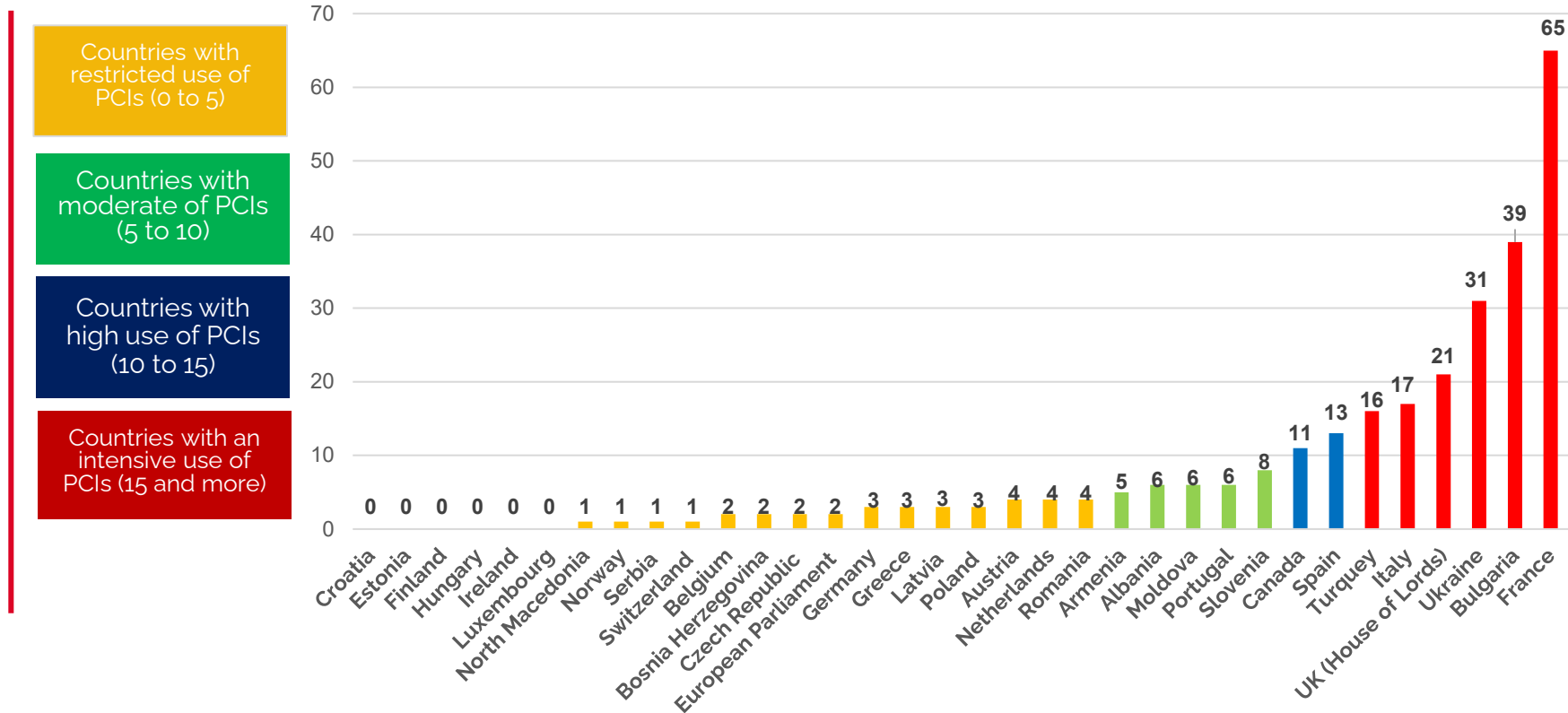
Possible
bicameral PCI

PCIs possible



2. A classification of PCIs

The use of PCIs since 2020



2. A classification of PCIs

Length & Initiative

Duration of PCIs varies greatly:



From **3 to 4 months** (Türkiye)

Up to **5 years** (Norway)

In general, not more than **1 year**



Initiative:

In many assemblies, **a majority ranging from 1/5 to 1/3** of the members is needed to set up a PCI.

No right of the opposition or a minority to create a PCI in a few countries (Belgium, The Netherlands).

Specific cases :

- “Drawing right” of parliamentary groups in France
- Setting up of a PCI by passing a law in Italy

2. A classification of PCIs

Chairpersons & Conflict Resolution

Selection and responsibility of chairpersons:



It is a common practice that the chairperson is a **member of the political group that has initiated the PCI**. In Estonia, the chairperson has to be a member of the opposition.

The President of the Chamber as chairperson ex lege:

The Austrian Nationalrat is unique: The President of the Chamber has to chair a PCI (and is not a member of it). S/He is assisted by the Procedural Judge.

Conflict resolution mechanisms:

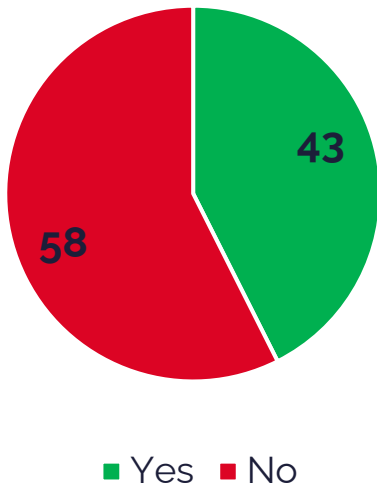
In general, conflicts within a PCI and between (parts of) a PCI and other state organs have to be resolved **politically**. But there are **exceptions** like conflicts over the right to establish a PCI (Slovenia) or the competences of a PCI (Spain).

In **Austria** and in **Germany**, the **Constitutional Courts** have a designated role as arbiter in such conflicts. In Austria the Constitutional Court is under an obligation to decide such cases immediately.

2. A classification of PCIs

Parallel judicial proceedings on the same matter

Parliamentary assemblies allowing a PCI in parallel to judicial proceedings on the same facts (in %)



The **sub judice rule** applies in a majority of countries.

In other countries, there are generally political arrangements or negotiations (Germany) or an **ad hoc** consultation procedure in Austria.

2. A classification of PCIs

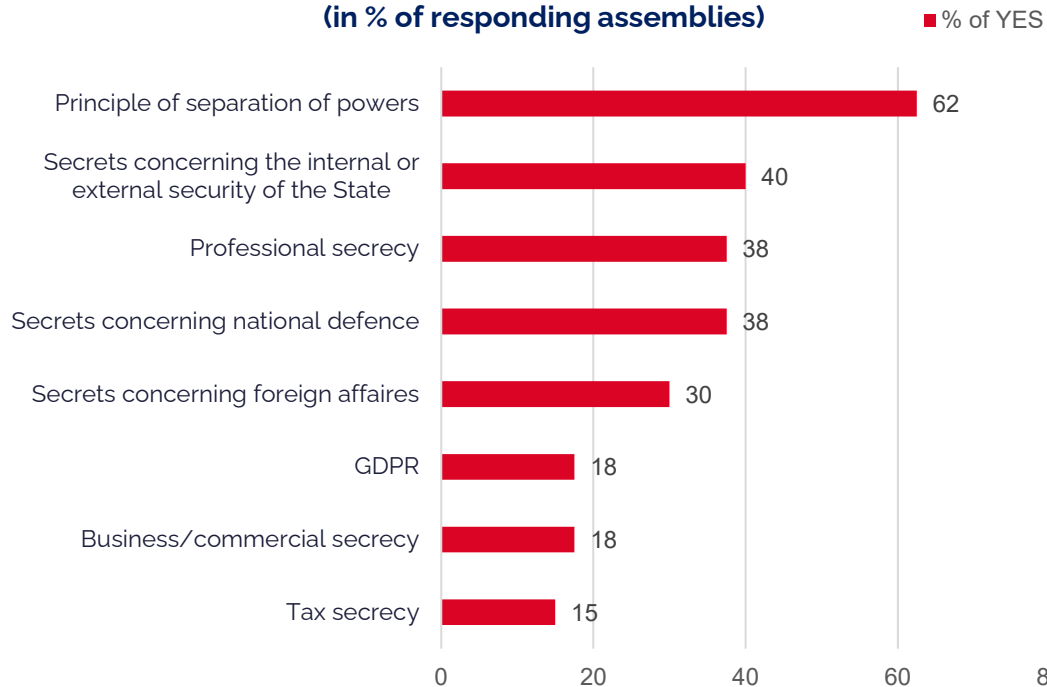
Investigative powers and their limits

The main investigative powers of PCIs are :

- **hearing of witnesses**, officials, civil servants, members of Gvt
- **requesting documents**
- in fewer parliaments, conducting fact-finding visits or on-the-spot investigations.

In many countries, possibility of **administrative or criminal sanctions** for providing false evidence, refusing to provide a document or refusing to be heard.

**Limits to PCI investigative power
(in % of responding assemblies)**



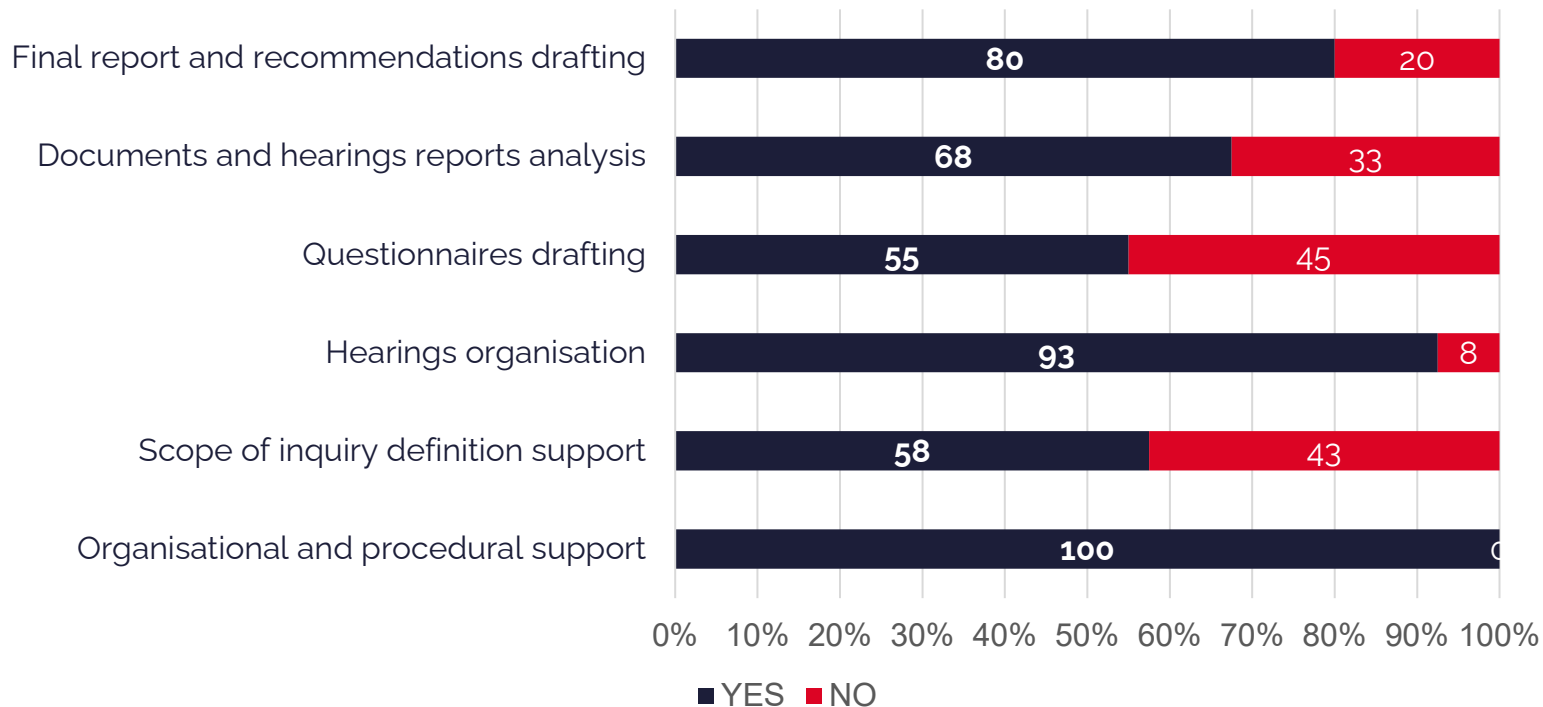


03.

Practical aspects of PCIs

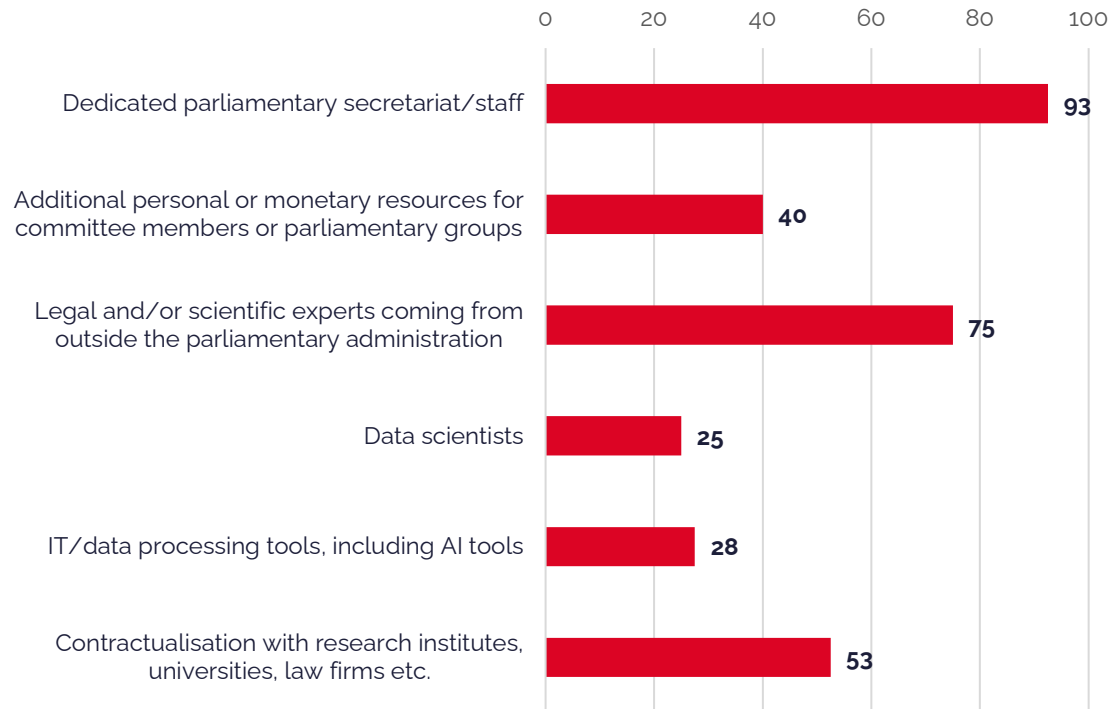
3. Practical aspects of PCIs

Role of parliamentary administration



3. Practical aspects of PCIs

Available resources and tools



In some assemblies, possible specific (external) assistance:

- from a procedural judge (Austria)
- from an « investigator » if requested by MPs (Germany)

Thank you for your attention...