

**WHAT IS INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE  
IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT?  
Perceptions about the required intercultural skills from the perspective  
of Finnish Members of the European Parliament**

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<p>Within intercultural communication research intercultural communication competence (ICC competence) is considered a precondition for succeeding in intercultural interactions. This study endeavours to extend the study of ICC competence by examining the concept in a culturally diverse political context, in the context of the European Parliament (EP). The focus of the study is on exploring what kind of intercultural skills the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) need in their work in order to communicate appropriately and effectively in intercultural settings and consequently, be seen as interculturally competent. The subject is studied from the perspective of the Finnish MEPs whose experiences and perceptions of intercultural interactions in the EP are enquired through interviewing method. The study employs two interviewing techniques: open-ended questionnaire (11) and semi-structured topic interviews (6).</p> <p>The results show that the MEPs encounter various intercultural interaction situations in their work of which the official meetings of the EP, committee meetings, group meetings and plenary session are the most intercultural and most important for their assignment. Cultural differences appear especially between northern and southern European cultures in manners, in communication style and in style of confrontation. The major findings of the study can be summarised into three intercultural skills: adaptation skills, communication skills, and socialising skills. Adaptation skills encompass the ability to recognise the problematic features of one's own culturally patterned behaviour and accommodate one's behaviour in intercultural settings. Communication skills include conflict management skill and intercultural persuading skill. Socialising skills cover relationship building skill and lobbying skill. The study also points out behavioural indicators through which the Finnish MEPs may demonstrate these intercultural skills in actual interaction. It is concluded that ICC competence for the MEPs is composed of intercultural skills that are somewhat different from the constituents of ICC competence for other professions, such as diplomats. This is mainly due to the context as well as the tasks of the MEPs which differ from other intercultural contexts and assignments.</p>	
Asiasanat – Keywords Intercultural communication competence, intercultural skills, cultural differences, European Parliament, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs)	
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## JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Kulttuurienvälisen viestinnän tutkimuksessa kulttuurienvälisen viestinnän kompetenssia pidetään edellytyksenä menestymiselle kulttuurienvälisessä kanssakäymisessä. Tämä tutkimus tarkastelee kulttuurienvälisen viestinnän kompetenssia kulttuurisesti monimuotoisessa poliittisessa kontekstissa, Euroopan parlamentin kontekstissa. Tutkimuksessa selvitetään, millaisia kulttuurienvälisen viestinnän taitoja Euroopan parlamentin jäsenet (mepit) tarvitsevat työssään voidakseen viestiä onnistuneesti ja tehokkaasti kulttuurienvälisissä tilanteissa. Aihetta lähestytään suomalaisten meppien kokemuksien ja havaintojen kautta. Tutkimuksessa hyödynnetään kahta haastattelutekniikkaa: avoimia kysymyslomakkeita (11) ja puolistrukturoituja haastatteluja (6).</p> <p>Tulokset osoittavat, että mepit kohtaavat työssään monenlaisia kulttuurienvälisiä vuorovaikutustilanteita, joista Euroopan parlamentin viralliset kokoontumiset – valiokuntakokoukset, poliittisten ryhmien kokoukset ja täysistunnot – ovat kaikkein “kulttuurienvälisimpiä” ja työn kannalta tärkeimpiä. Kulttuurieroja esiintyy erityisesti pohjois- ja eteläeurooppalaisien välillä ja ne ilmenevät erityisesti tavoissa, viestintätäytyllissä ja tavoissa toimia vastakkainasettelutilanteissa (style of confrontation). Tutkimuksen päätulokset voidaan tiivistää kolmeen kulttuurienväliseen taitoon, joita mepeiltä vaaditaan: mukautumis- ja sopeutumiskyky (adaptation skills), viestintätaidot (communication skills) ja sosiaaliset taidot (socialising skills). Mukautumis- ja sopeutumistaidot käsittävät kyvyn tunnistaa omassa käytöksessä ne kulttuurin tuomat piirteet, jotka ovat ongelmallisia kulttuurienvälisissä tilanteissa ja taidon mukauttaa omaa käytöstään näiden piirteiden osalta. Viestintätaidot sisältävät konfliktinhallintataidon (conflict management skill) ja kulttuurienvälisen vakuuttamisen ja suostuttelun taidon (intercultural persuading skill). Sosiaaliset taidot kattavat suhteiden luomisen ja lobbaamisen taidot. Tutkimuksessa esitetään myös ”käyttäytymismalleja” (behavioural indicators), joiden avulla suomalaiset mepit voivat osoittaa edellä mainittuja kulttuurienvälisen viestinnän taitoja todellisissa vuorovaikutustilanteissa. Tutkimuksen päätelmä on, että meppien kulttuurienvälisen viestinnän kompetenssi koostuu kulttuurienvälisistä taidoista, jotka ovat jossakin määrin erilaisia kuin muiden ammattikuntien, kuten diplomaattien. Tämä johtuu pääasiassa kontekstista ja meppien tehtävistä, jotka eroavat muista kulttuurienvälisistä konteksteista ja tehtävistä.</p>	
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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Unity in diversity

“Unity in diversity” is a slogan of the European Union (EU). It describes the EU’s endeavour to maintain cultural and linguistic diversity at the same time as promoting co-operation among the peoples of Europe. Balancing unity and diversity is obviously a great challenge, as today the EU brings together twenty five European nationalities and twenty different official languages. ([http://europa.eu.int/abc/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/abc/index_en.htm))

As an international governmental organisation (IGO) the European Union is rather unique and as well known interculturalist Geert Hofstede (2001: 433) has put it, “With this internal variety The European Union can be considered a laboratory for international cooperation for other parts of the world.” Hofstede’s statement is from the year 2001 after which 10 new member states have joined the laboratory. The largest enlargement of the EU so far was enacted 1<sup>st</sup> of May in 2004 and it was celebrated as a conclusion to East-West division in Europe. In addition to high political rhetoric concerning the enlargement, many practical issues were discussed by media and also the issues of increasing cultural diversity were noticed. Furthermore, the European elections in June 2004 were constantly on the agenda. In these, the world’s second biggest elections, 732 politicians were elected to represent their people in the European Parliament. (<http://www.europarl.eu.int/presentation/>)

During summer 2004 I was doing an internship at the Information office of the European Parliament in Helsinki which allowed me to follow the atmosphere from inside. Consequently, the idea for this study saw the light of the day. As a student of intercultural communication, the idea of the European Parliament as a multicultural working environment attracted me to explore what are the challenges that the diversity sets for the communication and how do the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) respond to the challenges in order to benefit from the synergy.

Europe is not a unity at the level of culture. There are notable cultural differences among the European countries (Hofstede 2001: 433) and European people still identify themselves in terms of nation states rather than in terms of Europe (Eurobarometer 63, 2005: 111). This cultural diversity can be, of course, considered the richness of Europe,

the European Union, and the European Parliament but inevitably it also challenges the people to communicate interculturally. Bennett argues (1998: 31) that intercultural communication is the only means of balancing unity and diversity in today's multicultural world.

Due to the free movement of labour and immigration from outside Europe, multicultural working environments are becoming more and more common all over Europe and thus, the cultural diversity of Europe is a rather topical issue. The cultural diversity of the European Parliament works as an interesting example of cultural diversity of the entire Europe; in the European Parliament, every twenty five European member country has its own representation. The main actors in this international and intercultural arena are the MEPs who are not only representatives of different states but also representatives of different cultures. The work of the MEPs is of interest in this study as a form of intercultural interaction. This study aims to examine what kind of cultural differences appear within the European Parliament and how they affect communication. More importantly, what it requires from the MEPs to work in such an intercultural environment and what kind of intercultural skills would contribute to positive outcomes in intercultural interactions? That is to say, this is an attempt to find out what is intercultural communication competence in the context of the European Parliament.

## **1.2 Researching intercultural communication competence – again?**

In this study intercultural communication competence (ICC competence) is understood as a response to the challenge set by the cultural diversity. It refers to one's ability to communicate appropriately and effectively in intercultural interaction situations (see e.g. Chen & Starosta 1998: 241). Effectiveness of communication refers to the ability to reach positive outcomes in interaction and appropriateness to the ability to do it with respect of contextual factors (Koester & al. 1993: 6). Intercultural skills are considered the key factor in intercultural competence; possessing certain intercultural skills one can communicate effectively and appropriately with foreign interlocutors and thus, be judged interculturally competent.



In the past 50 years, intercultural communication (ICC) competence has been studied in many fields and from different perspectives. Thus, various conceptions, models and theories have been created. (see e.g. Ruben 1989; Koester et al. 1993; Bradford et al. 2000.) What they have in common is an idea of the ICC competence as a precondition for succeeding in intercultural interactions.

After being the focus of intercultural communication research for many decades ICC competence still attracts many researchers. One might wonder whether there still is place for new inquiries and whether there is anything to explore anymore. The impetus for the ICC competence research arose from practical needs created by increasing intercultural contacts worldwide. This led to theoretical disintegration that was followed by a theoretical turn seeking to integrate the findings of the previous research. (Bradford et al. 2000: 28-29.) According to Witteborn (2003: 187), the theoretical turn as such can be regarded as progress in the ICC competence research. Unfortunately, reconceptualisation of ICC competence resulted also in the dominance of culture-general models that seek to build culture-general models of ICC competence that would help to predict competent behaviour in intercultural settings across situational and cultural contexts (Witteborn 2003: 187). Witteborn argues (2003: 190) that the culture-general approach to ICC competence has separated communication from its context and thus, many aspects of ICC competence have remained unexplored. Quite an opposite, Witteborn (2003: 187) himself suggests that in the future ICC competence research has to obtain more specific and detailed information concerning intercultural communication in different cultural and situational contexts. Furthermore, Hajek and Giles (2003: 943) argue that there is a lack of research that would define concrete behaviours leading to judgment of competence in intercultural interaction. That is, culture-specific and context-specific constructs of ICC competence are needed. A comprehensive attempt of creating a model of ICC competence that would present concrete tools how to behave competently in intercultural settings is “The Profile of Interculturally Effective Person” (Vulpe et al. 2000) which is made use of in this study too. In this study, focusing on the behavioural side of ICC competence implies studying the intercultural skills that would be considered competent in the intercultural context of the European Parliament.

Based on the assumption that ICC competence is both context and culture-bound this study assumes that there are rather many ICC competences than one ICC competence.

One may expect that as long as there are different cultural, organisational and professional contexts there is place for new inquiries. As the ICC competence research in Finland or internationally has not notably touched upon the European Parliament it is justifiable to study the subject from this perspective and expect bringing some new knowledge to the research of ICC competence. Consequently, this study aims to go beyond culture-general definitions of ICC by exploring the phenomenon as it occurs in the context of the European Parliament and is perceived by the Finnish MEPs. More precisely, this can be considered as an attempt to extend the previous research of ICC by relating it into a new context. In addition, this study seeks to produce context-specific and task-related intercultural skills relevant for the MEPs by defining concrete behavioural indicators that would lead to a judgment of competence in specific intercultural interactions within the EP.

There are, of course, many previous attempts to develop context-specific models of ICC competence. Researchers have studied the ICC competence of different professionals, such as business practitioners (e.g. Holden 2002), health care professionals (e.g. Witte & Morrison 1995), teachers (e.g. Banks 1994), technical advisors (e.g. Kealey 1996), Peace Corps (e.g. Harris 1975), tour guides (e.g. Leclerc & Martin 2004), international students (e.g. Collier, Ribeau & Hecht 1986). Furthermore, a culture-specific approach has generated empirical research conducted in a given cultural context such as the research examining the Finnish communicating with Chinese (e.g. Salo-Lee 1994) or Americans communicating with Egyptians (e.g. Kealey 1996). Perhaps most studies have been conducted in business contexts where the importance of ICC competence has been widely recognised. That is, in order to be successful in international business the cultural differences need to be recognised. Indeed, ignoring them may lead to remarkable financial losses. (see e.g. Varner & Beamer 2005.)

Even though the significance of ICC competence in political context is not that evident it may be even more devastating. Being a Member of the European Parliament (MEP) implies influencing indirectly on the life of 455 million European citizens. Therefore it is certainly not insignificant how the MEPs interact and communicate with each other. In fact, politicians and diplomats are often mentioned as a group of professionals benefiting from intercultural skills (see e.g. Hammer 1989). To date, however, ICC competence research has not generated many empirical studies about ICC competence

in the context of politics or diplomacy even though the tasks of a politician or diplomat are not directly equated with any of the above mentioned professions. It seems that the existing models of the ICC competence have taken to be applicable to the work of politicians as well. In her pro gradu thesis about the features of diplomatic communication Salo (2004) notices the lack of the research on diplomacy from the perspective of communication research, and interpersonal communication research in particular. One interculturalist who has paid some attention to diplomats is Gudykunst (1990) who believes that his theory on uncertainty avoidance is applicable to the context of diplomacy as behind the state relationships there are individuals and thus, interpersonal communication. Being a diplomat, however, differs from being a politician to some extent which encourages studying the ICC competence of the politicians on its own subject.

This study relies on the assumption that the EP is not any multicultural working environment and being an MEP is not any profession. There are some special characteristics both in the context of the EP and in the work of the MEPs that raise a question of whether the current ICC competence models, as such, are applicable in describing ICC competence in this context and within this type of intercultural contact. MEPs are special group of expatriates who hold a five year post in the EP. For most of the MEPs this implies working far away from their home country. Only a few of them, however, really settle down in the host country, Brussels, but travel to their home country on weekly basis. Many of them do not know anything of or anyone from the host country but only live within the multinational European community. (Blomgren 2003: 217.) In their work place there is no host culture but parallel national cultures. Additionally, the European Parliament itself is unique and exceptional in many ways too. The representatives are grouped according to their political affiliation - not according to their nationality. They may communicate in their mother tongue - not by using a lingua franca. They are elected by the citizens of the member countries - not nominated by the state or official. (see e.g. Corbett et al. 2003.) All in all, the work of an MEP and the context of the European Parliament are so complex and unique that they are certainly worth of studying on their own. Taking the European Parliament and the MEPs into the focus of the study is the only way of identifying truly context-specific and task-related intercultural skills that would be of help in the intercultural work of the MEPs.

Besides generating new theoretical insights on the ICC competence of the MEPs there are some more practical goals behind this study too. In order to benefit from the European cooperation intercultural dialogue needs to be attained and communication plays an important role in this. By studying the ICC competence needed in the European Parliament it is possible to generate awareness of the cultural differences and their impact on communication among the MEPs and the peoples of Europe. The MEPs who are participating in communication can make use of the results in defining, assessing and developing their own professionalism. Furthermore, the study would be worth a lot to the successors of the current Finnish MEPs when adapting to the new intercultural working environment of the European Parliament. Finally, it is the European people who define, through elections, who are the best to work as MEPs. The European Parliament and the MEPs have, however, remained distant and even mysterious to the Finnish electorate. This has been noticed in the European elections, for example, where the voting activity has remained rather low. In 2004 the turnout of the European elections in Finland was 41,1 per cent which is below the EU average. (<http://www.europarl.fi/ep/ShowPage.do?id=123>). How can the Finnish people elect the right candidates for the post when they are not familiar with the nature of the MEPs' work? Kemiläinen has studied in her pro gradu thesis (1997) what the Finnish electorate expects from the MEPs and found that the most important criteria for them are directness in communication, language skills, good education and willingness to explore new things (Kemiläinen 1998: 144). How do these criteria correspond with the skills that the MEPs themselves consider important? Based on their experiences, this study aims to reveal some additional information about the international side of the MEPs work and about the communication challenges faced by them. Thus, the results might not only deepen the understanding of the work of the MEPs but also offer some more criteria for choosing and evaluating candidates in the elections.

### **1.3 Among other studies related to the European Parliament**

Considering the topic that touches both communication and politics the previous studies have to be reviewed in two different fields: communication research and political research. As branches of the social sciences they have some common research interests, such as mass communication and rhetoric. Political research has not, however, been so interested in interpersonal issues, which in turn has not generated so much research on

communication among politicians. Furthermore, it seems that interpersonal communication research concerning politics has been mostly focused on studying rhetoric. For some reason, intercultural communication research has not been so interested in politicians either.

The European Union and its many institutions, of course, attract researchers from all over Europe. According to Raunio (1996: 23), the studies related to the European Parliament can be roughly divided in five categories. First, there are some general studies about the Parliament (e.g. Corbett et al. 2003). Second, there are studies that deal with the EP's role within the EU (e.g. Judge 1993). Third, the European elections have been studied by many scholars (e.g. Smith 1995b). Fourth, many studies have examined the transnational parties of the EP (e.g. Hix 1996). The fifth category is the studies related to the individual MEPs (e.g. Bowler & Farrel 1992a) and party groups in the EP (e.g. Wiberg & Raunio 1997). This study clearly falls into the fifth category because its subject is the MEPs themselves. The focus is, however, somewhat different from the other studies related to the MEPs, which have mostly concentrated on the voting behaviour of the MEPs (e.g. Hix 2001, Raunio 1996).

Since Finland became a member of the EU in 1995 the emergence of studies related to the European Union has been remarkable in Finland too. Nevertheless, it can be noticed that most of them have dealt with EU-politics whereas a notably smaller amount of studies have concerned the politicians (MEPs) themselves. Studies about European identity (e.g. Rytisalo 2003; Valentini 2005), European elections (e.g. Martikainen & Pekonen 1999), political groups of the European Parliament (e.g. Raunio 1996), and simultaneous interpretation (Vuorikoski 2004), for instance, have been conducted. These are, of course, closely related to the MEPs who are not, however, the main interest of these inquiries. In the social science department of the University of Jyväskylä there is one pro gradu thesis (Olin & Vaisto 1998) made on the authority of the Finnish female MEPs in the European Parliament. Another pro gradu thesis (Isotalus 2003) concerning the public relations of the Finnish MEPs has been conducted in the Department of Communication at the University of Jyväskylä. Even though the European Parliament as a context and the work of the MEPs are considered highly multicultural and multilingual it has not produced any remarkable intercultural studies.

In addition to academic research, there exist many reviews, journals and books written by the MEPs themselves. Offering an inside picture of the European Parliament they have been of great use as background information in this study. A long-term MEP Richard Corbett (2003) has published a very comprehensive book about the European Parliament with a focus on the work of the MEPs. From the previous and current Finnish MEPs at least Alexander Stubb (2005), Eija-Riitta Korhola (2002), Pertti Paasio (2000), Kirsi Piha (1999) and Esko Seppänen (1997) have published journals dealing with their work as MEPs. Many of the current MEPs also write on-line diaries which provide some further background information of their rhythm of life.

This study takes the MEPs into the focus of the research by considering them as a group of professionals who work in an international and intercultural context where communication is one of the key factors. The perspective is somewhat different from other studies related to the MEPs. Making use of ICC competence theories makes it possible to study the work of the politicians at the interpersonal level. Accordingly, this study aims to go beyond the research on EU-politics and institutions by not studying the policy-making itself but the people behind it, the MEPs.

#### **1.4 Research setting and research questions**

The main purpose of this study is to extend the findings of ICC competence research into a political context; to the context of European Parliament. This study aims to describe and define what intercultural skills are needed in this multicultural working environment in order to be perceived as interculturally competent. That is, the intention is to integrate intercultural skills with the context of the EP and the tasks of the MEPs – to identify context-specific and task-related intercultural skills. Thus, this study endeavours to find out what constitutes intercultural communication competence for them.

The perspective of this study is Finnish since intercultural communication situations are examined from the point of view of the Finnish MEPs. Their experiences of the intercultural context, cultural differences, and perceptions of appropriate and effective communication behaviour in intercultural communication situations are examined in order to explore the relevant intercultural skills for the MEPs.

The ICC competence is studied in the respect of intercultural communication situations that the MEPs encounter in their work. Consequently, the context of communication is somewhat emphasised. The first set of research questions examines the European Parliament as an intercultural working environment and aims to map the situational and relational context of the intercultural interaction:

1. What is the nature of intercultural interaction within the EP?

- What kind of intercultural communication situations do the tasks of the MEPs include?
- How are the relationships between the MEPs coming from different cultures?

Since cultural differences are expected to affect communication special attention is given to those interaction situations where the cultural differences from a Finnish point of view appear. In order to find out which communication situations are most influenced by cultural diversity in their experience, and how, the second set of research questions is:

2. What are the most significant cultural differences appearing in communication between the MEPs?

- In which communication situations do the biggest cultural differences appear?
- How do the cultural differences affect communication?

In order to describe ICC competence in the context of the EP it is not enough, however, to only examine the experiences of intercultural interactions and cultural differences but also to understand what are the MEPs' perceptions of them. Therefore, the third research question aims to capture the Finnish MEPs' perceptions about competent communication in those intercultural situations that are most influenced by cultural differences and to find out what are the best practices to manage those situations.

3. What are the Finnish MEPs' perceptions of appropriate and effective communication in the intercultural communication situations?

- What are the best practices to manage the communication situations that are most influenced by cultural differences?
- How do the Finnish communication patterns fit into the criteria of appropriate and effective communication behaviour in those situations?

On the grounds of the information about the intercultural working context of the MEPs, Finnish MEPs' experiences of cultural differences in communication and perceptions of appropriateness and effectiveness in communication the study aims to describe the intercultural skills relevant to MEPs and would lead to the judgment of ICC competence in this particular context.

### **1.5 Structure of the study**

The first chapter endeavoured indicating the topicality of the subject as well as the motivation for studying the subject. Previous studies were shortly presented in order to show the need of the research of ICC competence in the context of the EP. Additionally, the research setting was established and the research questions articulated.

The second chapter first addresses the concept of culture and its impact on communication. It communicates how culture is understood in this study and presents more precisely national, European and political culture. This chapter also presents the challenges that cultural diversity sets for communication and for the Finnish communicators in particular. The final part of the third chapter examines what intercultural communication implies for political language in terms of parliamentary language and diplomatic communication.

The primary theoretical framework of the study is established in the third chapter. Different theoretical perspectives to study ICC competence are contrasted and compared. Based on the previous theoretical contemplation the theoretical assumptions that guide this study are declared.

The fourth chapter of the study moves presenting the macro-context of the study. It explains the fundamentals of the EU and its institutions with emphasis on the European Parliament. Furthermore, cultural and linguistic diversity of the European Parliament is discussed. The focus is on the MEPs and their work.



The fifth chapter introduces the methodology used in the study. It communicates the research design, the method of collecting data, the participants of the study and the process of analysing the data.

The sixth chapter opens the empirical part of the study by presenting the main results of the study. The research questions concerning the situational and relations context of intercultural communication, cultural differences and appropriateness and effectiveness of communication are answered with the help of empirical data. In order to define the intercultural skills needed by the MEPs and describe the ICC competence for the Finnish MEPs the seventh chapter compiles together the results.

The final chapter discusses the findings of the study in relation to the previous studies about ICC competence as well as evaluates the success of the research process and the exploitability of the results. Additionally, some ideas for the future studies are pointed out.

## **2 CULTURE, COMMUNICATION AND POLITICAL LANGUAGE**

### **2.1 The impact of culture**

According to Samovar and Porter (2003: 7), “culture and communication work in tandem”. That is, we cannot draw a line between culture and communication but they are inseparable. The description follows the utterance by Edward T. Hall (1959: 186) who stated in 1959 that, “culture is communication and communication is culture.” Hall’s statement established the relationship between culture and communication and is often mentioned as opening of intercultural communication research. (see e.g. Chen & Starosta 1998.) It demonstrates the reciprocal relationship of culture and communication; culture reflects communication and communication is shaped by culture.

Consequently, the concept of culture is obviously at the heart of intercultural communication research. Defining culture, however, is a challenging task because of the complexity and ambiguity of the concept. The way how culture is understood by the researcher determines the focus of inquiry in intercultural communication research. Therefore, the concept of culture is discussed next.

First, it should be noticed that the concept of culture is twofold. Culture is commonly used to refer to civilisation or refinement by meaning arts and education. Intercultural communication research is not, however, interested in culture only in this sense. Culture, as it is understood in intercultural communication research, stems from cultural anthropologists who consider culture as patterns of thinking, feeling and acting. (Hofstede 1997: 5.) There are three characteristics of culture upon which anthropologists have agreed. First, they suppose that, culture is learned - not inherited. Second, they believe that, culture consists of many aspects which are intertwined so that any change in one aspect affects another. Third, they consider culture as collective phenomenon that bounds a group of people together and distinguishes them from other groups. (Hall 1989: 16.)

Understanding culture as a pervasive phenomenon implies that everything what people think, feel, and do is touched by culture. A well-known modern definition of culture, that captures the pervasive nature of culture, is the one created by Geert Hofstede (1980), which suggests an analogy with computers as a means of understanding culture. According to this analogy, culture is the “software of the mind” that is crucial for the functioning of the hardware and thus, the whole system. Installation of the software happens through the social environments people belong to. After installation the patterns of thinking, feeling and acting guide the behaviour of the people. This programming of the mind is shared with the other people who have acquired it from the same social environment. Thus, having common patterns of thinking, feeling and acting one group of people may distinguish from another. (Hofstede 1997: 3-5.) Hofstede (1997: 35) defines culture as “the collective programming of mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another.”

By following Hofstede’s definition Chen and Starosta (1998: 26) have constructed their own definition. According to that, culture is “A negotiated set of shared symbolic systems that guide individuals’ behaviours and incline them to function as a group”. In their definition Chen and Starosta want to emphasise the relationship between culture and communication. Similarly, Bennett (1998: 3) defines culture as “the learned and shared patterns of beliefs, behaviours, and values of groups of interacting people”. The definition underlines that culture requires interaction among the members of the culture.

Another holistic view of culture is expressed by Samovar and Porter (2003: 14) who consider culture as complete patterns of living. They define culture as “deposit of knowledge, experiences, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, social hierarchies, religions, notions of time, roles, spatial relationships, concepts of the universe and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving.” (ibid.) Samovar’s and Porter’s definition goes into detail and lists the possible aspects of life where culture is present at. It considers culture to develop in the course of generations which relates culture to common history. Furthermore, it supposes that culture is acquired through an enculturation process – not inherited.

The above-mentioned definitions of culture form the basis for understanding culture in this study which in short could be stated as follows: *Culture resides in the social environment people live in and interact with each other. In the course of time it influences their thinking, feeling and acting and thus, distinguishes them from the people influenced by another social environment.*

As people are involved in several social environments and enculturation processes during their lifetime also the programs of thinking, feeling and acting are multiple. Thus, culture can be divided into several subcultures which, however, are intertwined (Chen & Starosta 1998: 26). This implies that when studying culture one needs to decide at which level culture is understood. Hofstede (1997: 10) mentions national, regional, ethnic, religious, linguistic, gender, generation, social class and organisational level as examples of the layers at which the mental programs may develop and hence, also cultural differences appear. The three levels of culture relevant to this study will be discussed next.

### **2.1.1 National culture**

Culture is often understood as national culture that is common to the people living in the same country. National cultures are closely related to arbitrary borders that have bound people together. The golden era of the nation states was in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when many European states were founded. Nation states are political units which are based on the idea that every nation should have its own state. (Hofstede 1997: 12.) In Europe the nation states were mainly formed on the grounds of language and ethnicity (Helander 1991: 21). Nation states have built up an array of national institutions such as, a national education system, a national political system and a national army. The citizens of a nation state are mentally programmed through these institutions and thus their culture can be seen as highly influenced by their home country. (Hofstede 1997: 12.) Throughout this study culture is mainly understood at the national level, meaning that people who live in the same country have a common culture. Considering culture as a national construct makes it possible to speak about the Finnish culture that is common to people living in Finland, for instance.

Even though it is very common to classify people into national groups, Hofstede (1997: 12) warns of studying cultural differences only at the national level as it might produce generalisations of the people living in a certain country. That is, we cannot expect that all the Finnish are the same or speak about “a typical Finn”. It is important to remember that at the same time when belonging to a national culture people are members of many other cultural groups too. Being aware of the danger of generalisation this study employs the construct of national culture for two reasons. First, the EU is composed of European nation states, which implies that in practice many procedures within the EU are based on national categorisation. For example, each member country has a certain number of representatives in the EP and the MEPs are representatives of the peoples in their home countries. Additionally, the EU is all about cooperation between nation states that, according to Hofstede (1997: 13), is one argument for studying the culture at the national level. Second, the phenomenon of intercultural communication is studied from the perspective of the Finnish MEPs. Finnish national culture is the level of culture that is common to all the Finnish MEPs and distinguishes them from the other MEPs. Hofstede (1997: 13) notices that the fact that data is often categorised in compliance with nationality is one reason for studying cultural differences in national terms.

Hofstede (1980, 1991, 2001) has developed dimensions of cultural variability that can be used for studying cultural differences among national cultures. The aspects of national culture can be measured and compared in five dimensions: low-high power distance, collectivism vs. individualism, femininity vs. masculinity, and low-high uncertainty avoidance, long-term vs. short term orientation (Hofstede 2001: 28). Power distance refers to unequal distribution of power and tells to what extent the members of the society accept it (Hofstede 2001: 83). Collectivism-individualism dimension describes “the relationship between the individual and collectivity” (Hofstede 2001: 209); it explains who’s goals, individuals or collectivity’s, take precedence in the society. Femininity-masculinity dimension describes how gender roles are distributed within a society; whether they overlap (femininity) or are clearly distinguished (masculinity) (Hofstede 2001: 297). Uncertainty avoidance tells how the societies have adapted to and handle with uncertainty of human life (Hofstede 2001: 146). The fifth dimension, long-term vs. short term orientation, which was found later on, describes countries’ tendency to be more future or past oriented (Hofstede 2001: 359). This dimension is not, however, so relevant in this case as the European cultures are

considered to fall pretty much into the same cluster compared to some Asian national cultures (Hofstede 2001: 355).

Through empirical study Hofstede found that one end of each dimension tends to dominate in cultures. Finland, for instance, scores low in power distance dimension and averagely in uncertainty avoidance dimension, and is clearly more individualistic than collectivistic and more towards femininity than masculinity dimension. (Hofstede 2001: 87, 151, 215, 286.) It can be noticed the scores in cultural dimensions differ significantly among the European countries as well. Whereas Finland scores low in power distance (33), France (68), Portugal (63) and Greece (60) score rather high, for instance. Hofstede's study did not, however, cover all the European countries and therefore, full comparisons among the European Union member countries cannot be conducted.

### **2.1.2 European culture(s)**

European culture is a controversial concept that has appeared in the EU discourse just recently. It is related to the European Union identity politics that was launched in the mid-1980s to promote greater cohesion across the national borders. (Hansen 2000: 95-99.) According to Hansen (2000: 95) European identity can be thought to be very different from the national identities, as it is inclusive rather than exclusive. It is not based on antagonist understanding of difference but instead allows the differences of language, ethnicity and religion. National and regional differences are considered positive and relevant instances of the European identity. Thus, national and European identities are not seen as opposite but parallel identity categories that may coexist. (Hansen 2000: 95-99.)

Identity formation is normally strictly related to nationality and culture (e.g. Shore 2001; Valentini 2005: 182). According to Shore (2001), common culture that would form the base of common collective identity is exactly what the EU lacks. Shared language, history, memory and religion which are ingredients of national identity are factors that instead of uniting Europeans divide them. (Shore 2001.) Culture cannot be constructed out of nothing but it develops only with time. Furthermore, people need to identify with the culture in order that culture becomes vivid. Accordingly, there is no

European culture if Europeans do not see themselves as part of the EU. The latest Eurobarometer 63 (2005: 111) showed that the majority of EU citizens do not believe in European identity but rather identify with nation states. Shore (2001) pinpoints, however, that a sense of European is stronger among some political, administrative and business elites. Considering the MEPs as European political elite would hereby predict that the MEPs do not perceive significant cultural differences between nationalities as they belong to the same cultural group of Europeans. Even if the European identity exists, it does not make the fact that people in Europe communicate differently disappear.

McDonald (2000: 62-63) has conducted ethnographic research about identity and stereotypes in the European commission and found that in spite of the emerging idea of European identity cultural stereotypes do occur. Even though the European civil servants speak about “esprit européen” and “European identity” whenever incongruence appears at the level of everyday life it is interpreted in terms of nationality. McDonald (2000: 66-67) found the North-South dimension as one of the most frequently used frameworks that is used for explaining conceptual and practical differences in the work place. It is interesting to see whether the North-South dimension shows in the EP too – especially because the intercultural communication is studied from the Northern (Finnish) perspective.

Common culture and identity cannot be forced on Europeans. Hansen (2000: 99) points out that, the cultural policy of the Union is not based on the idea of melting pot but is rather shaped by diversity as the slogan “Unity in diversity” suggests. The common heritage, way of life and history are thought to be common and create affinity whereas many cultural differences exist at the national and regional level. (Hansen 2000: 99.) Therefore, European culture can be seen as a wider category of culture that comprises a wide array of subcultures, that is European national cultures.

### **2.1.3 Political culture**

Nousiainen (1998: 19) defines political culture as the beliefs, attitudes and evaluations that deal with politics, state and one’s position within them. Political culture is actually best defined as “political climate” rather than concrete political behaviour. Like other

layers of culture, political culture is also shaped by stability, because the changes in values and attitudes happen only relatively slowly. Political culture always derives from collective history. Political culture in Finland is shaped by six features: the Nordic idea of autonomy, Lutheran church, capitalism, nationalism, and public authority and bureaucracy. (Nousiainen 1998: 19.)

Political differences are one factor that divides Europe. According to Hix (1999: 140-141), political differences appear between large vs. small populations, long vs. short democratic traditions, social democratic vs. conservative governing traditions, majoritarian vs. consensual, and corporatists vs. pluralists. Other factors of culture, such as language and culture, affect political culture as well. The impact of religion shows in the differences of political culture between protestant and catholic cultural areas, for instance. Furthermore, the socio-economic structure of the state has an influence on the way the citizens and political elite think about politics. Socio-economic structure sometimes combines certain geographical areas to the extent that we speak about Northern countries and Mediterranean countries. (Helander 1991: 30.)

According to Helander (1991: 30), the concept of political culture can be used for explaining political behaviour and decision making. He remarks that, political culture in Belgium, in the Netherlands and in the Nordic countries is rather consensus seeking than characterised by conflicts and confrontation. (Helander 1991: 32). Hofstede (2001: 431) explains the difference in terms of culture. He argues that adversarial political discourse is typical for masculine cultures whereas in the feminine cultures it is more consensus-oriented. Differences in political culture might also occur in the way that the political decisions are justified. French political culture is strongly shaped by political ideologies and therefore, the political decisions are often justified in terms of principles and ideas. On the contrary, British political culture is considered to be very pragmatic. (Helander 1991: 30-33.)

The differences in political culture are emphasised especially by the supporters of divergence models. According to divergence models, the differences in state institutions, party systems, election systems and public sector inevitably lead to different political climates. (Lane 1996: 4.) The development of the European integration, however, is thought to lead to harmonisation of the political culture at the European level. (Helander 1991: 30, Lane 1996: 7.) The convergence models underline



the many similarities of the European states. Lane (1996: 5.) mentions parliamentarism, multi-party system, coalition governments and welfare states as the rallying points of the European states.

The European Parliament is a political arena that brings together politicians from different political traditions. Hence, it is a context where divergence or convergence of European political cultures can be studied. Are the political cultures of the EU-member countries manifested in the procedures of the EP? If they are, where do the differences show and what is their impact on communication? If not, is there a political culture of the EP? The possible differences at the level of political culture and their impact on communication are taken into consideration in the present study.

## **2.2 Intercultural interaction and verbal communication**

The tight bond between culture and communication facilitates our daily communication, because culture works as a framework in which the communication behaviour is interpreted. Its values, norms and beliefs determine interaction and communication in different situations. (Lustig & Koester 2003: 292-294.) However, the nexus of culture and communication implies that, people in different cultures communicate differently. They have different styles of interacting and preferred strategies of communicating (Kim 1993: 132).

Communication becomes intercultural when the participants come from at least two different cultures (Chen and Starosta 1998: 30). Collier (1989: 296), who considers culture as identification states, that in intercultural interactions people identify themselves as having different cultural identities. According to Kim (1991: 266), viewing each other as having different cultural identities is what distinguishes intercultural communication from intracultural. In intercultural interaction the interlocutors perceive each others rather as representatives of cultural groups than as individuals. (Kim 1991: 266.)

In intercultural encounters interactants have different expectations and interpretations about people's behaviour and consequently, communication becomes more unpredictable and problematic (Lustig & Koester 2003: 294). The possibility of

miscommunication and disagreement increases due to the different values, attitudes and beliefs deriving from culture (Chen & Starosta 1998: 28). Cultural differences are often described with a picture of an iceberg that demonstrates how some differences are more observable than others which lay underneath the surface. The most visible differences occur in food, language, clothing and manners and the invisible include such things as communication style, values, norms and beliefs. (see e.g. Salo-Lee 1996: 7-8). In this study, the major interest is communication and thus, especially the differences that lay underneath the surface.

One interest of intercultural communication research is explaining the cultural differences in communication. Individualism-collectivism is the broadest dimension of cultural variability that is often used for studying cultural differences in behaviour (see e.g. Gudykunst 1992: 44). Moreover, Hall's (1976) low and high-context scheme provides a more specific tool of explaining the differences in communication process. (Gudykunst 1992: 44). In high-context cultures the information resides in the context or the person and therefore, it is not explicitly communicated verbally. Conversely, in low-context cultures the information is placed in the explicit message (Hall 1976: 70, 76). According to Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988: 44), the individualistic cultures can be equated with low-context cultures and collectivistic cultures with high-context cultures.

Individualism-collectivism dimensions and low and high-context scheme are often used for explaining the differences in communication styles, for instance, that according to Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey vary in direct-indirect, elaborate-succinct, personal-contextual, instrumental-affective dimensions (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey 1988: 100.) According to Salo-Lee (1996: 44), differences in communication styles are normally noticed only when communicating interculturally when they might create misunderstandings which cannot be explained.

According to Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988: 104), direct-indirect style dimension that describes how explicitly the speakers express their intentions is probably the most evident aspect where cultural differences appear. Direct communicators state their true intentions whereas the indirect communicators have a tendency to use more concealed strategies of expressing their views. Those employing the direct style behave according to the norm of honesty stemming from individualistic values. On the contrary, the

communicators of collectivistic cultures tend to employ communication style that serves group harmony and group conformity. (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey 1988: 100-102.)

The second dimension of verbal communication where cultural differences may occur is elaborate-succinct style dimension. According to Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988: 108), elaborate style of communication that employs elaborate words and exaggerated speech is typical to speakers in moderate uncertainty avoidance, high-context cultures. On the contrary, representatives of high uncertainty avoidance and high-context cultures employ succinct style that makes use of silence and understatements. (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey 1988: 105-108.)

The third dimension of communication styles is personal-contextual that shows in the use of either individual-centered or role-centered language. Personal style reflects low-power distance of culture and low-contextuality which shows in informal ways of interacting. Contextual style characterises high-power distance and high-context cultures which value more formal codes of interaction. (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey 1988: 109-112.) Whether the communicators emphasise the communication process or the goal stems from the differences in communication styles as well. An instrumental communication style is characteristics of the people in individualistic, low-context cultures and affective style of the people in collectivistic, high-context cultures. (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey 1988: 112-114.)

It is indisputable that communication in the EP is very intercultural. Being aware that cultures vary it becomes interesting to discuss how the cultural differences express themselves in interaction between MEPs. How do they show at the level of national culture and political culture which are of interest in this study? How do they show in the verbal communication styles? Putting it into Hofstede's (1980, 1991, 2001) words, what are the "consequences of culture"?

### **2.2.1 Finnish communication patterns**

As this study explores intercultural encounters in the EP from the Finnish perspective it is relevant to look at more closely Finnish communication patterns that reflect Finnish

cultural values, norms and beliefs. According to Carbaugh (1995: 55), Finnish rules for speaking can be summarised as follows:

- “1) Don’t state the obvious;
- 2) If speaking, say something worthy of everyone’s attention;
- 3) Don’t invoke topics or themes that are contentious or conflictual (or more positively, keep present relations on harmonious ground);
- 4) Be personally committed to or invested in what you say;
- 5) What you say properly – the unobvious, socially worthwhile, noncontentious, personally involving themes – forms a basis for subsequent interactions.” (Carbaugh 1995: 55.)

Additionally, Sajavaara and Lehtonen (1997: 276) state that in a Finnish conversation there is a strict role divide between the speaker and a listener; the speaker should not be interrupted or questioned, and the listener remains silent. According to Finnish norms, a speaker who expresses him/herself clearly, briefly and efficiently is most valued (Sajavaara & Lehtonen 1997: 271).

Finnish communication style stems, of course, from the cultural values. According to Salo-Lee (1996: 38) Finnish culture can be categorised to individualistic cultures. One of the most valued things in the Finnish culture is honesty that drives the Finnish people choosing a rather direct style of communicating. In elaborate-succinct dimension the Finnish are closer to succinct style, in personal-contextual dimension towards personal extreme and in instrumental-affective dimension towards instrumental extreme. (Salo-Lee 1996: 37-41)

### **2.2.2 Finns as intercultural communicators**

Finnish communication patterns are often regarded as peculiar both by the representatives of other cultures and by the Finns themselves. The most persistent stereotype is the Finnish silence that probably derives from the norm of remaining silent when one does not have anything to say. (Sajavaara & Lehtonen 1997: 270). According to Sajavaara and Lehtonen (1997: 270), this might irritate the central and

southern Europeans who normally evaluate their interlocutors in terms of speaking skills.

In addition to silence, some other characteristics of Finnish communication culture may be considered strange by the foreign interlocutors. It has to be emphasised, that differences per se cannot be evaluated positively or negatively even though Finns themselves often think that their way of communicating is a handicap that is better to get rid of (Sajavaara & Lehtonen 1997: 277). Whether some behaviour is considered to be positive or negative depends on the cultural background of the interlocutor. As Salo-Lee (1996: 14) points out, the strengths and the weaknesses of Finnish communication behaviour can be defined only in terms of the interlocutor and the context of communication. Directness is one characteristics of Finnish communication culture that might be interpreted very differently across cultures. Some may appreciate it whereas others might regard it as impoliteness, face-threatening and simple (Salo-Lee 1996: 39). According to Sajavaara and Lehtonen (1997: 276), another feature of Finnish communicators that might be problematic in intercultural contexts is passivity and non-participation. In international work places the Finns do not often initiate in conversations.

Small talk is often regarded as one of the biggest handicaps of the Finns in intercultural interaction and many believe that it is totally missing from the Finnish repertoire (Salo-Lee 1996: 46). Salo-Lee (1996: 46) pinpoints, however, that the problems in small talk cannot be explained by the lack of small talk as it occurs in intracultural communication. Rather, it is the strategies and purposes of small talk that vary across cultures. Finnish communicators use more negative politeness strategies, such as respecting privacy and keeping distance, which might be interpreted as impoliteness by the those using positive politeness strategies. (Salo-Lee 1996: 54.)

Even though the Finnish communicator behaviours can be evaluated very differently depending on the interlocutor, according to Lehtonen (1994: 54), there are certain behaviours that are often mentioned as being either strengths or weaknesses by the foreign interlocutor. The positive evaluations of the Finnish interlocutor can be summarised: honest, trustworthy, and hospitable. The negative evaluations include such characteristics as: difficulties in getting into contact and opening a conversation, language skills and being reserved. (Lehtonen 1994: 54.)

## 2.3 Political language

### 2.3.1 The language of parliament

Politics is always conducted through communication. Accordingly, being a politician involves numbers of communicative actions, such as seeking consensus, elaborating policy, mediating in conflicts, persuading, representing interests and opposing others. (Wodak 2004: 381; Bayley 2004: 8.) Parliaments are probably the most evident example of the role of communication in political settings as all the institutional activities of the parliament deal with talk. This applies to the European Parliament too. As a former MEP, Pertti Paasio (2000: 55), write in his book about his career as an MEP: ”Euroopan parlamentti on monenlaisen puhumisen paikka...Puhuminen on edustajan tärkein työväline.” (“The European Parliament is a place for various ways of talking...Speaking is the most important tool of the representative”, translated by KL)

Parliamentary discourse is the most formal variety of political language. However, the way it is expressed in different parliamentary contexts varies. Parliamentary talk may be very formal and conventional in the plenary session whereas the talk taking place in the corridors may be more informal. Furthermore, compared with the talk in the plenary session talk in the committees may be more cooperative. (Bayley 2004: 1.) According to Vuorikoski (2004: 80), in the EP the plenary sessions as well as the committee meetings are very much focused on draft legislation and other written documents due to which the discourse is dominated by codes, terms and concepts.

Being determined by traditions, rules and regulations parliamentary discourse can be described as rule-bound. (Bayley 2004: 13-15.) According to Bayley (2004: 13), the distinctive characteristics of parliamentary discourse are those such as, argumentative vocabulary, direct and indirect quotation, explicit expression of belief and opinion, complex structure of sentences, for instance. Nevertheless, the way these features are expressed varies across cultural contexts as the parliaments are elected, constructed and structured differently depending on the country. Bayley (2004: 14) mentions rules of politeness, tolerance of aggressive linguistic behaviour, usage of abstract and concrete language, and concepts of irony and humour as examples of features where cross-cultural variation appears.

Opposing others is one communicative action of political discourse (see Wodak 2004) that is of interest in this study as the cultural variation in confrontation has been widely recognised. The style of confronting is intertwined with one's communication style. The representatives of indirect communication style tend to protect their own and other's faces via indirect confrontation, while the representatives of the direct communication style openly state their differing view (Bennett 1998: 21-22, see also Lustig & Koester 2003: 127.) The differences stem, again, from cultural values. In the low-context cultures open confrontation of ideas is valued while in high-context cultures they are rather avoided (see e.g. Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey 1988: 156). Hofstede (2001: 321) argues, for instance, that political discourse in Britain and Germany is adversarial because they are masculine cultures. On the contrary, in those countries whose culture is more feminine, like Nordic countries, the political discourse is rather gentle. (Hofstede 2001: 321.)

Additionally, persuasion, which is one of the fundamental communicative actions in which politicians engage (see e.g. Wodak 2004), varies in cultural terms. Representatives of different cultures employ different persuasive strategies that derive from their cultural patterns of thought (Gudykunst & Kim 1992: 161). Lustig and Koester (2003: 249) call the way people state their evidence, assumptions and claims when seeking to persuade the culture's persuasive style. Johnstone (cited in Lustig & Koester 2003: 250-251) differentiates three persuasive styles of which one is normally dominant in a culture: the quasilogical, presentational, and analogical. Quasilogical style follows a formal logic and is the preferred style of many Western cultures. Presentational style makes use of emotional aspects and analogical style of analogy, story, or a parable. It is apparent that representatives of different persuasive styles might encounter problems when seeking to persuade each others. Varner and Beamer (2005: 153) point out that persuasion stems from emotions. Accordingly, a message that is in form of facts might feel cold and impersonal, and thus, unpersuasive from a perspective of cultures that prefer emotional involvement. Furthermore, it has been found that persuasive styles vary along individualism-collectivism dimension. In collectivistic cultures people tend to value more socially appropriate persuasion strategies than people in individualistic cultures. (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey 1988: 153.)

Given, that parliamentary discourse is rule bound and communicative actions of political discourse vary across cultures, becoming a member of the parliament one needs to acquire the rules of communication behaviour (Bayley: 2004: 15). In the EP there are Rules of Procedure which regulate the official and bureaucratic issues within the EP. Raunio (1996: 7) remarks, however, that the individual MEPs follow some un-established collective actions. It raises a question, what are the traditions and rules that determine communication behaviour in the European Parliament, if indeed there are any? How are they acquired and followed? Examining these questions is of interest in this study, because there are numerous parallel systems of rules brought to the European Parliament by the MEPs from twenty five national parliaments. It raises a further question: How one's own cultural background can be noticed in the communicative actions?

### **2.3.2 Diplomatic communication**

In professional terms diplomats and politicians are close to each other. Especially the communicative actions they engage in are rather similar. Bayley (2004: 7) considers the language of parliament and the language of diplomacy as sub-genres of political language. Therefore, it is relevant to discuss some characteristics of diplomatic communication in this case too.

According to Solomon (1984: 21), one feature that is somewhat emphasised in diplomatic communication is the phatic function of communication. It refers to the aim of establishing, prolonging or discontinuing communication that is somewhat exaggerated in diplomatic communication. Another characteristic of diplomatic communication is the international dimension that is always present at diplomatic encounters and influences first and foremost on communication. According to Fischer (1989: 407), diplomacy is an "exercise in intercultural communication". On the contrary, Singer (1987: 225, 232) believes that as a form interelite international communication, the communication among diplomats and among politicians is less intercultural because they might have a common group culture that forms a common ground for communication. Sometimes it is argued that people who share the same profession form a discourse community which facilitates the interaction and communication between them (Pan et al. 2002: 11). Furthermore, Hofstede (2001: 433)



argues that cultural differences do not generate so many problems in political decision making because in the political contexts the appearing disagreements are solved through negotiation. Nevertheless, it is probably a misconception to suppose that cultural differences would not have any influence on communication in negotiation situations. On the contrary, it has been recognised that the negotiation styles are strongly culture bound (see e.g. Holden 2002; Varner & Beamer 2005). In addition to negotiations, in professional contexts the communicative misunderstandings appear in body language, use of space, time orientation, topic vs. relationship orientation, talking vs. silence, formality vs. informality, for instance (Pan et al. 2002: 11). Another argument against the interelite communication among the MEPs is that being elected by the citizens of the country the MEPs come from very diverse backgrounds. Hence, the MEPs cannot straightforwardly be considered to form one united elite whose membership would diminish the cultural differences.

The international dimension is strongly present at the EP too which enables to discuss the work of the MEPs in terms of diplomacy. Unfortunately, diplomatic communication has not been remarkably studied from an intercultural perspective either (Fischer 1990: 237; Salo 2004). Nevertheless, the International and intercultural annual in 1990 (Vol. 14), was devoted to diplomacy and deals with various communication processes of diplomacy and negotiation.

As Fischer (1989: 407) states many models of intercultural communication are applicable to the context of diplomacy as well. Even so, some aspects of their work assignments and environment make them a special case. Gudykunst (1990: 19, 26) considers diplomatic communication as a special case of intergroup communication as diplomacy involves both intergroup and interpersonal processes. At the same time when representing their state (intergroup level) diplomats interact with the representatives of other nations (interpersonal level). Gudykunst pinpoints, however, that it depends on the nature of the diplomatic encounter as to which of the levels is more important. Then again, Singer (1998: 226) emphasises that it is always people who communicate – not the nations. By studying the interpersonal level of the communication only this study follows Singer's statement. The interpersonal approach was chosen because the interaction among the MEPs cannot be considered as a form of intergroup communication so straightforwardly like in the case of diplomacy. Elected by the citizens the MEPs do not represent Finland with the same legitimacy as

diplomats. They do not represent the government but the Finnish people. In the EP the MEPs are not, however, grouped based on their nationality but form cross-cultural political groups. The interaction can be considered high on the interpersonal level as the MEPs communicate first and foremost with their foreign colleagues (see Gudykunst 1990: 26.) Hence, in this study the main focus will be on the interpersonal level of communication, that is studying the Finnish MEPs interacting with the other MEPs rather than representing Finland or Finnish voters.

Given that diplomatic communication is always intercultural it is essential to discuss how cultural background influences the interaction among diplomats. The topics that the diplomats – and politicians – communicate are very abstract by nature which complicates the intercultural communication process. As Fischer states, different perceptions of the abstract issues such as policies, laws, institutions and their functions, agreements, governmental processes, and finances, might lead to a situation that the interlocutors do not even speak about same topic. (Fischer 1989: 412.) Singer (1987: 226) believes that cultural differences have even greater impact when the subject is more “political” since in “technical” negotiations the common technocratic language facilitates the communication. According to Fischer (1990: 243), the styles of confrontation, debating, interpersonal interaction and habits of social behaviour are some examples of the cultural features that may have an influence on the communication process. Though, in diplomacy protocol might even out the cultural clashes. (Fischer 1990: 243.) In the European Parliament there are Rules of Procedure which are not, however, comparable to protocol. The question, whether there are any norms of behaviour or communication in the European Parliament that would facilitate interaction, is of interest in the present study too.

As can be noticed communication and intercultural issues are essential to diplomatic communication. Developing intercultural competence that would facilitate the intercultural encounters, however, is a very sensitive issue among diplomats. According to Fischer (1989: 417-418), promoting training to the diplomats is difficult as they often think they already possess the required intercultural skills. Therefore, the training of the diplomats should offer an approach that is challenging enough to catch their interest. Fischer (1989: 418) suggests that the training should start by considering culture as one aspect that has an influence on the substance of the foreign affairs concerns. It is often recognised by the negotiators, for instance that the cognitive and reasoning styles of the

counterpart differ from one's own. Training should offer the tools to understand the mind-sets of counterparts; how they justify their positions, cite evidence, explain, refute and persuade, for example. (Fischer 1990: 242.)

## **3 INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE**

### **3.1 Theoretical disintegration of ICC competence research**

Being aware that cultures vary and that it has a great impact on communication raises a question how to manage interaction across cultures. Chen and Starosta (1998: 240) believe that “intercultural competence is the only means whereby we can move beyond cultural differences in order to succeed in intercultural interactions.” Thus, it is not surprising that intercultural communication (ICC) competence has established its position as one of the key research subjects within the intercultural communication research. The history of the ICC competence research, however, is full of inconsistencies.

Being a research subject of several disciplines (e.g. sociolinguistics, interpersonal communication, and intercultural communication) it has produced a great amount of studies whose results are not, however, comparable to each other due to the lack of common nomenclature, for instance. (see e.g. Spitzberg 1989, Koester et al. 1993.) The early research arose from the practical needs that, according to Ruben (1989: 230), were such as explaining overseas failures, predicting overseas successes, selecting the right personnel and developing intercultural training. The pragmatic research tradition did, of course, contribute to the knowledge about intercultural phenomena but not so remarkably to the theory development. The use of various approaches, conceptualisations and methods to study ICC competence led to dispersion of the research tradition (Koester et al. 1993: 3). The notice of the lacking theory launched a debate on the subject of research; what is actually examined when ICC competence is under study? Consequently, a strong need for theorising aroused and several attempts to standardise the subject of study and to conceptualise ICC competence were conducted. Intercultural communication scholars were forced to turn backwards and look for the fundamentals of ICC competence. (see e.g. Martin 1993.)

Much of the ICC competence research extends the findings of interpersonal communication competence research. One of the early attempts to create cohesion to the research field was Spitzberg’s and Cupach’s theoretical framework presented in 1984 that combined theories about communication competence from interpersonal and

intercultural communication (Hammer 1989: 247). The movement of building theory produced some comprehensive overviews of the research subject. For example, in 1989 one issue of the *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 13 (3) was fully devoted to ICC competence research and covers various conceptualisations of ICC competence. Additionally, *International and Intercultural Communication Annual* in 1993, *Intercultural Communication Competence* (Wiseman & Koester 1993), brought together theoretical studies concerning ICC competence and discussed thoroughly the conceptual issues related to ICC competence in its introductory chapter (Koester et al. 1993). A more recent overview is a meta-analysis of ICC competence presented in *World Communication journal* in 2000 (Vol 29, nr. 1) by Bradford, Allen, and Beisser.

The theoretical turn of the research did not, however, reduce the lively discourse on the ICC competence. When reviewing the research literature one can notice that the debates have not produced consensus but multiple theories. As a consequence, a new tradition of writing research literature has emerged. The current studies about ICC competence research almost without exception open the discussion with theoretical contemplation of the origins and definitions of the research tradition. This is, of course, a very common procedure for many research fields but in ICC research it stands out because of its importance for understanding what the researcher is actually exploring. For these reasons, this chapter follows the tradition by introducing the different approaches to study ICC competence and articulating the theoretical assumptions of ICC competence in this study. Nonetheless, taking one's stand within the ICC competence research is not a simple task considering the numerous different perspectives taken by the scholars. This study will not directly follow any of the approaches but rather integrate some aspects of them in order to remain unbiased and open to new components of the ICC competence in this specific case of European Parliament and the MEPs.

### **3.1.1 The complexity of labelling ICC competence**

“Cross-cultural adjustment”, “cross-cultural adaptation”, “cross-cultural success”, “cross-cultural effectiveness”, “cross-cultural failure”, “personal adjustment”, “personal success” or “failure”, “cross-cultural awareness”, “multiculturalism”, “cultural competence” are all concepts used in ICC competence research (Koester et al. 1993: 5-6). The conceptual diversity can be explained as a result of researching the same subject

from various perspectives and within many disciplines. Obviously, the labels have also varied in the course of time as the scholars interested in subject and the objectives of the research have changed. Adjustment-dominated nomenclature (e.g. cross-cultural adjustment, cross-cultural adaptation) was a natural choice for the early inquirers that focused on individual's characteristics and adjustment to a new environment. (Koester et al. 1993: 5.) When the focus of the study moved from adjustment to the outcomes of intercultural interaction the terms of "effectiveness" and "competence" started to dominate the discourse on ICC competence. The term competence was acquired from sociolinguistics from whom it was taken over as an approved theoretical concept by intercultural communication scholars. (Koester et al. 1993: 5-6.) Nowadays, "competence" is more widely used because it better encompasses the importance of both effectiveness and appropriateness for the successful outcomes in intercultural interactions (Bradford et al. 2000: 32). Spitzberg and Cupach (1989: 6) define competence generally as "fitness or ability to perform".

The term "intercultural communication competence" (ICC competence) was chosen to describe the subject of study throughout this inquiry because of its slowly stabilised position in describing the ability to interact effectively and appropriately with people from a culture other than one's own (Bradford et al. 2000: 32). This implies that the focus is not on individual's adjustment to a new cultural environment or on personal traits and attitudes that would predict cross-cultural success. The word "communication" was included in the concept in order to put emphasis on the interaction aspect of competence. Furthermore, choosing intercultural instead of cross-cultural implies that emphasis is not put on comparison between separate cultures but on interaction between them.

### **3.1.2 Appropriateness and effectiveness**

Today, appropriateness and effectiveness are considered the two key dimensions of the ICC competence (see e.g. Koester et al. 1993; Lustig & Spitzberg 1993; Bradford et al. 2000). Accordingly, the definitions of ICC competence are often based on these components. Chen and Starosta (1998: 241), for instance define ICC competence as "the ability to effectively and appropriately execute communication behaviours to elicit a desired response in a specific environment".

According to Imahori and Cupach (2005: 195), appropriateness and effectiveness are the culture-general standards of ICC competence. Effectiveness refers to the ability to reach positive outcomes in intercultural interaction and appropriateness means doing it with respect to the contextual factors (Koester et al. 1993: 6). According to Spitzberg and Cupach (1989: 7), effectiveness is connected to satisfaction that arises from achieving one's goals. Appropriateness means that violating the norms of the interaction is avoided in order to be tact or polite (Spitzberg and Cupach 1989: 7.) Hecht et al. (1993: 120) emphasise the importance of the nature of the relationship between interlocutors that determines what communication behaviour is considered appropriate and inappropriate.

In spite of the fact that both effectiveness and appropriateness are considered necessary for understanding ICC competence, some researchers claim that they are stressed differently according to the goal of the study. Imahori and Lanigan (1989: 275-276), for instance, distinguish outcome-focused approach from message-focused approach. In outcome-focused approaches competence is understood in terms of effective outcome (cultural adaptation) due to which emphasis is put on effectiveness dimension. In message-focused approaches effectiveness is deemed unnecessary for being perceived as competent. Relevant is only the appropriate behaviour (skills) in the communication process. (Imahori & Lanigan 1989: 275-276.)

The main dimensions of appropriateness and effectiveness are used as the main determinants of ICC competence in the present study as well. ICC competence is constructed on the grounds of appropriate and appropriate communication behaviour in specific communication situations as they are perceived by the Finnish MEPs. Kim (2005: 100) argues, however, that as such they are too broad categories to describe ICC competence because the criteria for appropriate and effective communication behaviour derive from cultural patterns and thus, depend on the cultural background of the interlocutors. This is what makes intercultural communication challenging; one's own criteria for appropriateness and effectiveness are not valid with culturally different interlocutors. (Kim 2005: 100-102.) Therefore, it is expected that being interculturally appropriate and effective normally requires alternative choices of actions (Lustig and Koester 2003: 105-107) and accommodation of communication behaviour (Gallois et al 1995: 123).

### 3.1.3 Knowledge, attitudes and skills

Besides the appropriateness and effectiveness constituents of ICC competence, knowledge, attitudes, and skills are regarded as key factors of ICC competence. Possessing enough knowledge, the right attitude and certain skills is thought to lead to impression of competence. (see e.g. Spitzberg 1989: 150.) Appropriateness and effectiveness are the criteria for judging competence and skills, motivation and knowledge are the requirements for achieving that (Hecht et al 1993: 115). There exist parallel terms to describe knowledge, attitudes and skills such as cognitive, affective and operational (Kim 2001); knowledge, motivations and actions (Lustig & Koester 2003) and mindset and skillset (Bennett & Bennett 2004). The present study employs the terms knowledge, attitudes and skills, because they are thought to best describe what one needs to know, feel and do in practice in order to enhance the possibility to be perceived as interculturally competent. These terms have been used in the Profile of Interculturally Effective Person (Vulpe et al. 2000), for instance.

In the early years of the ICC competence research, scholars tended to focus on studying one of these dimensions which led to behaviour (e.g. Abe & Wiseman 1983; Hammer, Gudykunst, and Wiseman 1978; Martin & Hammer 1989) attitudinal (Gudykunst, Wiseman & Hammer 1977) and cognitive (Wiseman, Hammer & Nishida 1989; Collier et al. 1986) models of competence. Studying ICC competence as a behavioural construct has become the most common approach among the scholars. (Imahori & Lanigan 1989: 270-272.) Consequently, ICC skills are often thought to be interchangeable with ICC competence. According to Hammer (1989: 248), however, skills per se are not the competence but the judgments of the competence are made on the basis of them. As Gudykunst (1991: 103) has stated, the skills do not ensure competence but they certainly enhance the possibility that the others see us as being competent. Moreover, Hecht et al. (1993: 28) who consider communication fundamentally problematic define skills as responses to problematic issues that occur in communication. The studies taking a skills approach normally identify some skills that would lead to intercultural competence. A pioneer study employing a skills-approach was conducted by Ruben (1976) who identified seven variables as constituents of ICC competence: 1) display of respect, 2) interaction posture, 3) orientation to knowledge, 4) empathy, 5) self-oriented role-behaviour, 6) interaction management and 7) tolerance for ambiguity. (Bradford et al. 2000: 33-34.)



Even though the focus of the research is often on behaviour it cannot be studied separately from thought and emotion (Bennett & Bennett 2004: 149). More holistic models of ICC competence that emphasise the interrelated nature of knowledge, attitudes and skills (e.g. Chen & Starosta 1998; Kim 2001; Bennett & Bennett 2004) have appeared only recently. Kim's model (2001), for instance, supposes that knowledge, attitudes and skills are all present in communication situations simultaneously and thus closely intertwined. The components cooperate so that comprehensive knowledge leads to convenient attitude which together increase the possibility of skilled performance. By cognitive component Kim refers to ability to understand messages when interacting within the strange environment. Affective component means emotional capacity to cope with the challenges set by the strange environment and attitudes towards the intercultural interaction. Finally, operational component refers to expressing one's cognitive and affective competence through behaviour. (Kim 2001: 99-119.)

This study is clearly skills-oriented. This emphasis was chosen on the grounds of the assumption that the skills are more clearly varying according to context (e.g. culture, situation, and task) than other components of the competence. Additionally, according to Witteborn (2003: 190), choosing skills as a subject of study is understandable when the question is about sojourners who have to communicate successfully in order to succeed in their task. Herein, MEPs work is presumed to be very communicative by its nature and thus, communication skills crucial to their work accomplishment. Furthermore, it is assumed that cultural diversity makes the communication within the EP rather challenging and intercultural skills may develop as responses to the challenges (see Hecht et al. 1993: 28).

It has to be emphasised that unlike many behavioural approaches (Hammer 1989: 249) this study does not attempt to assess the competence of the MEPs but rather to identify the intercultural skills that they might need in their assignment. Assessing the ICC competence of the MEPs would have meant applying a construct of ICC competence or a "list" of intercultural skills to the context of the European Parliament and evaluating the MEPs intercultural competence according to the criteria of a model that was initially created for some other intercultural context and assignment. Instead of evaluating whether the MEPs meet the criteria of an existing model this study explores

what intercultural skills would be relevant within this kind of intercultural context and for them in particular.

According to Spitzberg and Cupach (1989: 8), intercultural communication skills can be studied at various levels. Skills can be organised hierarchically in accordance with the degree of intangibility. The most concrete skills are the molecular behaviours that occur in interaction situations and contribute to the smooth progress of the interaction and task accomplishment (e.g. head nods, eye gaze, interruptions). The second type of the skills is mid range skills, the more general characteristics that facilitate performing competently, such as empathy, social disclosure, and social interaction management. Finally, the most general type of skills is the cognitive processes that generate the other levels of skills: decoding, decision and encoding skills. Decoding skills refers to a person's ability to interpret the social cues of the situations. Decision skills mean the ability of choosing the appropriate response to the situation. Transforming the decoding skills and decision skills into behaviours requires encoding skills. (Spitzberg & Cupach 1989: 8-13.)

Similar to Spitzberg's and Cupach's classification is the one made in the Profile of Interculturally Effective Person (IEP) that was created by Centre for intercultural learning of Canadian Foreign Service Institute (Vulpe et al. 2000) with an aim to provide criteria for identifying, training and evaluating interculturally competent communicators in professional contexts. The profile uses a three-level classification in describing ICC competence: major competencies, core competencies and behavioural indicators. Nine "major competencies" form the most general level to examine the qualities of interculturally effective person: adaptation skills, an attitude of modesty and respect, an understanding of the concept of culture, knowledge of the host country and culture, relationship building, self-knowledge, intercultural communication, organisational skills, and personal and professional commitment. Next, is the level of "core competencies", consisting of 29 qualities, that extends the major competencies by providing more detailed information of the qualities interculturally effective person should possess. Finally there is the level of "behavioural indicators" which mean the concrete behaviours demonstrating the major and core competencies. The behavioural indicators include a list of behaviours which an interculturally effective person may employ in order to show her/his ability to adapt and create relationships, and display

respectful attitude and understanding of culture, for instance. (Vulpe et al. 2000: 4-6, 8-11.)

Being a behaviour-centred model of ICC competence that takes into account all three factors of ICC competence (skills, knowledge and attitudes) the profile of the IEP provides a framework for examining ICC competence in this case. (Vulpe et al. 2000: 4.) Nevertheless, the aim of the authors to make the profile as universal as possible (Vulpe et al. 2000: 7) makes it another general model of ICC competence that would be applicable to various cultural, situational and professional contexts. Thus, the behavioural indicators remain rather general too. Being aware of this the authors admit that the range of the needed competency areas is affected by various aspect of the international assignment that the professionals are engaged with (Vulpe et al. 2000: 7). When possible this study tries, however, to be even more specific in defining the behaviours that would indicate ICC competence in the context of the European Parliament, in particular. That is, the aim is to define the needed competency areas considering the cultural, situational and professional context, and based on that provide more detailed behavioural indicators of ICC competence. Despite putting emphasis on skills-factor of ICC competence this study acknowledges importance of knowledge and attitude. As Bennett and Bennett (2004: 149) claim, research may focus on examining one of the dimensions but it requires coordination of all three components: knowledge, attitude and behaviour (Bennett & Bennett 2004: 149).

### **3.1.4 Culture-general and culture-specific ICC competence**

One current issue that divides the researchers of ICC competence is the generalisability of the research results (Imahori & Cupach 2005: 195). The culture-general approach seeks to create models that would be applicable to any intercultural situational and cultural context. Competing with the culture-general approach is the culture-specific approach which makes no attempt to create such a universal model. Rather, it suggests that ICC competence should always be understood from the perspective of a specific culture and becoming interculturally competent means adopting the communication patterns of the host culture. (Koester et al. 1993: 12.)

The culture-general approaches have often employed a method called “list-technique”. The name derives from its attempt to list individual characteristics that would lead to positive outcomes in intercultural interaction situation (Witteborn 2003: 188). Several different lists and models have been created and as counted by Spitzberg and Cupach in 1989 (see Spitzberg 1989: 246) the lists contained altogether 136 distinct labels referring to the facets of ICC competence. The method has been strongly criticised because it uses concepts that have been chosen by the researcher beforehand and thus, makes presuppositions on the interactants. (Witteborn 2003: 188-190, Spitzberg 1989: 243-244.) Many of the lists of ICC competence include such attributes as, respect, empathy, flexibility, patience, interest, curiosity, openness, motivation, a sense of humour, tolerance for ambiguity, and willingness to suspend judgment (Fantini 2000: 28).

By following the culture-specific approach Witteborn (2003: 193) suggests that, rather than imposing certain concepts on interactants the research should take their knowledge about culture and communication as a starting point. Hence, the components of ICC competence would be obtained from the data and not beforehand from the theory. Researching ICC competence from the interactants’ point of view and within the context is also called emic perspective. (Witteborn 2003: 193.)

This study is based on the assumption that there is no one model of competence that would be applicable to any cultural context and guarantee competent communication behaviour. On the contrary, it approaches ICC competence of the MEPs from a culture-specific point of view (emic perspective). It examines ICC competence from a perspective of Finnish culture. It does not aspire to a generalisable model of ICC competence but only to explore how ICC competence is understood by a specific group of people within a specific cultural context. It takes into consideration the critique that the “list-technique” has received and does not take any components of the ICC competence as granted but rather tries to discover them from the authentic data.

### 3.1.5 The issue of context in ICC competence research

It is evident that communication always occurs within physical, social and interpersonal contexts that affect communication. ICC competence depends on the contextual factors too (Lustig & Koester 2003: 16, 64). Contextual expectations need to be met in order to be evaluated as a competent communicator (see e.g. Hecht et al. 1993: 120). But what is context in intercultural communication research? According to Katriel (1995: 271), intercultural communication research has paid attention to both “context of situation” and “context of culture” as defined by Malinowski (1935/1965).

Intercultural communication scholars have been praised because of recognising the importance of context better than interpersonal communication researchers (Chen & Starosta 1998: 241). Recognising the cultural context in ICC competence research implies that what is judged as competent in one cultural context does not necessarily lead to similar results in another. As cultural and communicational patterns vary across cultures the construction of competence also varies from culture to culture (e.g. Lustig & Koester 2003: 65). What maybe perceived as competent communication in Finland may be judged as being totally incompetent in India, for instance. While recognising the cultural context of ICC competence the research has been criticised because of neglecting the situational context (Dinges & Lieberman 1989: 372). Dinges and Lieberman (1989: 372) argue that the culture-general and person-centred approaches, in particular, have ignored the impact of situational factors in communication. As an alternative they suggest situation-centered or interaction models that consider ICC competence as interaction between person and situation. (Dinges and Lieberman 1989: 372.) Recognising the importance of situational context presupposes that ICC communication skills per se cannot be transferred from one context to another because they are evaluated in respect of task and the actual interaction (Salo-Lee 2003: 123).

Recently ICC competence scholars have paid more attention to the issue of context. Especially the situational context has received more attention. This implies that ICC competence is no longer thought to reside only in an individual or culture but in the actual context. This theoretical turn is understandable considering the tendency to understand ICC competence as an evaluative judgment which implies that competence depends on the social evaluation and context. (Lustig & Spitzberg 1993: 154.) Lustig and Koester (2003: 64) state that the judgment of competence depends on context,

relationship between the interactants, the goals or objectives of interaction, and the verbal and non-verbal messages that are used to achieve the goals.

Ethnographic studies have especially focused on examining the criteria for effective and appropriate communication behaviour in the particular social and intercultural situation. (Collier, 1989: 290; Koester et. al 1993: 7-8.) Witteborn (2003: 187-200), for example, suggests the ethnography of speaking as a method to study ICC competence in specific speech events which take place in certain settings. He claims that, by using the method researcher of ICC competence may study the correlation between performance, interaction and sociocultural norms in a particular situation. (Witteborn 2003: 187-200.)

The ethnographic method was out of question in this study due to the limited resources and limited access to the situational context (EP). Travelling to Brussels and making long-term observations would have involved a tremendous investment of time and money and would not necessarily have been even possible as one needs a permit or invitation to enter the EP in the first place. Nevertheless, the context is taken into consideration throughout the inquiry. In fact, context guided the research design in the first place. The study is based on an assumption that the context of the EP is somewhat special and the same intercultural skills that have been used to predict intercultural success of teachers and businessmen are not necessarily transferable to the political context and to the assignment of the MEPs. Moreover, the intercultural skills are studied in respect of cultural context as the Finnish cultural and communication patterns are taken into consideration.

### **3.1.6 Where does ICC competence reside?**

Is ICC competence a matter of individual characteristics, social judgment or relational outcome? That is a question that has exercised the minds of ICC competence researchers and still does. The early research, that was mainly focusing on cultural adaptation issues, deemed competence a set of characteristics or skills that a person possesses and displays. (Martin 1989: 234, Koester et al. 1993: 7.) Later on it was noticed, however, that knowledge, motivation, and skills of an individual do not guarantee that one is competent communicator. In the end, communication behaviour is

always judged to be competent or incompetent by someone. Normally, it is the interlocutor who evaluates the performance according to his/her own criteria of appropriateness and effectiveness. (Koester et al. 1993: 7.) This approach considers ICC competence as a social judgment, an evaluation of someone's performance. Thus, the same performance may be perceived competent or incompetent depending on the person who is assessing it. As the patterns of communication are culturally diverse it is obvious that the criteria for being perceived as competent are culture-bound as well. (Lustig & Koester 2003: 103; Gudykunst 1991: 103-104.)

Spitzberg (1989: 249) states that, when competence is understood as an evaluative impression one needs to consider two further questions: "What traits, skills, and characteristics increase the likelihood of being viewed as competent in communicating?" and "What is the nature of the inferential process that leads to the impression of competence?" Answering these questions has created topographies of cultural prototypes of a competent communicator. (Spitzberg 1989: 249-251.) One could, for example, examine what kind of communication behaviour Finnish people perceive as competent and on what are these perceptions based.

Finally, competence can be understood as residing within interaction and is a result of relational process (Imahori & Lanigan 1989: 275-276). This implies that competence is evaluated during the communicative exchange according to appropriateness criteria and not in the end of the interaction in terms of effective outcomes (adaptation).

As the present study aims to construct the ICC competence of the MEPs on the grounds of their perceptions, competence is thought to reside within the evaluative impressions of appropriate and effective communication behaviour. Assuming that criteria of appropriateness and effectiveness are culture-bound the study endeavours to go beyond these social judgments and discuss the reasons for evaluating some behaviour competent or incompetent. Herein, the Finnish cultural and communication patterns are of interest too as they form the Finnish MEPs' criteria of appropriateness and effectiveness.

### 3.2 Theoretical assumptions on ICC competence in this study

This study will not directly follow any of the approaches but rather integrate some aspects of them in order to study ICC competence in this specific case of European Parliament and the MEPs. Nevertheless, the theoretical assumptions of the study can be articulated as a result of the preceding critical contemplation of ICC competence research.

First, the term *intercultural communication competence* (ICC competence) was chosen to describe the subject of study because of its slowly stabilised position to describe the ability to interact effectively and appropriate with people from a culture other than one's own (Bradford et al. 2000: 32).

Second, *appropriateness and effectiveness* are considered the main criteria of competent communication. ICC competence for the MEPs is constructed on the grounds of appropriate and effective communication behaviour in specific intercultural communication situations. This study follows Spitzberg's and Cupach's (1989: 7) definition of appropriateness and considers appropriate such behaviour that does not violate the norms of the interaction situations faced by the MEPs and is considered tact and polite. Effectiveness refers to communication behaviour that leads to desired outcomes in interaction situations (Koester et al. 1993: 6). In order to find out what appropriate and effective communication within the EP is the Finnish MEPs are asked to describe the best practices to manage the communication situations that are most influenced by cultural differences. Furthermore, they are asked to report about successful encounters with foreign colleagues in order to find out what the desired outcomes of interaction are and how they can be achieved through communication.

Third, all three components of ICC competence, *knowledge, attitudes and skills*, are taken into consideration. The study is, however, skills-oriented as it is supposed that the judgment of competence is made on basis of the intercultural skills that appear in behaviour (see e.g. Gudykunst 1991: 103 and Hammer 1989: 248). Skills are thought to develop as responses to the challenges of intercultural communication (Hecht et al. 1993: 28). Therefore, the focus of the study is on those intercultural communication situations where the Finnish MEPs have encountered the greatest cultural differences.



The tools that they use for managing the cultural differences form the basis for defining the intercultural skills.

Fourth, the study takes a *culture-specific* approach to ICC competence. It examines ICC competence from a perspective of Finnish culture. It does not aspire to a generalisable model of ICC competence but only to explore how the ICC competence is understood by a specific group of people.

Fifth, this research is based on the assumption that there is no one model of competence that would be applicable to any context and guarantee competent communication behaviour. On the contrary, ICC competence is thought to emerge within a cultural, situational and professional context that needs to be taken into account when researching the subject. Thus, the approach can be named *context-specific* too.

Sixth, as ICC competence in this study is constructed on the grounds of the Finnish MEPs' experience and perceptions, competence is thought to reside within the evaluative impressions of appropriate and effective communication behaviour. Such communication behaviour of others that is evaluated appropriate and effective by the Finnish MEPs is regarded as being competent. Additionally, the Finnish MEPs are asked to report how they believe Finnish communication patterns meet the criteria of appropriateness and effectiveness. Focusing on the perceptions of the interlocutors' performance implies that ICC competence is assumed to be *social judgment* made by the interlocutor (Koester et al. 1993: 7).

## **4 THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AS THE MACRO-CONTEXT OF THE STUDY**

The European Parliament (EP) forms the immediate context of the present study. Intercultural interaction of the MEPs is examined within the framework of the EP and its various procedures. Nevertheless, in order to examine the EP it has to be situated in the wider context of the European Union (EU). Hence, the EU, with its many institutions, can be regarded as the macro-context of the study. In essence, the role of the EP can only be understood in relation to the EU in its entirety which is to some extent reflected in the research data too. Therefore, this chapter will first shortly introduce the idea of European integration and its institutional development to a unique international governmental organisation (IGO). Only then it is relevant to focus on the EP, its organisation and functions, in particular. The focus is on the MEPs and their work.

### **4.1 The idea of the European integration**

The first thoughts about European integration emerged after the Second World War when Europe was politically and geographically fragmented. There was an attempt to build a lasting peace and stability to Europe. Co-operation was considered as the only way to bring new prosperity in Europe. This idea led to the foundation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951 when the six member countries, Germany, France, The Netherlands, Belgium, Luxemburg and Italy, signed the Treaty of Paris. ([http://www.europa.eu.int/abc/history/index\\_en.htm](http://www.europa.eu.int/abc/history/index_en.htm); Hix 1999: 2-3.)

Since the establishment of the ECSC in 1951, the EU has welcomed nineteen new member countries: United Kingdom, Denmark and Ireland (1973); Greece (1981); Spain and Portugal (1986), Finland, Sweden and Austria (1995); Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia (2004). Bulgaria and Romania are expected to join the EU in 2007 and the accession negotiations with Turkey and Croatia have already been opened. ([http://www.europa.eu.int/abc/history/index\\_en.htm](http://www.europa.eu.int/abc/history/index_en.htm).)

Alongside the expansion of European co-operation the idea of European integration has developed too. In the beginning, when the aim was to secure common coal and steel production, the interests were mainly economic. Further integration has been agreed in the Treaties signed by the member countries. The Treaties of Rome in 1957 created the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM) and the European Economic Community (EEC), which deepened the economic cooperation by removing the trade barriers. The Maastricht treaty in 1992 created the European Union and introduced new forms of cooperation such as, defence and justice and home affairs. By enhancing the inter-governmental co-operation the Maastricht Treaty added the political dimension to the EU. ([http://www.europa.eu.int/abc/treaties\\_en.htm](http://www.europa.eu.int/abc/treaties_en.htm).) Due to the growing economic interdependence and liberalisation of the market common rules were created in consumer protection, environmental standards, external trade, assistance to less prosperous regions, competition policy, and work place standards, for instance (Corbett et al. 2003: 2-3). Consequently, today the EU deals with many issues that have direct influence on the everyday life of the EU citizens.

The deeper integration launched a long process of institutional development which is to be more or less finalised when and if the Constitutional treaty will come into force some day. The institutional development started when the sovereign states delegated some of their decision-making power to the supra-national institutions that operate at the European level. The power of decision on the common interest was first given to a supranational institution called High Authority. It consisted of civil servants and was supervised by the Council. The institutional merger of the three communities (ECSC, EURATOM, and EEC) in 1967 created a single Commission, a single Council of Ministers and the European Parliament (Horváth 2002: 29).

Today, the institutions that have been set to pursue the common interests of the EU are one feature that makes the EU a unique IGO. The EU is organised into five institutions, each of them having a certain function. The Council of the European Union is composed of the representatives of the government (often ministers) who meet regularly. The council represents the member states and is the main legislative and decision-making body in the EU. The Commission consists of twenty Commissioners who have been nominated by the member states' governments. The Commission makes new legislative proposals to the European Parliament and Council, and is the main executive body of the Union. The Court of Justice ensures that the member states

follow the common laws set in the EU. The European Court of Auditors “audits the accounts of the EU”. That is, it controls how the funds of the EU are used. The fifth institution is the European Parliament (EP) that is elected by the peoples of the member countries and hence, is the only democratic institution of the EU.

([http://www.europa.eu.int/institutions/index\\_en.htm](http://www.europa.eu.int/institutions/index_en.htm).)

Despite the great history, good intentions and moderate success of European integration the opinion polls show that the EU has not achieved a great success among the EU citizens. At the same time when the European elites are lauding the EU for its efforts of maintaining peace and developing prosperity in Europe there is a persistent opposition to the EU among the EU citizens in some member countries such as Finland, United Kingdom and Austria. The latest Eurobarometer 63 (2005) shows that on average only 54 per cent of the EU citizens are satisfied that their country is a member of the EU and only 47 per cent of the EU citizens have a positive image of the EU. According to the Eurobarometer survey (2005), in Finland only 30 per cent think that the EU gives a positive impression and 45 per cent considers EU-membership as a good thing.

When this is being written (summer 2005) it has been argued that the EU is “in deep crisis” because first the French and the Dutch rejected the EU constitution in the referenda and second, an agreement on the EU’s budget failed. Consequently, the EU seems to be more unpopular among the EU citizens than ever before. Many EU experts (e.g. Commissioner Margot Wallström 2005 and Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker 2005) believe that the unpopularity is partly a consequence of communication failure between the EU’s decision making elite and its people.

## **4.2 The European Parliament**

According to Corbett et al. (2003: 6), it is the EP in particular that makes the EU special. There are seven features that make the European Parliament a special case. First, it is unique as a trans-national democracy. Instead of diplomatic relations the international relations in Europe work through trans-national democracy. Without the EP the EU would be only a playground of the diplomats and bureaucrats. Second, the EP has a special position among the institutional system of the EU. Third, there are opponents of the EU within the EP too. Fourth, the institutional development of the EP

has been rather quick since it was elected for first time 1979. Fifth, the European Parliament is basically located in three different places. Sixth, the multilingualism of the Parliament is carefully organised and protected. Seventh, the government is not created based on the majorities in the European Parliament. (Corbett et al. 2003: 2-3.) Due to these special characteristics, the EP can be distinguished from other international representative institutions as well as from the member countries' parliaments.

Given, the EP is special, raises a question how the institution has developed, and what its role is today. In the beginning Parliament consisted of the representatives nominated by the governments and its role was rather consultative. However, the powers of the EP and thus, its importance have increased during the last decades. The EP was considered the only way to make the EU more open, democratic and transparent. Consequently, the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992 brought a remarkable change in power distribution. The co-decision procedure, that gave the EP the right to negotiate on the legislation with the Council and dismiss the decision of the Council, came into force in 1993. Today most of the European Union legislation requires the approval of the Parliament. (Corbett et al. 2003: 3-6, 172.)

In addition to its legislative role, the Parliament it has two other functions as well. First, the parliament has a decisive role in the adoption of the EU's budget. Moreover, the EP monitors its use through the Committee on Budgetary Control. Second, the EP supervises the other EU institutions - especially the Commission - in many ways. When formed after the European elections, the Commission needs Parliament's approval. This implies that the Parliament has a right to dismiss the commission proposed by the President of the Commission. In addition to approval of the Commission, the EP monitors the functioning of the Commission. This is conducted by controlling the reports of the Commission and asking the Commission oral and written questions. ([http://www.europa.eu.int/institutions/parliament/index\\_en.htm](http://www.europa.eu.int/institutions/parliament/index_en.htm).)

### 4.2.1 Multicultural European Parliament

One peculiarity of the EP is its multinationalism which enhanced remarkably in 2004 when the ten new countries joined the EU. Bringing together twenty five countries the EP is the biggest multinational democracy in the world. ([http://www.europarl.eu.int/presentation/.](http://www.europarl.eu.int/presentation/)) What does it mean in practice? What does it mean to work as an MEP with colleagues from twenty four different countries? According to a Finnish MEP, Alexander Stubb (2005: 50), sometimes coming to a decision requires “sweat, blood and tears” (“hikeä, verta ja kyyneleitä”, Stubb 2005: 50, translated by KL).

The EU as an IGO is not supposed to have a dominant national culture. The organisational culture of the EU administration, for instance, consists of different national traditions. (Hofstede 2001: 433; Shore 2001.) Coming from different European nationalities implies cultural, economic and political differences, at least. According to Hix (1999: 141), cultural differences within the EU, which are of interest in this study, appear in several dimensions: Latin vs. Germanic, Catholic vs. Protestant, North vs. South, East vs. West, high-trust vs. low-trust societies, homogenous vs. multiethnic societies etc. (Hix 1999: 140-141.) Are these cultural differences manifested in the EP and what is their impact on the work of the MEPs? The consequences of multiculturalism of the EP have not been widely studied. It has been argued, however, that decision-making culture in the EP is a consequence of multiculturalism; decisions are made through negotiations and compromising. (Blomgren 2003: 217.)

Instead of nationality, in the EP the parliamentarians are grouped on the grounds of political affinity. Sometimes it has been said that this diminishes the conflicts between the nations. (Corbett et al. 2003: 6.) Even so, working within political groups does not remove cultural differences. On the contrary, the fact that one’s closest colleagues come from other European countries – and not from the home country - increases the number of intercultural interactions and thus, the probability of cultural differences appearing. This does not surely imply conflicts but in all probability creates more challenges than working in monocultural contexts. As Corbett et al. state (2003: 8), being an MP or MEP requires different qualities. In the national context it is enough if one is a good debater whereas in the EP one needs to be good in explaining, and persuading the MEPs from twenty five different nationalities. (Corbett et al. 2003: 8.)

However, what intercultural skills are remains an unanswered question and is the driving force behind this study.

#### **4.2.2 Multilingualism within the European Parliament**

The twenty official and working languages of the EU are: Spanish, Danish, German, Greek, English, French, Italian, Dutch, Portuguese, Finnish, Swedish, Czech, Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Hungarian, Maltese, Polish, Slovak, and Slovene. ([http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/lang/languages/index\\_en.html](http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/lang/languages/index_en.html).)

Furthermore, it was decided in June 2005 that the Irish language becomes the 21<sup>st</sup> official and working language of the EU. The decision will come into force in practice in 2007. ([http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/translation/spotlight/irish\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/translation/spotlight/irish_en.htm).)

Working in twenty languages is a feature that clearly distinguishes the EP from other international organisations such as United Nations that operates in six official working languages. (Corbett et al. 2003: 34.) The reason for operating in the twenty official languages of the EU derives from the fact that the EP is composed of directly elected representatives instead of nominated representatives. Thus, in order to guarantee everyone an equal opportunity to be elected, regardless of the language skills, the MEPs may work in the official language of their home country. (Corbett et al. 2003: 34.) In most cases, this means using their mother tongue, except for those representatives of minority languages that do not have an official status. Wilson (2003: 3) argues that the MEPs must speak in their own language simply because they represent first and foremost their electorate – not themselves.

In practice the multilingualism of the EP implies that all the official documents of the EP are translated into official languages and interpretation is offered in the formal meetings. This rule is followed very strictly. However, in the committees and within the political groups the practices might be more informal. Exception is the informal meetings that are often conducted in English or French. (Corbett et al. 2003: 34-35, Loos 2004: 5-6.) Wilson (2003: 4) points out that much of the MEPs work happens in the informal contexts, in the corridors, where “the MEPs do not walk shadowed by an interpreter”.

The rules on translating the written texts affect the functioning of the EP. Especially the reaction time by the EP is slowed down as the texts have to be handed in to translation ten days prior to the meeting in which it is to be discussed. The interpretation of the oral texts affects the spontaneity and comprehension of the expression. This shows in telling jokes, using irony or criticism, for instance. Therefore, when wishing to address one MEP the speaker might use the addressee's language in order to make sure that the message is delivered properly. (Corbett et al. 2003: 36.)

Despite the impracticality that maintaining the translation and interpretation services implies it is rather unlikely that there will be a prompt solution to the problem. The number of languages used in the EP is a highly political issue as the linguistic diversity plays a significant role in guaranteeing the fairness and democracy of the EP. (Loos 2004: 6.) Actually, the organisation of the EP supports the language learning of the MEPs by offering language courses in the five most common working languages (English, Spanish, Italian, French and German) during the term. Additionally, the MEPs are offered a possibility of learning any official language of the EU in private language schools. The EP reimburses the costs up to 5000 euros per year. (Opas jäsennille 2004: 74-75.)

### **4.3 The members of the European Parliament**

#### **4.3.1 Election and term**

The European Parliament is composed of the members of the European Parliament (MEPs) who are elected by the European citizens in every five year. According to Corbett et al. (2003: 11), a direct election distinguishes the EP from many other international organisations as normally the representatives are nominated from the national parliaments. Since the EP was elected by suffrage for the first time in 1979, the number of the representatives has steadily increased from 410 to 732 (Corbett et al. 2003: 4, 11).

The number of seats per country depends on the size of the population. Finland used to have sixteen seats in the EP but since the enlargement of the EU in 2004 the number of the seats decreased to fourteen. It was decided (Amsterdam Treaty 1997 and Treaty of



Nice 2001) that the number of seats has to be somewhat restricted (may not exceed 750) in order to maintain the viability of the EP. (Corbett et al. 2003: 22.) Despite the fact that the elections are organised at the same time in every member country the electoral systems vary across the member states. In Finland the electoral system is based on proportional representation, like in national parliamentary elections. The European elections differ from the national elections in that Finland is not divided into constituencies but forms one national constituency. (Corbett et al. 2003: 13.) In Finland the first sixteen MEPs were exceptionally chosen from the Finnish Parliament and nominated by the parliament as Finland joined the EU one year after the European elections in 1995. Direct elections were, however, held in Finland in 1996 and since 1999 the Finnish MEPs have been elected at the same time as the other member countries in the trans-national elections. (<http://www.europarl.fi>.)

As stated in the Council's directive (93/109/EC) of 6 December 1993 any European citizen has a right to be a candidate in her/his country of residence. The residence principle makes it possible that a citizen of one member country can stand as a candidate for the European elections in another member country in case that it is her or his country of residence. (Corbett et al. 2003: 15.) There exist some other regulations concerning the age, campaigning and dual mandate, for instance, but they vary considerably depending on the countries. The elected MEPs are often experienced politicians in the national parliaments. Furthermore, many of the MEPs have held an important post in their home countries such as regional office-holders, regional presidents, or mayors. There are some celebrated judges, trade union leaders and media personalities too. (Corbett et al. 2003: 42-44.)

The turnout in European elections has remained low for several reasons. It is often said that the EP does not touch the everyday life of the citizens and the institutions are distant. One reason that has been used to explain the low turnouts is that the elections per se do not interest the EU citizens as the media coverage of the EP is bad and the results of the election do not affect the formation of the Commission. (Corbett et al. 2003: 8-10.) According to Hix (1999: 180), the EP elections are rather second-order national elections than European elections. National political issues are on the agenda because political parties make use of the elections in polishing the image of the party.

Hix (1999: 75) argues that the main goal of the MEPs is to get re-elected. Nevertheless, this collides with the high turnover of the MEPs. According to Corbett et al. (2003: 40), contrary to the national parliaments there are only few members who have been in service since 1979. Hix (1999: 75) believes that re-election depends more on the popularity of the national party than on succeeding in the EP.

#### **4.3.2 The work of the MEPs**

The EP is split between three different countries and cities. Once in a month (except August and September) the EP holds the plenary session in Strasbourg in France. The short additional sessions are held in Brussels in Belgium where most of the committee meetings also take place. In addition, the administration staff is located in Luxembourg and Brussels. In practice this implies maintaining facilities for the MEPs (offices, chambers) in Brussels and Strasbourg and in some cases staff in both locations. Perhaps one of the greatest disadvantages is, however, the constant travelling and transportation between Brussels and Strasbourg which according to Corbett et al. (2003: 28) negatively affects the effectiveness of the EP and is very unpopular among the MEPs too. Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that there would be any changes in this as the decision on which city the plenary sessions are held is not on the hands of the EP but the national governments which have earlier agreed (OJ C-341 23/12/1992) on the location of the institutions. (Corbett et al. 2003: 27-28, 32.)

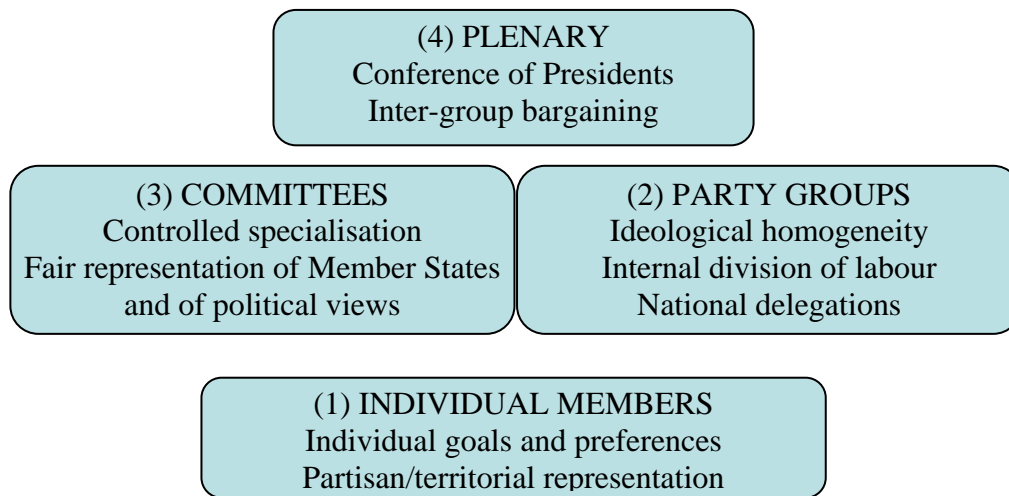
The activities of the EP normally follow a monthly cycle. One week is devoted to the plenary session which is followed by two committee weeks. The fourth week of the month is for the meetings of the political groups. Additionally, six plenary sittings have been held regularly every year in Brussels since 2000. A one month recess is held in August. In practice there might be slight changes in the timetable. (Corbett et al. 2003: 32-33.) According to Corbett et al. (2003: 48), the work of a MEP is already more than a full-time job. There is an enormous time pressure due to the number of duties and constant travelling. In addition to being active in the EP, the MEPs are expected to be in contact with their voters and the political party at home. Being active in national politics or holding a leadership position puts even more pressure on the MEPs and time management. The Finnish MEPs – among the other representatives from the distant member countries – encounter the problems of geographical distance too that is rather

time consuming. Active MEPs may gain good reputation in the EP but lose their contacts at home which might have a negative influence on the re-election. (Corbett et al. 2003: 48.) Being simultaneously situated in two political arenas, European and domestic, has been studied by Blomgren (2003) who calls the phenomenon cross-pressure (Blomgren 2003: 4).

Due to the enormous time pressure, the work of a MEP requires setting priorities. They may choose to be active in committee work or in their political group. They may choose to be a specialist within a particular policy area or remain generalists. They may attend every single plenary session or then not. (Corbett et al. 2003: 47-48.) According to Hix (1999: 75), the MEPs have different goals in the EP too. Office goals are attempts of achieving leadership positions within the EP, such as party leadership, chairmanship of the committee or post in the Bureau of the Parliament. Policy goals are attempts to pursue one's own ideological views and the interests of the constituents. In order to achieve these goals the MEPs need to attain good positions in their groups and committees and be able to form coalitions. (Hix 1999: 75.) Furthermore, the aspects of the parliament's work that are valued depend on the national culture too. The MEPs from northern countries, for instance, may use more time for discussing the technical details of the legislation than the members from the southern member countries. British members have traditionally appreciated the question time in the plenary more than others. (Corbett et al. 2003: 47-48.)

All in all, the work of an MEP can be roughly divided in two: preparing for the plenary session and the plenary session itself. The preparation work is conducted in the committee meetings and in the meetings of the political groups. ([http://www.europa.eu.int/institutions/parliament/index\\_en.htm](http://www.europa.eu.int/institutions/parliament/index_en.htm)). Figure 1 represents the internal organisation of the Parliament. First, there are the individual MEPs who have their own political goals and preferences in the EP. Second, there are the party groups which are ideological groupings formed by the individual MEPs. Third, there are the committees that are specialised according to policy areas and composed of MEPs from different member states and political groups. Fourth, there is the plenary which work is organised by the conference of presidents and is a venue for intergroup bargaining. (Raunio 1996: 57-59.)

Figure 1: The internal organisation of the Parliament (adopted from Raunio 1996: 56)



#### 4.3.2.1 Political groups

The MEPs form political groups based on their political affinities. It is possible to stay non-attached too. At the moment there are seven political groups in the EP: Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats (PPE-DE), Socialist Group in the European Parliament (PSE), Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance (Verts/ALE), Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL), Independence/Democracy Group (IND/DEM), Union for Europe of the Nations Group (UEN). (<http://www.europa.eu.int>.) The Finnish members of the National Coalition Party and the Swedish People's Party belong to the PPE-DE, the members of the Centre Party to ALDE, the members of the Social Democratic Party to PSE, the member(s) of the Greens to Verts/ALE, and the member(s) of the Left Alliance to GUE/NGL. (<http://www.europarl.fi>.) It is expected that the political groups have ideologically something in common which according to Raunio (1996: 228) contributes to the group cohesion of the political groups.

Meetings of the political groups normally take place in Brussels during the "Group week" and are devoted to discussing the next week's plenary agenda and the common position of the group in important votes. (Corbett et al. 2003: 84.) The group meetings are places where differences in opinion are brought up and discussed (Raunio 1996: 74). Raunio (1996: 74) points out that the size of the political group determines how the

meetings are organised. The meetings of the big political groups are more formal and organised than the meetings of the small groups (Raunio 1996: 74).

The political groups play a significant role in many political processes, such as choice of the EP leadership, the allocation of the committee positions and rapporteurships and forming the agenda of the plenary sessions (Hix 1999: 76; Corbett et al. 2003: 59). According to Hix (1999: 78), many MEPs hope to maintain good relationships with the party leaders because of the strong position of the political groups. Groups give voting instructions to their members but the system is less strict than in national parliaments. This implies that the MEPs can opt out from the group's position without any sanctions. Nevertheless, the research has shown (e.g. Raunio 1996) that the group cohesion is rather strong. It is clear the goals can be pursued more effectively by coordinated action. The time is limited too and one cannot get deep into every vote issue but rather votes according to group's position. (Corbett et al. 2003: 88-89.)

It is often argued that a single MEP does not have any powers in the EP because the discipline within the political groups determines the voting behaviour. Although the political groups normally take a common position in important votes, the role of the individual member can be significant in defining the position of the group. (Corbett et al. 1999: 45.) That is, in case that an MEP persuades the whole group to support his/her interest, the role can be even decisive. Furthermore, one does not have to follow the common position of the group. A single MEP can also put questions to the Commission and Council, table a motion for resolution or a written declaration, table and move amendments to any text in committee, make explanations of vote, ask questions related to the work of parliament's leadership, table amendments to the rules of procedure, raise points of order, or move the inadmissibility of a matter. (Corbett et al. 2003: 45-46.)

#### **4.3.2.2 Parliamentary committees**

The other part of the preparatory work is conducted in the parliamentary committees which are specialised according to the policy areas of the EU. The main legislative work is conducted in the committees and therefore, the work conducted in the committees is the corner stone of all the parliamentary activities. (Hix 1999: 78.) The

twenty committees are different in their size varying from some thirty members to over hundred members. ([http://www.europarl.eu.int/committees/home\\_en.htm](http://www.europarl.eu.int/committees/home_en.htm).)

The committees are formed during the first session of the new parliament. The appointments of the members are determined by the political groups. The MEPs normally belong to one committee and have one substitute committee membership according to their own preferences. The committees are not necessarily equal in their power and prestige. Consequently, some committees are more popular than others due to which the political groups cannot fulfil everyone's personal wishes. In such a case, it is normally the first term MEPs who might be left out. (Corbett et al. 2003: 104-105.) The MEPs normally join the committees that relate to their occupational experiences, to the interests of their constituents or to their interest groups (Hix 1999: 78).

The committees meet mainly in Brussels during the two weeks after the plenary session. In the meetings draft reports and opinions that deal with legislative, budgetary and agenda setting issues are discussed and adopted. The reports and opinions of the committee are prepared by individual MEPs, rapporteurs, who are nominated to the task by the coordinators. (Corbett et al. 2003: 110-111, 115.) According to Raunio (1996: 83) rapporteurship requires preparedness to make compromises as the draft report needs to be approved by the other members of the committee. Since rapporteurships are one way to gain reputation within the EP, they are highly valued by the MEPs. (Raunio 1996: 84.)

#### **4.3.2.3 Plenary sessions**

Plenary sessions of the EP are held once in a month in Strasbourg. Additional shorter sessions take place in Brussels. In Strasbourg the plenary session is usually held from Monday evening until Thursday. The agenda of the plenary week is set by the EP itself with the priority given on legislative items and urgent issues which are debated and in some cases voted in the plenary session. The votes do not normally follow the debates but are held in the special voting times. (Corbett et al. 2003: 139, 141-144.)

The speaking time in the plenary session is strictly limited. The Commission, The Council, rapporteurs, draftsmen of opinions and political groups are allocated a certain

time for debating. The speaking time given to the political groups depends on the number of the members in the group. That is, the biggest groups get considerably more speaking time than the smaller groups. The groups then allocate the speaking times to individual members. All in all, the time restrictions imply that there is not much place for spontaneity or discussion. (Corbett et al. 2003: 145-146.)

According to Corbett et al. (2003: 152), the plenary sessions of the EP are rather calm and there are no problems of maintaining order. How the order in the plenary session is perceived by the MEP depends, however, on national background as the parliamentary procedures vary a lot across the member countries. In the EP the Rules of Procedure determine the procedures such as, the right to make points of order and request verification of the quorum. Every now and then there occur demonstrations which are banned in case that they are of disturbance. (Corbett et al. 2003: 152.)

In view of the fact that the two biggest political parties (EPP and PSE) form the majority (Grand Coalition), the compromises are often sought between them. Nevertheless, the coalitions can be created by any of the groups depending on the issue. (Corbett et al. 2003: 150.) Due to the lacking government-opposition divide, the coalitions are, indeed, often formed around each individual vote. (Hix 1999: 79). Thus, an MEP who comes from a minor political party can have a significant role in legislative work too (Corbett et al. 2003: 8).

## **5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **5.1 A phenomenological approach**

According to Cresswell (1998: 15), conducting qualitative research is usual when the topic deals with social or human problems. Qualitative research allows studying the subject holistically, in detail, and within its context. (Cresswell 1998: 15.) This study intends to develop knowledge of intercultural communication competence in the context of the European Parliament and describe it from a Finnish perspective. Hence, it is obviously qualitative.

According to Cresswell (1998: 17-18), the descriptive nature of the research question and the desire to explore something new are some compelling reasons for conducting a qualitative research. This study aims to describe the ICC competence in the specific context. Furthermore, there is a need to explore the topic as ICC competence has not been widely studied in this context before. In order to be open to possible new ideas concerning the ICC competence none of the existing models describing the concept is used a priori.

There exists multiple ways of conducting qualitative research. Different approaches of qualitative inquiry imply different kinds of research processes and thus, the chosen approach guides the research design. (Cresswell 1998: 2.) The research design of this study follows a phenomenological approach which is based on Husserl's philosophy and was further developed by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty in the 20th century. Phenomenology emphasises the subjects' consciousness by studying actors' perspectives on the world they live in. The studies which take a phenomenological standpoint tend to be descriptive. (Kvale 1996: 52-53.)

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe ICC competence in the context of EP and define the intercultural skills for Finnish MEPs. At this stage of the research, ICC competence will be generally defined as appropriate and effective communication behaviour in intercultural interactions. Appropriateness refers to communication behaviour that does not violate the situational and relational norms of the context (Spitzberg & Cupach 1989: 7) and effectiveness to communication



behaviour that leads to desired outcomes in interaction (Koester et al. 1993: 6). Moreover, special attention is given to intercultural skills since it is considered that the judgment of ICC competence is done on the basis of one's behaviour in intercultural situations (see e.g Hammer 1989: 248).

## **5.2 Studying experiences and perceptions**

Phenomenological study is traditionally interested in participants' experience of the phenomenon under study (Cresswell 1998: 31). Accordingly, this study examines the Finnish MEPs' experiences of cultural differences in the European Parliament and their impact on communication. In their experience what kinds of challenges do the cultural differences bring to communication? Furthermore, this study is interested in the Finnish MEPs' perceptions of competent behaviour in those intercultural situations. How to manage the cultural differences in interaction situations in order to be viewed as interculturally competent?

Examining ICC competence through cultural differences is a natural choice as the intercultural skills are thought to develop as responses to problems in communication (see Hecht et al. 1993: 28). Additionally, the perceptions of appropriate and effective communication behaviour are of interest in this study since ICC competence is understood as evaluative judgment of interlocutor's behaviour. The intention is that after examining the interculturally challenging communication situations and perceptions of appropriate and effective behaviour in those situations the intercultural skills relevant to MEPs may be identified.

Following the phenomenological tradition the data is collected from the ones who have experienced the phenomenon under study (Cresswell 1998: 31). The data consists of the Finnish MEPs' observations of the intercultural context, their experiences of cultural differences and their understanding of appropriateness and effectiveness of communication. The MEPs are asked to report how they manage intercultural situations and what they believe are the best practices to overcome the misunderstandings. According to Bradford et al. (2000: 34), in ICC competence research especially the behavioural approach has used self-reports to collect information about the behaviours that communicators themselves think were useful in intercultural situations (Bradford et

al. 2000: 34). The participants are themselves the best reporters of experiencing the phenomenon that is, objective understanding is reached only through subjective experience (Cresswell 1998: 86).

Collier (1989: 254) pinpoints that in those studies that aim to assess the communication competence the data should also be collected from the significant others who evaluate whether the performance is competent or not. As this study does not, however, try to assess the ICC competence of the Finnish MEPs but is rather interested in their perceptions of the appropriate and effective communication behaviour collecting the data only from them can be considered sufficient.

According to Hecht et al. (1993: 21), perceptions can be studied only through informants' descriptions. Nevertheless, the descriptions should not be handled as reconstructions but rather as representations of the reality as they are based on interpretations. (Hecht et al. 1993: 21.) Relying on MEPs' experiences of the phenomenon implies studying their perception and interpretation of the phenomenon – not the reality per se. Furthermore, Singer points out (1998: 12) that culture significantly effects on the way people perceive the world. Therefore, examining the Finnish MEPs' experiences implies studying only their perception of social reality that is based on Finnish culture.

Ontologically the chosen phenomenological approach implies that individuals are thought to act consciously and create meanings based on their experiences (Cresswell 1998: 51-53). According to Collier (1989: 294), within ICC competence research especially the skills approaches often assume that humans are able to make choices concerning their communication behaviour; distinguish the effective skills from ineffective and appropriate from inappropriate. Accordingly, it is expected that the Finnish MEPs are able to identify which communication behaviours are regarded as appropriate and effective in the European Parliament.

### **5.3 Interviews with the MEPs**

In this study the data was collected by interviewing the Finnish MEPs who have encountered the challenges of the multicultural working environment in person. The interview method was chosen because the qualitative research interview offers a unique opportunity to access the every day world of the interviewees (Kvale 1996: 54). As Moustakas (in Kvale 1996: 54) states, in phenomenological study the researcher often examines the different perspectives on the same phenomenon.

The interviewing method has been previously used for collecting descriptions and judgments of competent communication behaviour in interethnic interactions, for instance, by Hecht et al. (1993) who have studied African American communication. In their experience people are able to identify appropriate and inappropriate behaviours in communication situations when they are asked to recall a recent conversation with a person from another ethnic group (Hecht et al. 1993: 120, 126). Hecht et al. (1993: 119) suggest inquiring communication norms, problematic events and improvement strategies in order to make the research as productive as possible.

At this stage of the study only Finnish MEPs were chosen to be interviewed in order to limit the study and describe the phenomenon as thoroughly as possible from the perspective of one nationality. As the criteria of intercultural competent behaviour is considered to be culture-bound including MEPs from other nationalities would have required making cross-cultural comparisons too. This would have made the topic too complex for this study. Finnish MEPs were also regarded as most attainable and accessible for interviewing as the costs of conducting the research were limited.

The initial goal was to interview all the current fourteen Finnish MEPs in order to include as many points of view to the research subject as possible. Being aware of the load of work and the tight schedules of the MEPs the goal was considered very optimistic. Kvale (1996: 102) points out, however, that even a small number of informants is sufficient when the purpose of the study is to understand the world as experienced by the subjects.

### 5.3.1 Written questionnaires

A preliminary questionnaire was planned for obtaining an answer to the first research question about the nature of intercultural communication in the work of the MEPs. To be more specific, the questionnaire aimed to map the situational and relational context of intercultural interaction; where, with whom and for what the intercultural communication takes place. Additionally, the questionnaire touched the second research question concerning cultural differences within the EP.

Email (see Appendix 1) was chosen as the means of approaching the MEPs in the initial stage because on their websites many of the MEPs hope that contact is only made via email. It also allowed clarify and justifying the purpose of the study clearly and shortly which according to Kvale (1996: 112), needs to be done for the ethical reasons too because it ensures that the interviewees are participating voluntarily. It was made explicit in the very beginning that the purpose of the study is most definitely not to evaluate their communication competence but rather examine their viewpoint on the issue. Furthermore, MEPs' anonymity as well as the confidentiality of the results was guaranteed. Consequently, the names of the interviewees or other identifiable factors will not be reported in this study.

In order to make the study interesting to the participants, it was emphasised how the study possibly contributes to the MEPs' knowledge about intercultural communication in their working environment. The study might also help them to define more profoundly what professionalism in their work is and what kind of intercultural skills it could encompass. It was also mentioned how the study could be useful for the electorate who could use the results as some kind of criteria for evaluating the candidates and their competence.

The questionnaire was emailed as an attachment (Appendix 2) to the fourteen Finnish MEPs on 30<sup>th</sup> of March 2005 and they were given approximately two weeks time to reply. It included some basic open-ended questions concerning intercultural interaction in their work as well as the request for a face-to-face interview. As only a minority had replied by the deadline the email was sent again on 18<sup>th</sup> of April and an extra two weeks to reply was allocated. At the end of April twelve MEPs had replied and eleven of them had answered to the questions. One MEP considered the questions too broad to

answer in the form of a questionnaire. Two of the fourteen Finnish MEPs did not reply at all.

Most of the MEPs replied very concisely and did not specify any concrete intercultural interaction situations. However, some respondents gave more extensive explanations or even examples of intercultural situations. A couple of MEPs commented on the research and the questionnaire in their responses as well. One MEP, for example, advised to study the web journals of the MEPs which turned out to be a valuable recommendation indeed.

There are some cogent reasons for collecting the first part of the data through the written questionnaires. First, it was considered crucial to gain some preliminary information of the MEPs' work in order to pose precise and convenient questions in the actual interview situation. Even though there are many books written about the European Parliament and the MEPs, their work still remains pretty distant and mysterious for an outsider. Secondly, it was supposed that by using written questionnaire as many MEPs as possible would participate in the study. It was considered more likely that most of them would answer to a short questionnaire than discuss the topic in face-to-face interviews. Thirdly, the data collected through questionnaires was thought to facilitate choosing the topics for the face-to-face interviews as well.

### **5.3.2 Semi-structured topic interviews**

The primary method of the study was semi-structured topic interviews with the MEPs. The interviews were conducted in order to examine more deeply the Finnish MEPs' experiences of the cultural differences in their work place and its impact on their work in different situations as well as their perceptions of appropriateness and effectiveness of communication in the intercultural situations.

The interviewees were selected on the grounds of the preliminary questionnaire where their willingness to participate in a face-to-face interview was inquired. In the questionnaires seven MEPs promised to participate in an interview but in the end only six Finnish MEPs were interviewed during April and May in 2005. One MEP who gave

his promise for an interview never replied afterwards when a time for an interview was suggested.

The interviewees, three women and three men, came from different political groups and backgrounds. Four of them were first term MEPs and two were re-elected. Two of the interviews were conducted via telephone call to Brussels and the rest in face-to-face appointments in Finland. Three of the face-to-face interviews were conducted in public places and one in the office of the interviewee. The length of the interviews varied from 30 to 60 minutes depending on the available time and the speed of the talk. All the interviews were conducted in Finnish, and recorded and transcribed afterwards. Initially, it was thought that the transcribed interviews could have been sent back to the interviewees for verification but unfortunately the idea had to be dropped because of the limited time of the interviewees. Nevertheless, one interviewee wanted to check afterwards the transcribed comments that were cited in the study without making any corrections, however.

The type of the interviews was semi-structured topic interview which is a half-structured interviewing technique. This implies that the interviews were not based on fixed interview questions but preceded according to some main themes. Semi-structured interviews were chosen for several reasons. According to Hirsjärvi & Hurme (2000: 47-48), in semi-structured interviews the subjects' interpretations of the researched issue are the main interest. Thus, the semi-structured topic interview was the most appropriate method for exploring the Finnish MEPs' perceptions on appropriate and effective communication in intercultural context. It also enabled them to describe more freely, than a structured interview would have, the aspects of intercultural communication that they find significant in their work and gave the interviewer a possibility to pose follow-up questions. Moreover, semi-structured interviewing technique was chosen instead of open interviews because the author wanted to avoid the problem that the interviews would be too much controlled by the interviewees. Many of the MEPs are professional communicators which could have quite easily led to a situation that the interview is dominated by them. Structuring the interviewees around some topics was thought to facilitate controlling the progression of the interview. Proceeding according to the topics also ensured that the focus of the interview remained within the framework of the research questions.

The main themes for the interviews were chosen on the grounds of the theoretical literature on ICC competence, the questionnaire answers, and the MEPs' published diaries. Questionnaire answers and the background information gained from the diaries were used for planning questions that would capture the context of the intercultural communication. The questionnaire answers showed, for instance, that plenary session, committee meetings and group meetings are the most intercultural contexts and consequently, the interaction in those intercultural settings was examined more deeply in the interviews. On the grounds of the questionnaire answers it was also decided that the interviews would focus especially on the interaction among the MEPs and the relationship between them – not on the interaction between the MEPs and the other reference groups such as lobbyists, and civil servants among others. Moreover, the interview questions were planned to address more closely those cultural differences that were brought up already in the questionnaire answers: differences in customs, differences in communication style and differences in style of confrontation.

Additionally, theories of ICC competence guided planning the interview structure even though none of the existing models was used as a framework in order to avoid imposing the questions on the interviewees. Especially The Profile of Interculturally Effective Person (Vulpe et al. 2000) and its major competencies relevant to this study gave some ideas for the interview themes. The interviews were structured into eight main themes (Appendix 2): multicultural working environment, political culture, cultural differences and communication, appropriateness and effectiveness of communication behaviour, cultural background and interaction situations, social relationships, language and advices to successors. Some background information was inquired in the beginning of the interviewing sessions. All the themes included several sub-questions of which those concerning communication behaviour formed the broadest group. Sub-questions were not, however, strictly followed but the interviews proceeded in the natural order that varied a lot depending on the interviewee. In the end the MEPs were given an opportunity to bring out some additional comments related to the issue.

The way questions were posed was carefully planned beforehand because the topic can be considered slightly sensitive. Some of the questions were, for example, posed in the passive form so that they would not be considered too intrusive. In the interview situation the MEPs were allowed to tell about their experiences as freely as possible. The MEPs were treated as specialists in their own field and work. Also the special

status of the MEPs was taken into consideration due to which formal address forms were used during the interview in most cases. The questions of anonymity and confidentiality were orally discussed and agreed on the interview situation with every participant and their permission to record the interview was asked.

#### **5.4 Data analysis and presentation of results**

The main focus of the analysis is on the data collected through semi-structured topic interviews but parts of the analysis are also based on questionnaires. Recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim but without marking paraverbal features because the aim was to analyse content rather than the language of the interviews.

The analysis is simply qualitative and it proceeded inductively. Transcribed interviews and questionnaire answers were first treated individually and all the different experiences and statements concerning the situational and relational context, cultural differences and appropriateness and effectiveness of communication were identified. This was done with every questionnaire and interview after which all the statements were categorised into three lists: the data dealing with the context, the data concerning the cultural differences and the data concerning the appropriateness and effectiveness of communication. Next, clusters of meanings were identified, examined in terms of the research questions and reduced into main themes for the presentation of the research results.

In the first phase of the analysis the data concerning the context of communication was collected together. The list dealing with the context of the communication included descriptions and experiences of interaction in the group meetings, committee meetings and plenary session, as well as interaction in some more informal contexts of communication such as aeroplanes, corridors, cafeterias, and elevators. In the analysis the emphasis is put on the formal contexts, group meetings, committee meetings and plenary session, because they were the most frequently mentioned intercultural contexts by the questionnaire respondents and the interviewees and their importance in the work of the MEPs was emphasised. These political contexts were also considered most interesting in defining the context specific and task-related intercultural skills for the MEPs since they are some special characteristics of the context and thus, make the EP



somewhat different from the other intercultural contexts. Furthermore, the statements concerning the relational context of communication were listed and the patterned regularities were sought.

Next, the data dealing with cultural differences was analysed in a similar manner. The list concerning cultural differences included experiences of differences in directness, small talk, sincerity, time tables, politeness, values, manners, connotations of words, body language, showing emotions, humour, quantity of speech, and disagreeing among many others. The recurring cultural differences were differences in customs, differences in directness, differences in politeness, differences in small talk, and differences in disagreeing. For the presentation of results these clusters were pulled together and reduced into three categories: differences in manners, differences in communication style and differences in styles of confrontation.

Finally, the information dealing with the appropriateness and effectiveness of communication was identified from the research data. The third list included the MEPs' perceptions of appropriate and effective communication behaviour in those intercultural situations that were most influenced by cultural differences. On the basis of the questionnaire answers the interview questions were aimed to map especially the features of effective speech and the appropriate way of presenting one's differing views since cultural differences in giving speeches and disagreeing were considered the most significant. Both are also some communicative actions that the MEPs engage in during committee and group meetings, and plenary session that were considered the most intercultural contexts. The perceptions of appropriateness and effectiveness included clear and pithy talk, diplomatic way of disagreeing, politeness in disagreeing, emotionalism in speeches, showing reciprocity in behaviour, participating in small talk, being active, being hard working, socialising, networking, good language skills, negotiating skills, lobbying, being friendly, showing respect, taking the others into consideration, and considering the cultural and historical background of the interlocutor. These statements were grouped under three categories that were named for the presentation of the results as persuading effectively and appropriately, confronting appropriately, lobbying and networking appropriately.

The results are reported descriptively by representing the MEPs' experiences and perceptions of the contexts of communication, intercultural communication situations

and appropriate and effective communication behaviour in the European Parliament. Verbatim extracts from the interviews are offered to demonstrate the meanings found from the data. However, repetitive words and the particles *niinku* (like) were left out from the examples in order to facilitate understanding as well as shorten the examples. The quotations are represented both in the original language (Finnish) and translated into English. The anonymity of the interviewees is maintained by not mentioning the names or other personal details of the interviewees. In connection of the examples abbreviations QW and QM (W=woman, M=man) refer to questionnaire respondents, and abbreviations IW and IM (W= woman, M=man) refer to interviewees.

Finally, the results are interpreted with an aim of pointing out the intercultural skills needed by the MEPs'. As the study is conducted from a Finnish perspective the results are discussed in terms of Finnish cultural and communication patterns. By comparing Finnish MEPs perceptions about competent intercultural communication with different theoretical conceptions of intercultural communication competence the study aims to define what constitutes competence for MEPs.

## 6 RESULTS

The results presented in this chapter are based on the eleven questionnaire answers (QW/QM) and six interviews (IW/IM) with a focus on the interviews. Some background information about the six interviewees is presented first. The situational and relational context for interaction, as found from the questionnaires and interviews, are presented next. Then, the chapter introduces the MEPs' thoughts on intercultural communication within the EP after which the cultural differences experienced by the MEPs are reported in terms of national and political culture. Finally, the criteria of effectiveness and appropriateness of those communication actions which are most influenced by cultural differences are presented.

### 6.1 Different ways to the European Parliament

The first questions of the interviews endeavoured to map the MEPs' way to the EP; what was their political experience before the EP and how did they prepare themselves to the MEP career. Furthermore, their previous international experiences and knowledge of intercultural communication were inquired.

Two of the interviewees (IW1, IW2) had a very long political career in national politics before they were elected to the EP. Additionally, one interviewee (IM3) had a ten year-long career in national politics before becoming an MEP. One interviewee had political experience from the national politics in the 70's and a diplomatic career (IM1). One interviewee (IW3) had political experience from the EP only. One interviewee (IM2) had not worked as a politician before his career as an MEP but was intensively involved in European politics in other ways. The previous political experience turned out to be a factor that had an influence on some answers of the interviewees. Those four (IM1, IM3, IW1, IW2) who were experienced in national politics, for example, often compared the EP with the Finnish parliament. Besides, those two (IW1, IW2) who had the longest political career had a tendency to speak about politics more often than the other interviewees. On the contrary, the one interviewee (IW3) who did not have any political experience before her career at the EP considered that she could not describe

the political culture of the EP. Nonetheless, she gave rather analytical answers of the political life per se.

In addition to the political experience, the extent of international experience seemed to have an influence on some answers. Two of the interviewees (IM1, IM2) had international working experience and a longer expatriate experience. One interviewee (IW3) had studied and lived abroad for a short time and the remaining three (IW1, IW2, IM3) had some occasional international contacts. Two of them (IW1, IM3) stated that they were not particularly internationally oriented before their career as MEPs. The two interviewees (IM1, IM2) who had the most extensive international experience handled some questions about cultural differences as certainties. This might be a sign of their ICC competence as according to Imahori and Lanigan (1989: 279), past intercultural contacts do have a positive effect on one's competence level and directly influences the knowledge component of ICC competence.

Only one of the interviewee (IM1) had theoretical knowledge of intercultural communication and in fact, he had even given lectures on intercultural communication. This had a clear impact on the way he expressed his experiences of cultural differences. He used the terminology of intercultural communication literature more when reporting on his experiences and kept to the topic more strictly than the other interviewees. In addition, one interviewee (IM2) considered his life in general to be so intercultural that it is comparable to theoretical knowledge of intercultural communication. He had studied, lived and worked abroad for a significant time and had a multicultural family. The other four interviewees (IW1, IW2, IW3, and IM3) did not have any theoretical knowledge of intercultural communication. Two of them (IW1, IW2) specified, however, that they had paid some attention to intercultural issues in their current position.

Five of the six interviewees had not prepared themselves to the work in the EP beforehand. The MEPs had not received much advice about a career as an MEP either. One interviewee (IW3) told that she had prepared herself by studying European affairs and legislation issues. The others considered their existing competencies to be sufficient. One MEP (M1) reported that he is studying French language at the moment.

## 6.2 Intercultural interaction and communication within the EP

The aim to define the specific communication situations where intercultural interaction occurs on the grounds of the questionnaire answers somewhat failed as most of the respondents did not give any concrete examples of the communication situations. Nevertheless, the information compiled from the questionnaires certainly gave a good picture of the work of the MEPs and facilitated choosing the themes for the interviews. The questionnaire data gave an idea of the degree of interculturalness of the communication and the MEPs' attitude towards the cultural diversity. Furthermore, on the grounds of the questionnaire answers the situational and the relational contexts of communication could be somewhat specified. The questionnaire respondents named plenary session, committee meetings and the group meetings as most important places for interaction.

### 6.2.1 It is "absolutely everywhere"...

Based on the eleven questionnaire answers it can be stated that the work of an MEP is very intercultural by nature. Eight of the respondents considered all MEPs' duties intercultural. The only exception is the work that takes place in Finland. One respondent (QW1) gave a good definition of the intercultural interactions faced by MEPs.

*"Työmme luonteesta johtuen melkein kaikki tehtävät Brysselissä ja Strasbourgissa sisältävät kansainvälistä vuorovaikutusta."* (QW1)

*"Due to the nature of our work almost all the duties taking place in Brussels and Strasbourg include international interaction."* (QW1, translated by KL)

The meetings of the political groups and committees were considered the most important duties in which the degree of interculturalness is very high. In addition to the formal meetings, there are more informal work-related intercultural interaction situations such as chats in the corridors, elevators, cafeterias and having work-related lunches and dinners. One respondent (QW2) described intercultural interaction and communication in the EP as follows:

*"Kaikkia päätösehdotuksia koskevat keskustelut käydään useista maista peräisin olevien ihmisten kesken. Niitä käydään meppien työhuoneissa, kokoushuoneissa, käytävillä, matkalla lentokentälle/kentältä, eli ihan joka paikassa. Vessan koppero lienee ainoa poikkeus."* (QW2)

*“All the conversations related to draft resolutions are conducted with people from different countries. They take place in MEPs’ offices, negotiation rooms, corridors, on the way to/from the airport, that is, absolutely everywhere. The toilet is probably the only exception.”* (QW2, translated by KL)

On the grounds of the questionnaires, the interview questions were planned to focus especially on the formal interaction within the EP: the group meetings, the committee meetings and plenary session. In addition to being the most important working contexts they were considered highly interactive and intercultural by the questionnaire respondents too.

### 6.2.2 ... “But it is nice!”

Although the questionnaires and the interviews were not directly aimed to map the MEPs’ attitudes towards the cultural diversity, some of them emphasised their positive thoughts about the cultural diversity of the EP. According to the profile of IEP (Vulpe et al. 2000: 13), enjoying the experience of living and working in a new culture is a core competency of an interculturally effective person and therefore, the attitudes of the Finnish MEPs are shortly reported here. Two interviewees explained how the increasing cultural diversity brought by the fifth enlargement almost inspires them. One respondent (QM2) reported:

*“Täytyy sanoa, että kyllähän kulttuuriset stereotypiat myönteisessä mielessä vaan ovat vahvistuneet. Itälaajentuminen on tietysti antanut aivan uuden piristysruiskeen. Mielestäni vain mukavaa.”* (QM2)

*“I must say that the cultural stereotypes have only enhanced but only in a positive manner. Enlargement to the East has brightened up the EP. In my opinion it’s only nice.”* (QM2, translated by KL)

One MEP (IW2) said that cultural diversity was one of the reasons why she started to consider her candidacy in the elections in the first place.

*”Mää todella alun perin sillon kun suomi liitty EU:hun olin sitä mieltä et mä en mepiks ainakaan ikinä halua että mä en halua istuu koko elämäni lentokoneessa. Mut sitten tosiaan viime vuonna alkutalvesta mua rupes nimenomaan kiinnostamaan se että nyt kun eu laajenee ja tulee nää uudet jäsenmaat niin siitä tulee kulttuurisesti erilainen tilanne sinne europarlamenttiin. Se oli oikeestaan ensimmäinen semmonen asia, joka sai mun niinku päätäni kääntymään.”* (IW2)

*"When Finland joined the EU I really thought that I never want to be an MEP and sit my whole life in the aeroplane. But last year in the early winter I got interested because of the EU-enlargement and the new member countries that would bring a culturally new situation to the EP. That was the first thing that changed my opinion."* (IW2, translated by KL)

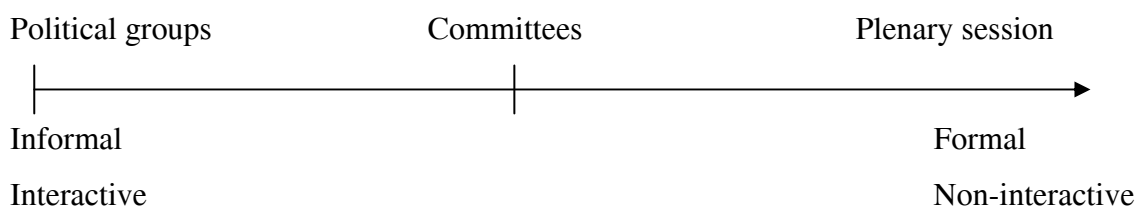
Some interviewees believed, however, that cultural diversity also brings more challenges to their work. One MEP (IW1) described the challenges of working in the culturally diverse environment:

*"Pikku hiljaa tulee tietty väsymys siihen raskauteen mitä tavallaan pärjääminen siinä haasteellisessa ympäristössä aiheuttaa. Et toisaaltahan se on erittäin hyvä koska mitään rutinoitumista ei pääse tapahtumaan..."* (IW1)

*"Little by little one gets tired to the back-breaking of the work what coping within the challenging environment causes. But one way it is good because then one does not get stuck to the routines..."* (IW1, translated by KL)

### 6.2.3 Interaction in the plenary session, committees and political groups

Plenary session, committee meetings and group meetings are the most important parts of the MEPs' work (see e.g. Raunio 1996). Questionnaire answers showed that committee meetings and group meetings are the contexts where the most intercultural interaction takes place. It was found through the interviews that interaction within these three contexts differs by nature. The Finnish MEPs remarked that there is not so much interaction in the plenary while the meetings of the political groups and committees give more place for discussion. The same has been mentioned, for instance, by Corbett et al. (2003: 146) as well. Additionally, the group meetings appeared to be less formal compared with the committee meetings and plenary session. One interviewee (IW3) described the degree of formality and interactivity as presented in the figure below:



The plenary session appeared to be more formal and less interactive than committee meetings and group meetings. According to the interviews there is a slight difference between the committee and group meetings too. The difference has to be understood in

respect of the different functions of the three venues. The group meetings which are devoted to discussing and debating on the common position of the group in political issues (Corbett et al. 2003: 84) were considered most interactive and less formal than the other contexts. Though, one MEP (IM3) also considered the group meetings very formal. He came from a different political group than the other MEPs which might be a reason for his differing view. Raunio (1996: 74) has pointed out that there is variation how formally the political groups are organised mainly depending on their size. Some MEPs stated that the possible disagreements and contradictions are brought up and discussed especially in the group meetings. One MEP (IM1) stated that having the same political view does not diminish the differences between the MEPs from different nationalities.

*”Mut kyllä kansalliset erityispiirteet esimerkiksi on voimakkaampia usein kuin puolue...Ja usein on vaikea niin kun vaik ois samasta puolueesta niin on vaikea ymmärtää toisen ajattelutapaa. Että britin on vaikea ymmärtää jotain italiaista vaikka ne ois samaa puoluetta kansainvälisesti.” (IM1)*

*”But the national characteristics are more important than the party... And sometimes it is difficult to understand the view of the other even if s/he came from the same party. That is, a Brit has difficulties to understand an Italian even though in international terms they belong to the same party.” (IM1, translated by KL)*

The political dimension of the group meetings may actually increase the influence of the cultural difference. Singer (1987: 226) states, for instance, that in political negotiations there is no technocratic language that would facilitate the communication.

Whereas the group meetings are contexts of political discussion the committee meetings are a place for legislative work (Hix 1999: 78). According to Vuorikoski (2004: 80), the discourse of the committee meetings and plenary session is shaped by their legislative function. According to the interviewees, the legislative role of the committee shows in the formality of the interaction. One MEP (IW1) characterised the committee meetings to be very fact-oriented as they deal with legislative issues.

*“Mut sittenhän meillä on valiokuntaryhmien kokouksia, jotka vielä selkeämmin keskittyy ihan siihen, että mitä mieltä ollaan jostakin muutosehdotuksesta, että ollaanko tällä kannalla vai tällä kannalla. Et se on hyvin hyvin asiaorientoitunutta.” (IW1)*

*”But then we have the committee meetings which are even more focused on discussing the committee’s view on an amendment; whether to take one position or another. It is very, very fact-oriented.” (IW1, translated by KL)*



Another MEP (IM1) described the committee meetings as *a miniature of the plenary session* as it brings together MEPs across the political groups. The committees really are a miniature as they might have some 30-100 members, which is only a fraction of the MEPs of the plenary session (732 members).

Plenary session is determined by the Rules of Procedure (Corbett et al. 2003: 152) and according to the interviewees the most formal context of interaction. The speaking time and turns are strictly restricted and basically there is no place for interaction. Some interviewees had noticed, however, that there are other means of expressing diverging views such as demonstrating nonverbally that was perceived rather informal. One MEP (IM1) told how non-verbal means was used for demonstrating against the Pope:

*”Paavin kuoleman johdosta parlamentissa vietettiin minuutin hiljainen hetki. Niin osa porukasta käveli salista ulos mielenosoituksena, koska katso että paavi oli tehnyt elämässään enemmän paha kuin hyvää. Toiset nousee ylös, seisoo pää riipuksissa ja toiset kävelee ulos.”* (IM1)

*”Due to the Pope’s death there was a silent moment in the Parliament. Some of the people walked out from the plenary as a demonstration because in their opinion the Pope had caused more troubles than good things. The others stood up while the others walk out.”* (IM1, translated by KL)

Furthermore, one MEP (IW2) described another way of demonstrating that she considered informal compared with the Finnish parliament:

*”Siinä vaiheessa kun äänestettiin turkin jäsenyysneuvottelujen alottamista koskevasta parlamentin kannanotosta niin meil oli semmosia lappuja jossa luki englanniks, turkiks ja vissin vähän muillakin kielillä että kyllä.”* (IW2)

*”When there was a vote of the statement of the Parliament about starting the membership negotiations with Turkey we had such posters which communicated ‘Yes!’ in English, in Turkish and might be in some other languages too.”* (IW2, translated by KL)

Corbett et al. (2003: 152) note that the order in the plenary session can be perceived as either calm or lively depending on the nationality of the evaluator. One interviewee (IW2) pointed out that demonstrating and interjections distinguish the EP from the Finnish Parliament where they are prohibited. Hence, from a Finnish perspective the plenary sessions might look even *bohemian*, like one MEP (IW2) described.

One interviewee (IW2) brought up that the more formal the context is the more problems cultural diversity creates. When the MEPs discuss something in the cross-political working groups the interaction might be really relaxed. On the contrary, in

more formal meetings even connotations of the words might cause disagreements as they are perceived differently depending on the national context.

*”Kun parlamentti hyväksyi päätöslauselman toisen maailmasodan päättymisen kuusikymmentävuotispäivän johdosta, niin sen sisällöstä oli käyty siis todella tiukat neuvottelut... Esimerkiksi Baltian maiden venäläisvähemmistöä edustavat mepit oli hurjana sanan ’miehitys’ käytöstä, koska ne tulkitse asian siten, että se tarkoittaa heille sitä, että heille ei koskaan tulla antamaan täysiä kansalaisoikeuksia. Että minkälaiset sanankänteet nyt sitten tyydyttää just sitten tai on ainakin siedettäviä sitte näin monikansalliselle jengille.” (IW2)*

*”When the Parliament adopted the resolution on the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War its content was a result of really difficult negotiations. For example, the MEPs who represent the Russian minority of the Baltic countries were really shocked about the use of the word ’occupation’, because they interpreted that for them it would mean that they will never have the full civil rights. So, what kind of wording would satisfy or at least be accepted by such a multinational gang.” (IW2, translated by KL)*

In short, the committee and group meetings that the questionnaire respondents mentioned as contexts of intercultural interaction turned out to be more interactive and less informal than the plenary session. According to the interviewees they differ among themselves to some extent as well. The differences might derive from their diverse functions as well as composition of the meetings.

#### **6.2.4 Relationships among the MEPs**

The most important form of co-operation among the MEPs seems to be working in the committees where the work is mostly law-drafting work. Committees were regarded as most important reference groups by many questionnaire respondents. One respondent (QW3) summarised the forms of co-operation among the MEPs as follows:

*”Kaikkea [yhteistyötä] mikä liittyy päätösten valmisteluun. Tärkein viiteryhmä on oma valiokunta ja sen jäsenet. Seuraavaksi tärkein oman ryhmän jäsenet ja sitten valiokunnan muiden ryhmien jäsenet.” (QW3)*

*”All kind [of co-operation] that relates to drafting resolutions. The most important reference group is one’s own committee and its members. The next most important is the members of one’s group and then, the committee members of other groups.” (QW3, translated by KL)*

Two of the respondents (IQM, IQM) pointed out that they co-operate first and foremost with their foreign colleagues — not with the other Finnish MEPs. Actually, through the

interviews the relationships among the Finnish appeared to be rather complex. Many MEPs considered them very competitive mainly because of the competition about the attention of the national media.

In addition to their colleagues from other countries, the MEPs interact with the civil servants of the Parliament and Commission, lobbyists, and diplomats who often come from foreign cultures. On the grounds of the questionnaire answers, the interviews were planned for examining the interaction between the MEPs, in particular. The other groups of people with whom they interact were excluded because contacts with them were not mentioned to be the most significant for the work.

Every MEP has 731 colleagues and one interview theme explored the relationships between them as perceived by the Finnish MEPs. All the interviewees had developed some relationships within the working community. The relationships seemed to most often emerge because of common interests and goals. One interviewee (IW1) mentioned that she has most in common with the MEPs who started in the EP at the same time with her. One MEP (IM3) believed that the MEPs might cluster together in compliance with the status; those who are former ministers, for example, are *like-minded*. This could be considered a sign of what Singer (1987: 225, 232) calls interelite communication among the diplomats and politicians. The MEPs who have a similar professional background are members of the same discourse community which forms a common ground for interaction and thus, facilitates communication.

Relationships among the MEPs were considered mostly professional. Many MEPs believed that this is a consequence of the tight schedules. Even with the closer colleagues the topics of conversation are often work-related. One first-term MEP (IW2) explained:

*”Se duuni vie niin ison osan, et tavallaan siihen muuhun hölpötykseen jää sen verran vähän aikaa. Nekin ihmiset joiden kanssa kokee ihan ystävyyttä, niin asiaasioista niidenkin kanssa kuitenkin puhuu, koska niitä asiaasioita on aina toimitettavana.”* (IW2)

*”The job takes such a big piece of time that there is only little time for other chatting. Even with those people who I consider to be my friends we speak business because there are always some business to dispatch.”* (IW2, translated by KL)

Some interviewees mentioned that compared to the Finnish Parliament there are not so many possibilities to create real friendships within the EP. One experienced MEP (IW1) believed that cultural diversity is one reason why personal relationships evolve less frequently in the EP.

*”Suomen eduskunnassa on paljon helpompi olla työpäivän jälkeen olla työpäivän jälkeen kollegoitten kanssa tekemisissä, koska ne taustat ja kiinnostuksen aiheet ja kieli erityisesti on yhteinen. Mutta täällä kun on niin paljon eri virikkeiden kanssa tekemisissä päivät päästyään niin ei enää sellasta työajan ulkopuolella olevaa kaveerausta oo niin paljon kun kuvittelis.” (IW1)*

*”In the Finnish Parliament it is easier to spend time with colleagues after working day because the backgrounds and the interests and the language, in particular, are common. But here one is surrounded by so many different stimulation all day long that there is not much getting together after working hours.” (IW1, translated by KL)*

Furthermore, one MEP (IM3) stated that being an MEP is a rather *lonely job* which according to Blomgren is (2003: 217) very common opinion among the MEPs who have different experience from the national parliament. The fact that there are no permanent support groups that would help in the legislative work, for instance, puts more pressure on individual MEPs, as stated by two interviewees.

Nevertheless, the professional relationships might evolve into friendships too. Three interviewees told that they have developed some personal relationships with their colleagues. One second-term MEP (IW3) pointed out that the life of an MEP requires making friends with the colleagues because of the lack of free time outside the EP:

*”Eihän meillä kaikilla vapaa-aikaakaan oo paljon. Et missä välissä sitä sitten saadaan ystäviä?...Niin sillonhan toisaalta pitää ajatella niin että työyhteisöstä pitää löytää itselleen ystäviä, ettei tuu yksinäiseks ihmiseks.” (IW3)*

*”We do not have lots of free time either. How do we make friends then?...In order not to feel lonely one has to find friends from the working community.” (IW3, translated by KL)*

Two interviewees told that more informal context had contributed to their relationship building. The relationships might get deeper through the committees' delegations to the member countries, for instance. One MEP (IM1) reported:

*”Noissa muodollisissa [tilanteissa] ei ehdi eikä pysty silleen [ystävystymään]. Kun on pakko istua monta tuntia lentokoneessa jonkun vieressä, niin sit se näyttölee lompakostaan lasten kuvia ja koirien kuvia ja jotkut kertoo ihan henkilökohtasia asioitakin. Ja sen jälkeen on paljon helpompi sitten just asioita hoitaa jos on tullut sen verran tutuksi.” (IM1)*

*”There is no time or chance [to make friends] in formal contexts. When one must sit many hours next to someone in the aeroplane then s/he starts to show pictures of the kids and dogs and some might tell even personal issues. And afterwards it is easier to go about matters when acquaintanceship exists.”*  
(IM1, translated by KL)

All in all, the MEPs agreed that personal relationships would contribute to advocating political issues within the EP. One MEP (IM1) described the meaning of relationships building: *“Muuten siellä saa ihan rauhassa huutaa itsekseen omaa asiaansa”* (*Otherwise you can shout your own businesses at leisure*, translated by KL). Due to the time pressure, formal context, different language, or independency of the work personal relationships were, however, experienced difficult to create. The only interview (IM2) who believed that he has many personal advantageous relationships with the colleagues had many contacts and relationships from Europe previous to the EP.

### **6.3 Experiences of cultural differences**

Given, that culture has an impact on communication (see e.g. Hall 1959) recognising the existence of cultural differences is essential to ICC competence. Herein, cultural differences between the representatives of different cultures were of interest also because the skills are thought to develop as responses to problematic issues of communication (Hecht et al 1993: 28). Consequently, the MEPs were asked to report their experiences of cultural differences. All of the interviewees except one agreed that different nationalities and cultures are observable in the EP. The one interviewee (IM3) who made the exception and did not consider cultural differences significant believed that the differences are only linguistic.

The cultural differences that emerged from the questionnaire answers were confirmed to be the most notable through interviews and can be presented in clusters: differences in customs, differences in communication style and differences in style of confrontation. In the questionnaires none of the questionnaire respondents clearly reported differences in political culture but in the interviews a question of political culture was included in order to gain more information of the political climate, the atmosphere of the EP. The cultural differences that were found to be most significant in

the questionnaire answers as well as the interviews are presented next; first in terms of national culture and from a Finnish perspective and then, in terms of political culture.

### **6.3.1 Northern vs. Southern Europeans**

Some argue (e.g. Shore 2001) that the sense of European identity is rather strong among the European elites, those working with the EU. Nevertheless, the results of this study show that the MEPs, who can be regarded as political elite in the core of the EU, identify primarily with their national or regional culture and consider the cultural differences among the MEPs significant. In terms of national culture the differences seem to appear especially between Northern and Southern Europeans. The same has been found by McDonald (2000: 66) who has studied national identification in the European Commission. The division into southern and northern countries described by the MEPs seemed to follow the one presented by McDonald who considers the countries generally in the north to be Britain, Ireland, Netherlands, Denmark, Germany, Luxembourg, Belgium (sometimes), Sweden, Finland and Austria. Those in south are France, Spain, Italy, Greece and Portugal. (McDonald 2000: 66.)

The division into southern and northern cultures mainly corresponds with Hofstede's (1980, 1991, 2001) findings concerning cultural variation among nationalities in individualism-collectivism, low and high uncertainty avoidance, masculinity-femininity and low and high power distance dimensions. Especially Greece and Portugal fall far from Finland in many dimensions. While Finland (score 33) is rather low on power distance dimension Portugal (score 63) and Greece (60) are above average. Furthermore, Finland scores (59) average on uncertainty avoidance dimension whereas Greece (112) and Portugal (104) have the highest scores on the uncertainty avoidance dimension. The scores differ significantly also on individualism-collectivism dimension where Finland (score 63) is clearly more individualistic than Greece (35) and Portugal (27).

In the interviewing situations the interviewees were not asked which cultures they perceive most foreign or close but the dichotomy developed alongside with the answers to the question of cultural differences within the EP. The differences in customs,

communication style and style of confrontation were often interpreted in terms of North-South dichotomy.

The differences in the North-South dimension were mentioned by all of the interviewees. In addition to southern European countries, the interviewees referred to *Catholic countries*, *Mediterranean countries*, or *countries rooted in Latin languages*. The categorisation follows also the one made by Hix (1999: 141) who argues that cultural differences within the EU appear in the Catholic vs. Protestant, North vs. South and Latin vs. Germanic dimensions. The interviewees considered the Finns equal to the *Northern Europeans* and *Scandinavians*. Two interviewees considered the Balts as Northern Europeans as well and two interviewees considered the British and Germans similar to the Finnish.

### 6.3.1.1 Differences in manners

Even though the focus was on the cultural differences in communication many interviewees described the visible part of culture, manners, as well. Four interviewees remarked that customs play a more important role in southern than in northern European cultures. One interviewee (IM1) described the phenomenon as follows:

*”Kaikki tää niin sanottu vanha tapakulttuuri on sitä voimakkaampaa mitä etelämmäksi mennään.”* (IM1)

*”All this so called old customs is stronger when one goes more to the South.”* (IM1, translated by KL)

Another interviewee (IW1) mentioned that various politeness rituals are employed especially by the MEPs from the Catholic countries whereas the Finns cannot be considered the most polite ones:

*”...liittyen sitten siihen tietynlaiseen kohteliaisuusrituaaleihin niin ehkä siinä on sitten tällanen sanosko nyt katolisen Euroopan tyylihän se enemmän on... Kaikki tällaset et esimerkiks annetaan tietä siis huomataan aina että on muitakin siinä tilassa kuin itse ja pyritään sillä tavalla tekemään olo mukavaksi että huomioidaan ihmiset siinä ympärillä. Joko puheissa tai teoissa...Mut melkein se, et jos joku osoittaa et ole hyvä ja mene, niin se ei oo suomalainen.”* (IW1)

*”...related to some kind of politeness rituals, let’s say that it is rather a style of Catholic countries...Paying attention to other people, like giving way, are ways*

*of making the people around feeling comfortable. Either in words or in acts...But it is often not a Finn who points that: please go first.” (IW1, translated by KL)*

Even if manners are only a surface of the cultures, a top of the iceberg (e.g. Salo-Lee 1996: 7-8), the interviewees believed that they play an important role within the EP. One interviewee (IW3) stated:

*”Ja näil ei oo, vois joku sanoo, et ei mitään merkitystä. Mut totta kai näillä on merkitystä, et kuinka kotonaan on täällä ja minkä vaikutelman olemisestaan antaa, että viihtyykö siinä.” (IW3)*

*”And someone could say these are not of importance. But of course they are, that is how home you feel here and what kind of impression you give about your being here; how comfortable one feels.” (IW3, translated by KL)*

The example also demonstrates the importance of enjoying the intercultural experience for ICC competence (see Vulpe et al. 2000: 13). By understanding the cultural variation in customs and adjusting one’s behaviour accordingly might be interpreted positively by the interlocutor and hence, lead to the judgement of competence.

### **6.3.1.2 Differences in communication styles**

In verbal communication the differences in relation to the Southern Europeans appeared especially in communication style. This finding is to a great extent consistent with theorisations about differences in communication styles made by Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988) who have explained the differences in communication styles by cultural values (Hofstede) and low- and high context orientations (Hall).

Many MEPs had noticed differences in directness of communication when communicating with the Southern Europeans. According to the interviewees, the Finnish express their intentions rather explicitly and directly compared to the Southern Europeans. Differences in communication style might occur in the communication process too. One interviewee (IM3) had noticed that the goals of the interaction might be totally different; whereas the Finns are eager to reach a prompt solution the Southern Europeans are more interested in extensive discussions. The following example demonstrates both the difference in directness and in the process of communication:



*“...suomalaiset menee heti to the point; et me halutaan heti nopeasti päätöksiä ja selvittää ratkasuja. Ja sit on taas nuo eteläeurooppalaiset - ja kyllä ruotsalaisetkin - on sellasia diskuteeraajia et ne vaan puhuu ja puhuu ja puhuu. Ja voi sanoo et monesti se prosessi ja se itsensä ilmaistuksi saaminen on melkein tärkeempi tai ainakin yhtä tärkeä kun se puhe, lopputulos. Meillä taas ei kiinnosta niinkään se keskustelu vaan kiinnostaa nopeat tulokset ja eteenpäinmeno.” (IM3)*

*”...the Finns go directly to the point; we want immediate decisions and solutions. And then there are those Southern Europeans - and the Swedish as well – who are such debaters that they just talk and talk and talk. And one can say that often the process and expressing oneself are more important or at least as important as the talk, the outcome.” (IM3, translated by KL)*

The statement also describes well the difference between instrumental and affective style of communication defined by Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988: 112-114). In the example the Finnish style that is described as more goal-oriented corresponds with the characteristics of instrumental style common to individualistic low-context cultures. On the contrary, the Southern Europeans, who the interviewee noticed to be more interested in the process, have characteristics of the representatives of affective style who tend to be more expressive and negotiating. According to Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988: 115), affective style is typical for the people in collectivistic, high-context cultures, hereby in southern European cultures.

A few MEPs had perceived that the content of the messages differ on the North-South dimension too. They believed that the Finnish manner of speech is more fact-oriented than that of Southern Europeans who tend to be more expressive. One MEP (IM3) described:

*”Taas kreikkalaiset on sit taas että ajatellaan että on vähän toisen tyyppinen tapa ja he on monipuheisia ja enemmän tunteikkaita ja ja enemmän ulospäin suuntautuneita. Suomalaiset on ehkä asiaorientoituneita.” (IM3)*

*”The Greeks are thought to have another manner of speech and they are of many words and more emotional and more extrovert. The Finns are rather fact-oriented.” (IM3, translated by KL)*

The example illustrates also the difference between elaborate vs. succinct styles of communication as described by Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988: 105-108). The Greeks who tend to use more expressive language are representatives of elaborate communication style while the Finnish, who say only what is needed, are representatives of succinct communication style. The different styles of communication predict difficulties in many communicative activities MEPs engage in. The differences

in communication style will be discussed later in this chapter in terms of the appropriateness and effectiveness of persuading.

### 6.3.1.3 Differences in styles of confrontation

It is clear that being a politician involves opposing to others (Wodak 2004: 381, Bayley 2004: 8). Furthermore, it has been recognised that the styles of confrontation vary across cultures (e.g. Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey 1988; Bennett 1998). The Finnish MEPs had noticed the differences in styles of confrontation too. Herein, the differences were again perceived to appear between the Northern and Southern Europeans. One interviewee (IW1) described how the difference in directness between the Finnish and the Spanish or the Greek shows in contradicting:

*”Jos on kritisoitavaa jonkun ehdotusta kohtaan niin suomalainen sanoo, että: ‘Minä olen eri mieltä!’. Joku vaikka espanjalainen tai ehkä kreikkalainen nyt erityisesti: ‘Tämä oli loistava puheenvuoro, minä voin yhtyä lähes kaikkiin esitettyihin asioihin, tästä asiasta olen kuitenkin eri mieltä.’ Ja sitten päädytään ehkä siihen että koko ajatus oli, mikä oli esitetty, niin ihan väärä.”* (IW1)

*”When a Finn wants to criticise a draft s/he says that: ‘I disagree!! When a Spanish or especially a Greek [MEP says]: ‘This was a magnificent speech, I can agree with almost all the presented issues, but in this issue I, however, disagree.’ And finally the whole idea that was presented is wrong.”* (IW1, translated by KL)

The example illustrates the difference between direct and indirect communication style that originates from difference in cultural values. The representatives of more collectivistic cultures, the Greeks, employ a rather indirect style of criticising in order to maintain group harmony whereas the representatives of more individualistic cultures, the Finnish, seek to follow the norm of honesty (see Gudykunst 1988: 104). In the styles of confrontation the Finnish were noticed to be rather similar with the British and other Nordic countries. One MEP (IW1) characterised:

*”Saksalaiset ja britit on enemmän meidän kaltasia mutta kyllähän saksassa on tätä muodollista kohteliaisuutta kuitenkin aika paljon. Mut että britit ja pohjoismaat, skotlanti me ollaan niinku tämmösiä aika suoraviivasia.”* (IW1)

*”The Germans and the Brits are more similar to us but in Germany there is more certain formal politeness. But the Brits and the Nordic countries, Scotland, we are quite one could say straightforward.”* (IW1, translated by KL)

One interviewee had noticed a difference in the styles of confrontation between the Finnish and the British as well which corresponds with Hofstede's (2001: 321) argument that political discourse in Britain is more adversarial than in the Nordic countries because the British culture can be regarded as more masculine than the Finnish culture. One MEP (IW2) described the British style of confrontation as follows:

*"Esimerkiksi briteistä aika monet on sellasia, et ne ilmasee ittensä aika kärkevästi, mutta tollanen brittikeskustelukulttuuri on aika kärkevien ilmaisuuden kulttuuri... niin kauan ilmeisesti kun pysyy vaan sanoissaan niin ei oo ylärajaa sille skaalalle mihin sitten puututtais."* (IW2)

*"Many of the British, for instance, express themselves pretty sharply but the British conversation culture is a culture of sharp expressions. As long as you keep your word there is no limit for the scale into which issues one may interfere."* (IW2, translated by KL)

It is evident that there exist parallel styles of confrontation as the styles of confrontation derive from cultural patterns. What then is the appropriate way of expressing one's differing view will be discussed later on when the results concerning appropriateness and effectiveness of confrontation are presented.

### **6.3.2 Being a Finn in the European Parliament**

Interculturally effective persons should be able to explain how they are influenced by their own culture too (Vulpe et al. 2000: 18). Being able to articulate the potential interpersonal problems that Finnish communication behaviour may create turned out to be an easy task for the MEPs. All of the interviewees had remarked on some Finnish behavioural patterns when interacting in intercultural contexts. As presented in the previous chapters Finnish behavioural and communication patterns were considered to be different especially in relation to southern European cultures.

Some communication behaviours were thought to be interpreted negatively by the representatives of the southern European cultures. Many interviewees had remarked how the Finnish have a tendency to state their message rather directly which they believed could give a negative impression. One interviewee had remarked how the Finnish tend to go directly to the point whereas the representatives of other cultures may pay more attention to building a relationship between the interlocutors. One interviewee (IM1) described the difference as follows:

*“Ne on ne vanhat totuudet ettei esimerkiksi kannattaa eteläeurooppalaisten kanssa mennä suoraan asiaan vaan on pakko tutustua ensin.” (IM1)*

*“It is an old truth that one should not go directly to the point with the Southern Europeans but it is necessary to get to know the other person first.” (IM1, translated by KL)*

This is an example of difference between the task and relationship orientated cultures as well. It has been found that members of collectivistic cultures put more emphasis on relationship between the interlocutors than the members of individualistic cultures who are primarily focused on the task (see e.g. Adler 2002: 48-49).

Another feature of Finnish culture that the interviewees believed to be problematic when communicating with the foreign colleagues is the Finnish succinct way of expression. One MEP (IW1) characterised the Finnish style of communication as follows:

*”...kyllä monet sitten ehkä sitä kattoo ainakin aluks vähän oudoksuen, että ei olla kohteliaita, eikä sitä sellasta rituaalia oteta mukaan siihen kommunikointiin, mikä tavallaan pehmentää kaikkee sanomista”. (IW1)*

*”...Many might consider it rather weird first that we are not polite and do not take a kind of ritual into the communication which would tone the message down.” (IW1, translated by KL)*

From Finnish perspective representatives of other cultures, the Southern Europeans in particular, have a tendency to chatter too much. Conversely, the interviewees believed that the other people might even be surprised at the concise way of Finnish expression. One interviewee (IW1) gave a felicitous example of the Finnish curtness and other's perception of it:

*“No, esimerkiksi yhdessä sovittelussa mä sanoin kun kysyttiin et mitä mieltä mitä mieltä esittelijä on, onko esittelijä sitä [mieltä] että niinku tää on hyväksyttävissä vai ei, niin mä sanoin: kyllä! Niin kaikki mielti, et mitä nyt? Että sulla on puheenvuoro. Että sellaseen ei oo totuttu, että joku voi olla niin lyhytsananen.” (IW1)*

*”Once in a conciliation when I was asked what the rapporteur thinks; does the rapporteur think that this is acceptable or not, I answered: Yes! Everyone was thinking what is going on? You have been given the floor. People are not used to it that someone can be so curt.” (IW1, translated by KL)*

Directness and conciseness of expression are not, of course, only a negative thing and many MEPs believed that it is sometimes actually appreciated by the other MEPs as the speaking time is often limited. One interviewee (IW3) stated:

*”Sitä arvostetaan et meil on yleensä aika lyhyet puheenvuorot, et meistä tiedetään se et me ei rasiteta muita semmosella jaarittelulla.” (IW3)*

*”It is appreciated that we often give rather short speeches. People know that we don’t burden others with chattering.” (IW3, translated by KL)*

In addition to succinct and direct style of communication, one interviewee (IM1) believed that the lack of good manners creates an uncultured impression especially in the eyes of Southern Europeans:

*”Etelästä katsoen pohjoiseen...Kyllä sitä vähän ehkä yksinkertaisina ja sivistymättöminä. [Suomalaisilla] Ei ole käytöstapoja...Esimerkiksi saksalaiset ja ranskalaiset teitttelevät edelleen. Ihan siis sinuttelu on erittäin harvinaista.” (IM1)*

*”Looking from South to the North...A little bit simple and uncultured. [The Finns] do not have good manners...The Germans and the French, for example, still use formal address forms. Using Informal address forms is very rare.” (IM1, translated by KL)*

Many interviewees mentioned that Finnish MEPs are perceived to be honest and sincere which as such is a rather positive evaluation. Similar evaluations have been found in previous studies as well (see Lehtonen 1994). In some situations, such as negotiations, being sincere and expressing one’s intentions directly might be, however, an unsuccessful communication style. One interviewee (IW3) explained how she was compelled to change her negotiating strategy to be “less honest” in order to reach the goal:

*”Joissakin sovittelutilanteissa esimerkiks ei ole viisasta esittää sitä, mitä todella haluaa vaan pitää mieltä enemmän. Joten sitten kun siitä neuvotellaan niin mulle jää käteen se mitä mä haluan.” (W3)*

*”In some conciliations, for example, it is not wise to express what you really want but think more. Whereupon, in the negotiation I get what I want.” (W3, translated by KL)*

To sum up, according to the interviewees being a Finn in the European Parliament and behaving accordingly can be either a weakness or strength. Nevertheless, it might create some problems particularly with southern European interlocutors whose style of communication is different in directness and quantity of speech, in particular. Directness might be regarded as impoliteness, curtness as too short, and fact-orientation

as boring. It has to be emphasised, however, that this is only the image that the Finnish MEPs themselves assume that the other MEPs think about them. Assuming that the other MEPs share the same negative perceptions is called projected autostereotype and itself creates misunderstandings (Sajavaara & Lehtonen 1997: 266).

### 6.3.3 Signs of political culture?

None of the interviewees directly stated that the EP would have developed its own political culture in the first place. In general, the interview question concerning the political culture yielded very heterogeneous answers, which is understandable as only four of the interviewees had previous experience of politics and political culture. For those, who did not have much previous experience of political life in Finland or some other country the question was rather difficult. The interviewees who had previous experience from the Finnish parliament tended to compare the EP with the Finnish Parliament.

Four interviewees considered the atmosphere of the EP friendlier and nicer than in the Finnish Parliament. Few MEPs emphasised, for instance, that compared to the Finnish Parliament disagreements are rare and appear only between different opinions – not between persons. One MEP (IM3) characterises the possible disagreements as follows:

*”Mun mielestä se on ollu hyvin asiallista argumentaatiota. Et...ei valiokunnissa ja ryhmässä niinkään henkilöön mennä. Et siellä asiat riitelee ja jos riitelee niin sit käydään keskustelua.”* (IM3)

*”In my opinion argumentation has been very decorous. That is, it never indulges in personalities in committees or groups. There only things argue and if they do then they are discussed.”* (IM3, translated by KL)

Some interviewees believed that the “nice” and “friendly” atmosphere is due to the lacking government-opposition divide. The fact that there is no standing majority has an influence on the political processes as well as on political atmosphere. The allies might be formed among any political groups depending on the political issue in question. In practice this implies that sometimes you might need the support of your political opponents too. One interviewee (IW3) explained the friendly atmosphere as follows:

*”Jotta saisit sun omii tärkeitä juttuja läpi niin sulla pitää olla mahdollisimman paljon semmosia ihmisiä jotka kuuntelee sua. Josta tulee se että ihmiset on lähtökohtaisesti toisilleen ystävällisiä.”(IW3)*

*”Everyone has an opportunity to advocate something that s/he considers important... and in order to get them accepted one has to have enough people who listen. In consequence, people are primarily friendly.” (IW3, translated by KL)*

Another interviewee (IM3) described the difference between the Finnish and European Parliament:

*“Että eduskunnassa istuntosalissa enemmänkin osotettiin ehkä nimellä ja syytettiin, leimattiin ja yleistettiin ja niin edespäin. Et ei tuolla [EP] oo sen tyyppistä. Että siellä yritetään taistella argumenteilla ja perustella. Se varmaan johtuu siitä, että ei oo sitä hallitus-oppositiota.” (IM3)*

*”On the floor of the Finnish Parliament there were more addressing with someone’s name and blaming, stigmatising and generalising etc. There [EP] is nothing like that. There people try to dispute through arguments and state reasons. That must be due to the lacking government-opposition divide.” (IM3, translated by KL)*

Despite the friendly atmosphere, the EP is a place of political conflicts as well. This distinguishes the political climate of the EP from the Finnish that according to Helander (1991: 32) is rather consensus-seeking. Some interviewees had noticed the difference and one interviewee (IM1) describes the difference as follows:

*“Että meillä pohjoismaissa yritetään konfliktit hoitaa sopimalla asioista ja jossain eteläeurooppalaisissa annetaan konfliktiin asti mennä asioiden ja sitten riidellään ja äänestetään ja osoitetaan mieltä ja sitten katsotaan vasta että mitä tulee.” (IM1)*

*”We in the Nordic countries try to solve the problems through conciliation and in some southern European [countries] they let them to develop into conflicts and then they argue, vote and demonstrate and then, wait and see.” (IM1, translated by KL)*

This is consistent with the difference in political discourse found by Hofstede (2001: 431) who argues that in feminine cultures politics tends to be more consensus-oriented compared to the masculine cultures. Known that many southern European cultures are more masculine compared to Finnish culture, it is therefore rather logical that the southern European style might feel adversarial compared to the Finnish perspective.

A few interviewees reported that in the EP conflicts between political ideologies, in particular, are more frequent. Helander (1991: 33) argues that ideologies are more

apparent in the political debate in France, for instance. One MEP (IW1) believed that the differences between right and left, that are not so clear in the Finnish politics anymore, are more vivid in the EP:

*”Että tällä eurooppalaisella areenalla on tällanen oikeisto-vasemmisto keskustelu on paljon tavanomaisempaa ja nää erot on olemassa.”* (IW1)

*”At the European arena the right-left discussion is more common and the differences exist.”* (IW1, translated by KL)

Some researchers (e.g. Blomgren 2003, et al. 2003) have found that the decision-making in the EP is based on compromises. This was mentioned by some interviewees as well. One interviewee (IM1) thought that cultural diversity correlates directly with making compromises.

*”Parlamentille on tullut tietty tapa toimia. Ja silloin se sitten tarkoittaa tietysti sitä, että kun on niin monta kansallisuutta, niin joudutaan hakemaan sitä pienintä yhteisymmärrystä.”* (IM1)

*”The parliament has developed a certain way of proceeding. That is, because there are so many nationalities, one needs to find the smallest possible consensus.”* (IM1, translated by KL)

Furthermore, some interviewees believed that the political culture of the EP is shaped by tight schedules and slow decision-making. This corresponds with the fact that all documents have to be translated into every official language and often sent to the member countries before the adoption which considerably slows down the reaction time of the EP (see Corbett et al. 2003: 36).

In short, the interviewees mentioned the lacking government-opposition, the presence of political conflicts and ideologies, compromising and slowness of decision making as features of political culture of the EP. They are not necessarily signs of the political culture of the EP but differences compared to the Finnish Parliament at least. Nevertheless, different political cultures of the member countries were not reported to create any remarkable cultural clashes. This corresponds with the convergence models of political culture (see e.g. Lane 1996) that predict the European political cultures to become more and more similar.



## 6.4 Effectiveness and appropriateness of communication

### 6.4.1 Influencing, gaining trust and getting respect

Given, that effective communication is reaching positive outcomes (Koester et al. 1993: 6) the desired outcomes need to be somewhat defined before discussing the criteria of appropriateness and effectiveness for communication in the EP. That is describing what it is to be a successful MEP. According to Hix (1999: 75) the MEPs have various goals in the EP. Policy goals which are attempts to pursue one's own ideological views (Hix 1999: 75) appeared to be main goals of the Finnish MEPs. In interaction and communication this appears as influencing, gaining trust and getting respect.

In regards to influencing the MEPs spoke about affecting decision-making, promoting one's interest, getting people to listen you, getting reports to draft, and getting one's message across to the others. One MEP (IW3) explained how to get the reports to draft within her political group, for instance:

*"...Vähitellen syntyy semmonen nokkimisjärjestys. Oma aktiivisuus ja ahkeruus ja tietysti se, että pyytää ja sitte perustelee pyyntönsä, että miks juuri minä olisin hyvä tekemään tämän. Ehkä vähän neuvottelee ihmisiä tukemaan sitä näkemystä." (IW3)*

*"little by little there develops a kind of pecking order. One's own activity and diligence and, of course, that asks for it and states reasons for the request: why I would be the best to do this. Maybe negotiates a little bit to get people to support one's view." (IW3, translated by KL)*

The example demonstrates the importance of one's good position in the committees and groups for achieving one's own goals (see Hix 1999: 75).

In order to get into a good position the MEPs need to show that they are trustworthy. The MEPs emphasise that one needs to *gain trust and credibility, show interest and gain trust, and get support to one's own position*. Many interviewees emphasised that *reciprocity* is very important; in order to get respect one needs to show respect to others. One MEP (IW1) described the meaning of reciprocity as follows:

*"Semmonen joka ei ensinnäkin arvosta muitten tekemää työtä, siis ei osota kiinnostusta siihen et mitä mitä ajatuksia muilla on. Jos ne on tehny jotain hyviä raportteja, niin ei osallistu siihen keskusteluun, et nää on ollu hyviä ideoita. Mutta sitte kun tulee oma tarve sanoa, niin olettaa että ilman muuta että saa automaattisesti läpi oman ajatuksensa. Että siinä saattaa tulla aika pahoja pettymyksiä. Et se vastavuorosuus on hirveen tärkeä." (IW1)*

*”Someone who does not appreciate the work of others. That is, does not show interest to other’s ideas. If they have done some good reports and one does not participate by saying that those were good ideas. But when it is one’s own turn to say, one expects to get the message across to the others immediately. Then there might be big disappointments. Reciprocity is very important.” (IW1, translated by KL)*

To put it briefly, effectiveness in the EP is advocating one’s political interests by influencing the others so that they would take the same position in some political issue. Nevertheless, first one needs to gain trust and respect within the EP. What are the appropriate ways of influencing, and getting trust in the EP as perceived by the Finnish MEPs are presented next.

#### **6.4.2 Persuading effectively and appropriately**

Representing one’s own interests and persuading the others are some of the communication actions that the parliamentarians engage in (Wodak 2004: 381; Bayley 2004: 8.). Giving an effective speech is one way of presenting one’s own interests and persuading the others. Two MEPs believed that in general the MEPs’ rhetorical skills are above average as only the best communicators get elected in the first place. Nevertheless, the persuasive styles vary across cultures (see e.g. Varner & Beamer 2005: 153) and therefore, it is to be expected that the MEPs from different cultures consider different kinds of speeches as being persuading.

According to the Finnish MEPs, an effective and persuading speech is *short, condensed, clear, and well-grounded*. This is in compliance with the Finnish norms of speaking that value clear and brief speech (Sajavaara & Lehtonen 1997: 271). Many interviewees considered the Finnish way of giving a speech most appropriate as the speaking time in the plenary session is strictly limited (Corbett et al. 2003: 145). One MEP (IW1) stated:

*”Tietysti parlamentissahan se [suomalainen tapa] on hyvä, koska siellä on kahen minuutin puheenvuorot keskimäärin. Niin tällä menetelmällä saa jopa sanottua jonkin asian.” (IW1)*

*”In the Parliament it [the Finnish way] is good because an average speech is limited in two minutes. In this way one can even get something across.” (IW1, translated by KL)*

According to most interviewees, there is absolutely too much talk in the EP because of the MEPs who do not consider the conciseness of the expression as a virtue. One MEP (IW3) described the situation:

*“...täällä monesti puhutaan liian pitkään. Tai noissa täysistunnoissa se puheaika on rajotettu, mutta valitettavasti ryhmäkokouksissa ja valiokunnissa sitä ei rajoteta ja jotkut sitten ikävyyttää pituudella.” (IW3)*

*“...Here people often speak for too long. Or in the plenary session the time of speech is limited but in group meetings and in committees it is not and then some bore the others with the length [of the speech]. (IW3, translated by KL)*

The Finnish MEPs had noticed the differences in persuading especially compared with the southern European MEPs. Herein, the difference in succinct and elaborate communication style can be noticed as well. While the Finnish MEPs are in favour of succinct style many interviewees remarked that the Southern Europeans have a tendency to use empty phrases and exaggeration which are characteristics of elaborate communication style. As a representative of succinct communication style one Finnish MEP (IM1) considered the praising of the previous speaker, that is rather common to the elaborate style, as exaggeration and waste of time:

*”Eli puolet vuorosta menee siihen että kiitellään miten loistavasti edellinen puhuja on puhunut, vaikka ollaan ihan eri mieltä. Meidän mielestä se on ajan haaskausta. Voitas mennä suoraan asiaan.” (IM1)*

*”Half of the speech is used for commending how marvellously the previous speaker has spoken even though one completely disagrees. We consider that a waste of time. It would be better to go directly to the point.” (IM1, translated by KL)*

Elaborate style was evaluated rather negatively by many interviewees and thus, unpersuasive. Equally, many Finnish MEPs believed that their succinct style does not necessarily persuade the MEPs from southern European cultures. One MEP (IW2) acknowledged the varying persuasion styles of the Finnish and the Southern Europeans:

*“Ja sitten helposti eteläeurooppalaisempien puhe kuulostaa semmoselta tyhjämpäiväselältä sanahelinältä meikäläisen korvissa ja meikäläisen puhe saattaa sitten kuulostaa heidän korvissa jonkun semmosen sydämättömän ja ihanteettoman teknokraatin narinalta.” (IW2)*

*”Easily the speech of Southerners sounds like idle talk and empty words in our ears while our speech might sound like heartless and non-idealistic gripping of a technocrat in their ears.” (IW2, translated by KL)*

According to Varner and Beamer (2005: 153), persuasion is closely related to emotions and thus, it is common that the representatives of emotional persuasion style consider the persuading attempts that make use of facts rather impersonal and cold.

Even though an ability of putting one's words briefly is certainly an asset it might not always be the most effective style of persuasion. Due to the high quantity and quality of speech all the interviewees had acknowledged, there is the problem of standing out from the others. For the sake of getting attention the Finnish criteria of effectiveness might be sometimes violated. The interviewees believed that *humour*, *emotionalism*, *conceit*, and *originality* could be some means of sticking into the listeners' mind. These are rather characteristics of a presentational and analogical persuasive style than of the quasilogical style (see Jonhstone cited in Lustig & Koester 2003: 250-251) typical to the Finnish in normal circumstances. One interviewee (IW3) explained how emotion can be used for persuading:

*“Taitava asiansa puhuja sisällyttää jonkin verran tunteiden ilmaisua...joka saa muut tuntemaan, et tää on välttämätön asia, et on ihan kamalaa, jos tätä ei oteta huomioon.”* (IW3)

*“A skilled speaker includes some emotions that gets the others feel to that this is a crucial issue; that it is absolutely horrible if this is not considered.”* (IW3, translated by KL)

Additionally, one interviewee (IW2) gave an example of a speech that she remembered well and considered funny because of its allusion. The speech took place in the plenary session in autumn 2004 when the EP was supposed to vote for the approval of Barroso's new Commission but did not because Barroso withdrew his proposal at the last moment.

*“Ja sit siinä poliittiset ryhmät suuruusjärjestyksessä kommentoi ja Daniel Cohn-Bendit sano, että MaoTse Tung aikoinaan opetti, että jotta voisi voittaa niin täytyy ymmärtää myös se että on häviöllä. Nimenomaan se, että Barroso on vanha maolainen ja myöskin Daniel Cohn-Bendit on itse tämmönen vanha opiskelijavasemmistolainen. Juuri siksi se oli niin hauska.”* (IW2)

*“And then the political groups according to their size commented and Daniel Cohn-Bendit said that MaoTse Tung once taught that in order to win one has to accept defeat. The funny thing was that Barroso is a former Maoist, like Daniel Cohn-Bendit himself is a former leftie.”* (IW2, translated by KL)

According to interviewees, one should, however, be careful when using jokes as an effect because they do not often translate well. This shows in telling jokes, using irony

or criticism, for instance. Therefore, when wishing to address one MEP the speaker might use the addressee's language in order to make sure that the message is delivered properly. (Corbett et al. 2003: 36.) Three interviewees (IM2, IM1, and IW2) told that they prefer listening or giving speeches in the original language because something always disappears in interpretation.

In the end, it could be stated that persuading in the EP is not an easy task. One should be brief, clear and concise and simultaneously persuade the audience by emotionalism, conceit or humour. Varying persuasive styles make the goals of influencing, getting respect and gaining trust among representatives from twenty five cultures a difficult task as noticed by Corbett et al. (2003: 8) as well. As stated by one MEP (IM1) there is no norm of an effective speech in the European Parliament but the MEPs speak as they "*are used at home*".

### 6.4.3 Confronting appropriately

Many interviewees had remarked that the Finnish direct style of confrontation might not always be the most appropriate. Instead of confronting directly many other MEPs normally employ an indirect style of confrontation. The interviewees reported that a certain pattern of disagreeing and contradicting within the EP has developed which one MEP (IW3) called a *hamburger technique* according to which the conflicting point is between compliments and praises:

*"Täällä on syytä kaikki puhe kääriä sellaseen kohteliaisuuteen ja kehujen muotoon ja sanoa jyrkätkin asiat hampurilaistekniikalla. Käärii...sen pihvin molemmille puolille kehu, jotta se ei järkyttäisi liikaa."* (IW3)

*"Here one should cover speech with compliments and praising and state conflicting issues by the hamburger technique. Put a praise on both sides of the steak that it would not shock too much."* (IW3, translated by KL)

Many interviewees told that they had adopted their own style of confrontation in order to show respect to the others. Especially in the group meeting where the differing viewpoints within the group are brought up but where maintaining group harmony is important one should be rather careful with opposing others. According to one MEP (IM2), this can be considered a *diplomatic way* of expressing disagreements. Another MEP (IM1) portrayed the pattern of confronting as follows:

*“Kerrotaan et miten hirveesti arvostaa tämän toisen mielipidettä, mutta olen kuitenkin ajatellut että minä minun täytyy olla eri mieltä hänen kanssaan näistä ja näistä syistä. Ja sitten kerrotaan mistä syistä: en voi kannattaa teidän ehdotustanne huomiossa istunnossa näistä ja näistä syistä vaan aion äänestää teitä vastaan. Pyydän, että ymmärrätte miksi sen teen” (IM1)*

*”First one says how much s/he appreciates the opinion of the other but then says: ‘I have thought, however, that I have to disagree with you for these reasons’. And then the reasons are articulated: I cannot support your proposal in tomorrow’s session for these reasons but I will vote against you. I hope you will understand why I am doing it’.” (IM1, translated by KL)*

Maintaining an advantageous relationship is essential to achieving one’s goals of influencing, gaining trust and getting respect. As one MEP (IM1) states about insulting the others: *“Kyllä sen varmaan edestään löytää sitten!”* (“*You will surely find it in front of you some day!*”, IM1, translated by KL). The aim of maintaining the communication refers to the phatic function of communication that, according to Solomon (1984: 21), is of importance in diplomatic communication too.

Stating the differing view indirectly can be considered socially appropriate as it does not violate the group harmony that is somewhat emphasised in the group meetings. The political groups are expected to have ideologically something in common (Raunio 1996: 228) and the MEPs normally want to maintain good relationships with the group leaders as they hold significant power within the EP (see e.g. Hix 1999: 78).

#### **6.4.4 Lobbying and networking effectively**

According to the interviewees, a skilful communicator within the EP is *active*. Having a clear message is important but advocating one’s own political interests requires a certain kind of activity too. One needs to actively lobby in order to get support for one’s own view. One MEP (IM1) explained :

*”Aika varovasti täytyy usealle ihmiselle erikseen ja myöskin taustavaikuttajille käydä puhumassa samaa asiaa... Että pyytää tavallaan niin kun apua että voitteko katsoa vähän perään, kun mulla on tällöinen ajatus, että voitais viedä tätä asiaa tähän suuntaan. Eli se on sellasta niinku pitkävaikutteista vaikuttamista, niin sanottua lobbaamista.” (IM1)*

*”One has to quite carefully speak to many different people and those in the background about the same issue. Kind of ask for help that could you please*

*look after this a bit and we could pursue this to that direction. That is a kind of long-term influencing, so called lobbying.” (IM1, translated by KL)*

Activity is closely related to *socialising* and many interviewees used it interchangeably with the word activity. Ability to socialise is often mentioned in the ICC competence models and is regarded as one of the core competencies in the profile of IEP (Vulpe et al. 2000: 22) too. It means the ability to socialise harmoniously and productively with host-nationals and co-workers. (Vulpe et al. 2000: 22.) The interviewees pointed out that lobbying requires *social intelligence, relationship skills* and *natural attitude towards people* as after getting acquainted with people it is easier to get across one’s own message and thus, get support from others. Conversely, the interviewees believed that an MEP who is too *humble* or *withdrawing* cannot easily succeed in the EP.

A willingness to socialise appeared to be important for successful lobbying. Additionally, some MEPs mentioned that succeeding within the EP is all about making oneself visible. One has to participate actively in the meetings and other occasions in order to be acknowledged as an active MEP. One interviewee (IW1) characterised a skilful communicator:

*”Semmonen, joka sillan tällön näyttäytyy ja joka yrittää saada asioita läpi. Et täytyy olla mukana siinä prosessissa hyvin tiiviisti ja osoittaa, että on kiinnostunut niistä tehtävistä ja saada luottamusta. Ja sitte pystyy saamaan viestiä perille myös muille.” (IW1)*

*”Someone who makes her-/himself visible every now and then, and tries to get things done. That is, one has to be actively present at the process and show that s/he is interested in those tasks and get respect. And then it is possible to get across one’s message to the others.” (IW1, translated by KL)*

Lobbying as a form of active influencing could be considered a challenge for the Finnish communicators who often encounter problems in intercultural interaction because of their passivity and non-participation (Sajavaara & Lehtonen 1997: 276). In fact, activity turned out to be an issue that many interviewees had changed in their own communication behaviour after their election to the EP. One MEP (IW3) told how she has had to learn to force her company on the others.

*”Täällä on joutunut...nöyrytymään siihenkin, että tyrkyttäytyy. Se on mulle hirveen vastenmielistä ja mä en ekana vuonna edes pyytänyt raporttia. Mä luulin että ne tarjotaan sitte, kun katsotaan että on minun aika saada raportti. Et on joku, joka huolehtii oikeenmukaisuudesta täällä, mutta eihän sellasta olekaan. Et itse pitää pitää puolensa, et pääsee tekemään työtä.” (IW3)*

*”Here I have had to be humble and even start to force my company on the others. It is very unpleasant to me and in the first year I didn’t even ask for a rapport. I thought that it would be offered to me when it is my time to get one; that there is someone here who takes care of fairness. But such fairness does not exist. One has to fight for one’s own rights to work.” (IW3, translated by KL)*

One first term MEP (IW2) explained how she very consciously tried to use as many turns to speak as possible for the sake of being known within the political group which is against her normal (Finnish) behavioural patterns.

*“Alussa kun on uus niin kannattaa käyttää puheenvuoro, vaikkei ois mitään varsinaista asiaa ihan siks et naama tulee tunnetuks. Ja mä tein esimerkiksi oman ryhmän kokouksissa sillai, että vaikka mää yleensä en oo hirveen innokas käyttämään puheenvuoroja... että pyysin puheenvuoroa ihan vaan pyytääkseni puheenvuoroa, tehdäkseni niinkun itseäni tunnetuksi.” (IW2)*

*”In the beginning when you are new you should take a turn to speak even if you did not have anything special to say - only because then you can make them remember your face. And I did so in the group meetings even though I’m not normally very eager to take the floor...I asked for permission to speak in order to make myself known. (IW2, translated by KL)*

Furthermore, the interviewees had acknowledged the importance of social relationships for achieving one’s goals. They emphasised the meaning of small talk as means of socialising and as a means of succeeding in political work. Small talk in the EP is *being friendly to other people, showing interest to other people, taking others into consideration, giving positive feedback and showing that one feels and to make others feel comfortable within the environment*. One interviewee (IW1) pointed out the importance of small talk:

*“Se, että näkee vähän vaivaa tämmösiä hyvän päivän tuttavuuksia saadakseen. Koska silloin pystyy helpommin saamaan myös asian läpi kun on jonkunlainen suhde.” (IW1)*

*”One should put an effort to get acquaintances. Because then one can get better things done when some kind of relationship exists.” (IW1, translated by KL)*

Small talk is often regarded as a weakness of the Finnish communicators (e.g. Salo-Lee 1996: 46) which was brought up by the interviewees as well. Many MEPs reported how they had adjusted their own communication behaviour to include some small talk. One MEP (IW3) stated:

*”Et mä en itse nauti niin suuresta sellasesta small talkista kun tää työ vaatii. Niin sillä lailla joutuu muuttamaan työvaatimusten mukaan. Pitää höpöttää joskus jossain tilanteessa, vaikkei välttämättä itse jaksais solmia tuttavuuksia, niin tietää, et se kuuluu asiaan.” (IW3)*



*"I do not myself enjoy much that kind of big small talk that this work requires. That is, one has to adjust to the requirements of the work. One has to sometimes chatter in some situations even if s/he would not feel like that, but one knows that's the way it is."* (IW3, translated by KL)

In addition to activity and willingness to participate in small talk, lobbying requires language skills. Lobbying is often conducted in informal contexts where translation services are not provided (Wilson 2003: 4). According to many interviewees, extensive language skills multiply the channels of influencing. One MEP (IM3) describes the importance of language skills as follows:

*"Kielen merkityshän on hirveen tärkeä, että ei vaan englanti vaan mielellään vielä ranskakin. Ja mitä enemmän kieliä niin sitä enemmän kanavia vaikuttaa. Koska kaikki se vaikuttaminen, mikä tapahtuu virallisten kokousten ulkopuolella - ja se määrä ei oo vähäinen - niin niissähan sitä joutuu kommunikoidaan."* (IM3)

*"Language is very important, and not only English but rather French too. And the more one knows the languages the more channels s/he has for influencing. As all the influencing that happens outside the formal meetings – and that is not too little – is communicating."* (IM3, translated by KL)

Few interviewees mentioned that being able to speak with the interlocutor in her or his mother tongue gives a good impression and is highly appreciated. One MEP (IM2) explained the role of the language skills:

*"Kyllähän se on tosi kiva jos pystyy puhumaan jonkun saksalaisen tai ranskalaisen kanssa heidän äidinkielellään. Antaahan se aina sellasen kivan pikku lisäsävöksen. Et kyllä ne on tosi otettuja."* (IM2)

*"It is very nice indeed if one is able to speak in the mother tongue of German or French. It is a plus. They are really pleased."* (IM2, translated by KL)

According to the profile of IEP (Vulpe et al. 2000: 30), one can use local greetings, for instance, to show that s/he is interested in the people with whom s/he interacts.

The eleven questionnaire respondents reported that they use English for everyday work-related communication. Many reported that they use also Swedish and German but only few knew French. Even though all the interviewees emphasised the meaning of language, especially in socialising, only one of them was currently studying a language (French) and two interviewees mentioned their willingness to learn more languages in the future. The interviewees believed that it is sufficient if one's knows English well enough.

## **7 INTERCULTURAL SKILLS**

Acknowledging the overall goal of the research this chapter represents an effort at identifying and defining the intercultural skills that are required from the MEPs. The information about situational and relational context of the interaction, cultural differences, and the criteria of effectiveness and appropriateness emerging from the questionnaire answers and interviews is compiled together. The intercultural skills presented in this chapter are a result of interpretation of the data.

The intercultural skills are defined with the help of the framework presented in the Profile of Interculturally Effective Person (Vulpe et al. 2000). Thus, the intercultural skills are described as consisting of major and core competencies and behavioural indicators. The major competencies that were found to be most significant within this context are adaptation skills, communication skills and socialising skills. All the major competencies include more detailed core competencies and behavioural indicators through which the Finnish MEPs could demonstrate the intercultural skills in actual interaction. The following sub-chapters focus on describing especially the behavioural indicators of adaptation skills, communication skills and socialising skills.

At the end of the chapter the other elements of ICC competence, knowledge and attitude, are shortly presented in order to provide an overall picture of intercultural communication competence in the context of the European Parliament. Furthermore, a figure recaps the essence of ICC competence for the Finnish MEPs.

### **7.1 Adaptation skills**

Except for the plenary session it can be argued that there are no norms of behaviour within the EP. As found from the interviews the context is purely multicultural; the cultural patterns of the member countries are observable and create cultural differences in intercultural interaction. That is, there is no one host culture one could adjust to. Rather, there are twenty five different cultures present at the EP the MEPs have to cope with.

How do the MEPs deal with and respond to the challenge? There are, of course, many options to manage the cultural differences, such as avoiding the cultural clashes or ignoring them. Nevertheless, one of the core competencies of adaptation skills presented in the profile of the IEP can be considered the most important in the context of the European Parliament: The core competency of adaptation skills that emphasises the ability to recognise the problematic behaviours in one's own culture and "to behave in some ways differently in the host culture than at home" (Vulpe et al. 2000: 14). It can be transferred to the context of the EP as follows: An interculturally competent Finnish MEP recognises that there might be certain Finnish communication behaviours that are not necessarily effective and appropriate in the European Parliament and is able to accommodate the communication behaviour accordingly.

The question which Finnish behaviours should be adapted and how can be answered on the grounds of the results concerning the cultural differences and perceptions of appropriateness and effectiveness presented in the previous chapter. The behavioural indicators that would demonstrate one's ability to accommodate behaviour with the norms of twenty five European cultures are presented more precisely in the next chapters.

## **7.2 Communication skills**

### **7.2.1 Conflict management skill**

On the grounds of the interview data, some differences in communication style that might create misunderstandings can be pointed out. The interviewees believed that Finnish communication style can be perceived as being rather direct by the representatives of the southern European cultures who employ more indirect means of expression. Using precise and straight-forward language behaviours is typical of individual cultures that follow the norm of honesty and openness. In contrast, indirect style of communication employs imprecise and ambiguous behaviour that is typical to collectivistic cultures that value group harmony and conformity. (Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey 1988: 102.) That is, there exist two different criteria of appropriateness and effectiveness when representatives of direct and indirect communication cultures interact.

Salo-Lee (1996: 39) believes that Finnish directness may create misunderstandings especially in social and informal interaction. The interviews with the MEPs showed that conflicts between direct and indirect style may appear especially in the debates of the group meetings where contradicting political views are presented. The group meetings turned out to be the most interactive and informal contexts of communication within the formal meetings of the EP. The interviewees had remarked that the other MEPs – the Southern Europeans in particular – tend to use a certain pattern of expressing a differing view whereas the Finnish state their opinion directly. They admitted that even though confronting directly would be an effective style according to the Finnish criteria, it is probably not regarded as the most appropriate according to the criteria of southern European cultures. According to Salo-Lee (1996: 39), Finnish directness can sometimes be considered even face-threatening, impolite or simple by the foreign interlocutors.

Considering the important role that the political groups play within the EP the MEPs certainly do not wish to be interpreted by any means as being inappropriate by the members of their own political group (see Hix 1999: 78). Keeping in the mind the goals of interaction that were found to be getting respect and gaining trust, it can be argued that harmonious relationships would be an asset in further interaction. Therefore, in order to communicate socially appropriately in conflicting situations, such as debates on a political issue, an indirect communication style needs to be employed.

Confronting appropriately can be considered a core competency of communication skills in the context of the European Parliament. Herein, it is named a conflict management skill (see e.g. Ting-Toomey 1985) since it is a response to the challenge of cultural differences in style of confrontation. When seeking to express conflict management skill one needs to first recognise difference between the direct and indirect communication style as well as the cultural differences in style of confrontation. Second, it is not enough to recognise the differences and understand them but also accommodate one's communication behaviour. For the Finnish MEPs the behavioural indicators of conflict management skill would be expressing one's contradicting view more indirectly and using smoothing strategies in order to avoid violating the criteria of appropriateness of other cultures.

### **7.2.2 Intercultural persuading skill**

Differing communication styles and persuasive styles that the members of the individualistic and collectivistic cultures employ make persuading in the EP a challenge. Stating one's point as briefly as possible is a sign of succinct communication style (Salo-Lee 1996: 40-41) and valued highly by the Finnish MEPs. The interviewees had noticed that the representatives of many southern European cultures have a tendency to use a more expressive style which is a sign of elaborate style of communication (Gudykunst 1988: 105, 108). Furthermore, the Finnish, as many Western European cultures, tend to employ a quasilogical persuasion style that makes use of facts and is an opposite to the presentational style making use of more expressive means of persuasion (Johnstone cited in Lustig & Koester 2003: 250-251).

When the representatives of different communication and persuasive styles endeavour to give an effective speech it is rather probable that the expectations do not meet. According to the Finnish MEPs, the southern European MEPs speak far too much and do not express themselves clearly enough. On the contrary, the interviewees believed that the speeches given by the Finnish MEPs are very fact-oriented and even uninteresting from the perspective of the Southern Europeans. The varying criteria of effectiveness makes it difficult to give a speech that would meet the expectations of both sides and requires intercultural persuasion skills which can be named another core competency of communication skills within the EP.

In order to persuade the others the Finnish MEPs should be ready to violate their own criteria of effectiveness and appropriateness to some extent. When seeking to influence the representatives of elaborate communication style and presentational persuasion style the Finnish MEPs could include their persuasion style some components of elaborate communication and presentational persuasive style, such as emotions, humour, or conceit that can be considered the behavioural indicators of the intercultural persuasion skill for the Finnish MEPs. That is, the Finnish MEPs should use some more effects in their speech that they would be perceived effective by the representatives of other cultures too.

As far as a goal of communication is persuading and influencing the others, like it appeared to be within the EP, every MEP should be able to match up the speech to the

expectations of the audience. When a representative of elaborate style wants to influence on the representative of succinct communication style, like the Finnish, s/he would make the speech more concise and clear. The Finnish MEPs emphasised that the Finnish way of being brief and clear is the most effective style as the schedules are rather tight and too complicated message remains unclear because of the interpretation. Herein, adjusting to the elaborate communication and presentational persuasive style is certainly not abandoning the Finnish patterns but rather *spice it up with other elements* (*yrittää sitä maustaa muilla elementeillä*), as one MEP (IW3) stated.

### 7.3 Socialising skills

Socialising skills appeared to be of great importance in the context of the European Parliament where the goals of interaction appeared to be mostly social, such as influencing others, gaining trust and getting respect. Correspondingly to the diplomatic communication the phatic function that refers to the aim of establishing, prolonging or discontinuing communication (Solomon 1984: 21) is essential in the EP too. The Finnish MEPs emphasised, for instance, the importance of showing respect to the others in order to have support for one's own ideas and thus, prolong the communication with the colleagues. On the contrary hurting somebody's pride, for instance, implies discontinuation of communication. Both professional and personal relationships are needed to achieve one's goals. Ability to build relationships is essential to the MEPs and a core competency of socialising skills could be named a relationship building skill.

According to the Finnish MEPs, the relationships among the MEPs are mostly professional. The personal relationships were not thought to be easily established because of time pressure, formality of the interaction, different language and the independent nature of the work, for instance. Additionally, it has been argued (see Blomgren 2003: 217) that the work of an MEP is a rather independent trial. Nevertheless, being an MEP does not have to be a lonely job. As one interviewee pointed out, one should make friends with the colleagues who in fact, are the only ones with whom the MEPs have enough time to spend. Personal relationships among the MEPs seem to develop along time or as a consequence of previous contacts. Whenever a professional relationship evolves into more personal it certainly facilitates reaching

positive outcomes, such as influencing. As found out from the interviews, in order to develop beneficial professional and personal relationships with the foreign colleagues one should take advantage of the more informal contexts of the work-related communication, such as delegations to the member countries.

Another core competency of the socialising skills is lobbying skill. One needs to actively lobby in order to get visibility, gain trust and get respect and thus, to have better possibilities to influence. Both of the core competencies, relationship building skill and lobbying skill, can be expressed through active participation in interaction, small talk and language skills which thus, can be considered the behavioural indicators of the socialising skills within the EP.

One way of expressing one's relationship building and lobbying skills is actively participating in interaction. According to Lehtonen (1994: 54), getting into contact and initiating conversations are often considered weaknesses of Finnish communicators in intercultural interaction which might explain the difficulties in relationship building too. As some interviewees reported, sometimes relationship building and lobbying require changing one's preferences of appropriate communication. One has to make initiative and interfere in discussion in order to get one's own message across. In intercultural conversations the Finnish communicators often take the role of listener (Sajavaara & Lehtonen 1997: 276) whereas in the Parliament speaking is essential to succeeding.

Additionally, small talk that is often regarded as a handicap of the Finnish communicators (see e.g. Salo-Lee 1996: 46), is a means of relationship building and lobbying. Many of the interviewees had noticed the importance of small talk and consequently, had tried to participate in small talk more actively than their normal communication behaviour would predict. Some interviewees believed that the Finnish MEPs have problems with small talk which might create an impression of impoliteness or even of a lack of manners. The possible misunderstandings might, in fact, derive from the differences in the way small talk is conducted across cultures. It has been recognised that the Finnish communicators use negative politeness strategies such as respecting privacy and keeping distance, which might be interpreted as impoliteness by those using positive politeness strategies (Salo-Lee 1996: 54.) Hence, in order to be perceived as polite and friendly by the other MEPs the Finns could include more

positive politeness strategies in their small talk and learn some customs of the other cultures. Many interviewees pointed out that small talk is not insignificant even if it might be often regarded as such. By showing respect to the others one can get respect and gain trust which further contribute to the whole process of influencing.

Building relationships and lobbying effectively within the EP requires extensive language skills too. The Rules of Procedure (Chapter 3, Rule 138) guarantee that all documents are translated into official languages, the representatives have a right to speak in their native language and the speech given in one of the official language is simultaneously interpreted into the other official languages. Technically this implies that the translation and interpretation services are so extensive that one does not need to know more than one language. (Corbett et al. 2003: 34.) In practice, communicating only in one language makes it rather difficult to reach positive outcomes as the work of an MEP requires interaction with other MEPs. The interviewees reported that a significant amount of lobbying and networking takes place in informal contexts where interpretation is not available. Loos (2004: 20) has found that this is not a problem in informal contexts of interaction because lingua franca – most often English or French – can be used for communication. Nevertheless, through the interviews it was found out that language skills play important role in effectiveness too. The more languages an MEP knows the more interlocutors s/he has. That implies more channels of influencing. Not all of the MEPs know English and thus, if a Finnish MEP knows only English there is no channel of communication. Participation in a conversation dealing with some political issue with a colleague requires a rather good knowledge of the language of the interlocutor. Additionally, many MEPs believed, however, that knowing only some phrases of many languages could be beneficial too.

To conclude, the social contacts are crucial in the EP but relationship building and lobbying are sometimes challenging in the culturally diverse and hectic circumstances. In order to build useful relationships and achieve one's goals of influencing, the Finnish MEPs should participate actively in conversation, pay attention to small talk and further improve their language skills.



#### **7.4 Comments on knowledge and attitude**

The main objective of the study was examining what constitutes intercultural communication for the MEPs. The intercultural skills and their behavioural indicators that might lead to a judgment of intercultural communication competence have now been now pointed. Nevertheless, the scholars (e.g. Bennett & Bennett 2004; Chen & Starosta 1998; Kim 2001) of intercultural communication point out that ICC always consists of three elements: knowledge, attitude and skills. Despite this study being skills oriented some comments on the required knowledge and attitude in the context of the EP can be made on the grounds of the interviews.

The interviews proved that cultural differences exist and are observable at the European level. Besides, the cultural differences among Europeans show in communication. Thus, we cannot speak about European culture in a sense of common programming of the minds of the Europeans that would guide their thinking, feeling and acting. Rather, the Europeans – even the MEPs as European elite – are influenced by their national cultures that distinguish them from each other. Consequently, the multinational and multicultural working environment of the EP requires taking into consideration the cultural differences in communication among the MEPs. That is, the MEPs must possess knowledge of their own culture as well as knowledge of the other European cultures and the patterns of thinking, feeling and acting that guide their behaviour. The Finnish MEPs, for instance, need to be aware of how being Finnish influences their communication. They should be able to recognize the strengths and the weaknesses of being a Finn in intercultural encounters. Furthermore, from a Finnish perspective the southern European cultures were particularly considered foreign, which challenges the Finnish MEPs to learn more about the southern European cultures. Since many differences appear in collectivism-individualism dimension awareness of the different values of collectivistic and individualistic cultures would help to explain the differences in communication and understand them.

The result that different political cultures of the member countries do not create significant cultural clashes within the EP could be interpreted as a sign of the political culture of the EP shaped by the lacking government-opposition divide, ideological conflicts, slow decision-making, independency of the work of the MEPs, and tight schedules. As such the political climate of the EP is somewhat different from the

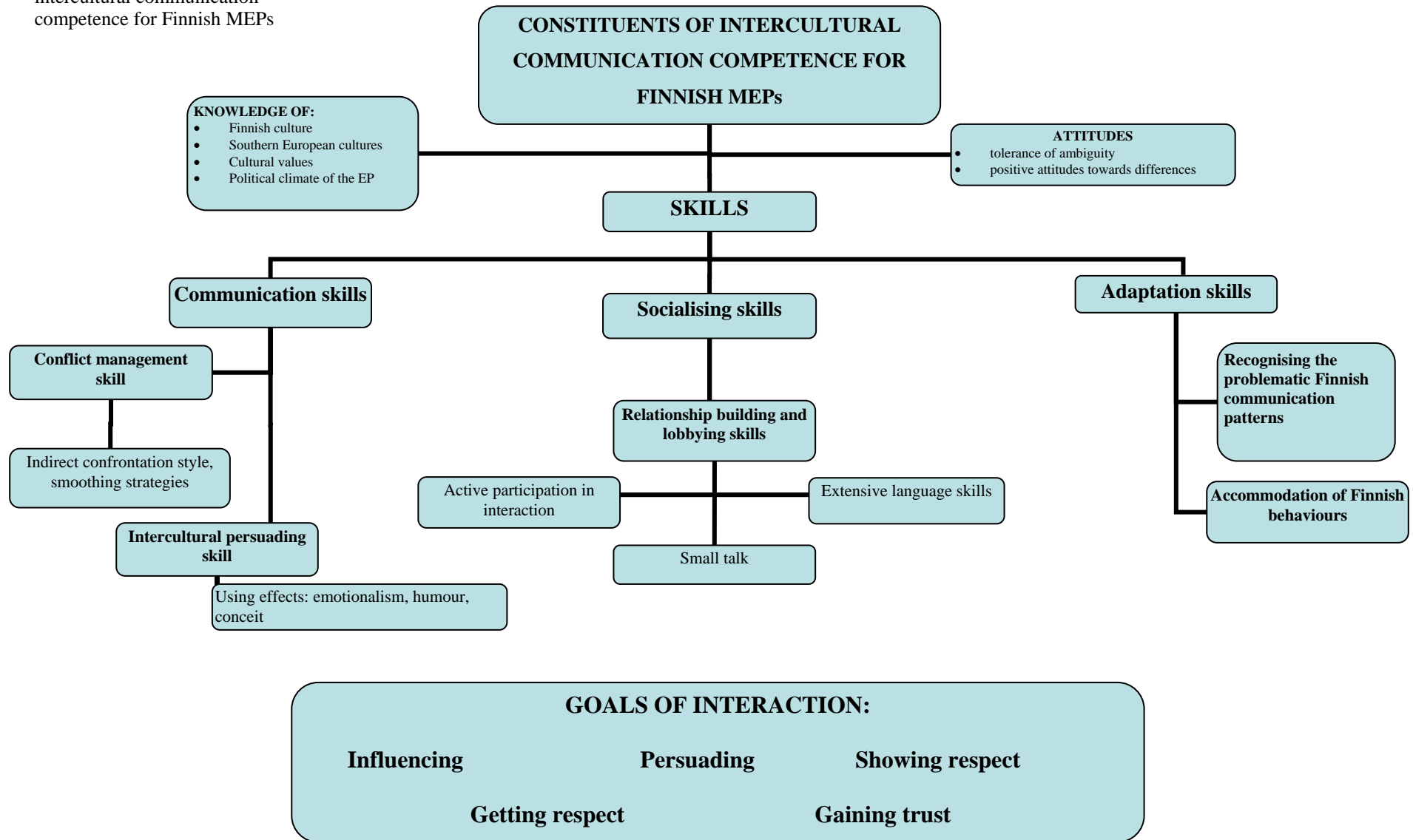
Finnish Parliament. Therefore, those Finnish MEPs who are previous members of the Finnish Parliament are faced with a process of unlearning the Finnish political culture in order to acquire a new system of parliamentary activities present at the EP.

As the EP is a real mixture of cultures the MEPs cannot be expected to be masters of all European cultures. More importantly, one should learn to tolerate the ambiguity created by the cultural diversity and develop a positive attitude toward differences. According to the interviewees, whether one feels comfortable with the culturally diverse environment shows and affects the interaction too.

### **7.5 The constituents of intercultural competence for Finnish MEPs**

Figure 2 summarises the findings of the study. The main components of intercultural competence knowledge, attitudes and skills are presented as they would be from a Finnish perspective. The knowledge and attitude component are presented at the top. Communication skills, socialising skills and adaptation skills form the major competencies of the intercultural skills in the EP and are presented in the centre of the figure. Under each major competency some more accurate core competencies and behavioural indicators are presented. That is, someone who possesses communication skills can manage conflicts and may express this ability by contradicting indirectly, for instance. The goals of the interaction among the MEPs – influencing, persuading, getting respect and gaining trust – are presented at the bottom.

Figure 2: The constituents of intercultural communication competence for Finnish MEPs



## 8 DISCUSSION

The aim of revisiting the construct of intercultural communication (ICC) competence in the context of the European Parliament has been conducted and the results presented. Finally, it is time to discuss the meaning and further implications of the study. Do the findings of the study extend the theory on ICC competence and is it of use in practice? And if it is, how? Moreover, the final chapter includes critical evaluation of the research and the findings.

The starting point of the study was to find out what constitutes ICC competence for the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). The context of the European Parliament (EP) was considered highly intercultural and the work very communicative in its nature. Consequently, the impetus for intercultural skills occurred.

For the purpose of defining the intercultural skills in the context of the EP a context- and culture-specific theoretical approach to ICC competence was employed. It was assumed that there is no one model of ICC competence that would suit to respond to the challenges of intercultural interaction across cultural, professional and situational contexts. There was a hope of creating a construct of ICC competence that would give detailed information of the required intercultural skills in the EP. Instead of endeavouring to map general qualities of interculturally competent person context and task-specific behavioural indicators were sought.

The empirical data was collected through interviews with Finnish MEPs that makes the approach a culture-specific study. In order to find the intercultural skills needed by the MEPs the research questions were aimed to map the situational and relational context of intercultural communication within the EP, the cultural differences in interaction and the criteria of appropriateness and effectiveness as perceived by the Finnish MEPs. The questions were examined through open-ended questionnaires (11) and semi-structured interviews (6) with the MEPs.

The context of the EP turned out to be highly intercultural. The official meetings of the EP – committee meetings, group meetings, and plenary session – were considered the

most intercultural situations and most important tasks of the MEPs. Interaction within these intercultural contexts includes such communicative actions as giving speeches, debating, lobbying and confronting the others. Although formality and interactivity among these contexts may vary the communication can be regarded as rather formal and relationships among the MEPs mostly professional. The political climate of the EP was considered *friendly* and *nice*.

From a Finnish perspective cultural differences in the EP appear especially between Northern and Southern Europeans. They show in manners, communication style and style of confronting, in particular. Instead, different political cultures were not reported to create remarkable cultural clashes. The Finnish MEPs believed that direct communication style, succinct way of expression and lack of manners are some characteristics of Finnish communication patterns that might create misunderstandings in intercultural communication situations.

In the EP succeeding means influencing the others, gaining trust and getting respect. What then are the appropriate and effective ways of achieving these goals? From a Finnish perspective the most effective way of expressing one's view and persuading the others is to speak shortly and concisely. Many MEPs admitted, however, that a speech that utilises the means of presentational and analogical style, such as emotions or conceit, is often better acknowledged and remembered and thus, more effective. Nevertheless, based on the results it is not possible to point out one persuasion style that would be the most appropriate and effective in the EP. Instead, there appears a style of confronting that according to the Finnish MEPs can be considered a best practice in conflicting situations. The appropriate style of confrontation can be called *a hamburger technique* in which the conflicting view is between compliments and praises. The interviewees had noticed that whereas many others employ the indirect way of confrontation (hamburger technique) the Finnish MEPs have a tendency to state one differing view rather directly which can be considered problematic in contexts where maintaining the group harmony and good relationships are emphasised, like the group meetings. Finally, an important means in achieving one's goals of influencing the others, gaining trust and getting respect are lobbying and networking. An effectively lobbying and networking MEP shows interest in others by participating actively in communication and small talk and masters many languages. Even though such activity

in communication and small talk do not inevitably belong to the communication patterns of the Finnish the interviewees were rather unanimous regarding their importance for succeeding in one's work.

Based on the results concerning the context, cultural differences, and appropriateness and effectiveness the intercultural skills needed by the MEPs were identified. To sum up, it was found out that at the most general level the intercultural skills consist of three major competencies: socialising skills, communication skills and adaptation skills. They are all very commonly mentioned constituents of intercultural communication competence and in this respect, many models of intercultural communication competence could be applied to describe the intercultural skills needed by the MEPs. Nevertheless, the intention was not to remain at the general level but to examine how to demonstrate intercultural skills in one's communication behaviour. On the basis of this study some more specific core competencies and behavioural indicators of the socialising, communication and adaptation skills that are needed by the MEPs can be described.

The major competence of socialising skills was found to include two core competencies: relationship building skill and lobbying skill. Both are of great importance in achieving one's goals that in the EP appeared to be mostly social, such as influencing, gaining trust and getting respect. It was found out that relationship building and lobbying skills can be demonstrated by active interaction, participating in small talk and extensive language skills which thus, can be considered the behavioural indicators of the socialising skills.

Also the major competence of communication skills was found to include two core competencies: conflict management skill and intercultural persuading skill. The Finnish MEPs could demonstrate their conflict management skill by employing more indirect means of confronting. Indirect style of confrontation can be considered socially more appropriate especially when interacting with the representatives of the collective cultures, the southern European cultures. Thus, a behavioural indicator of conflict management skill would be confronting indirectly and making use of smoothing strategies when contradicting. Furthermore, when seeking to persuade the representatives of other member countries the Finnish MEPs could spice up their normal succinct communication style and quasilogical persuasion style with some

effects common to elaborate communication style and presentational and analogical persuasive style.

Finally, there is the major competence of adaptation skills that could be actually considered a meta-skill of all the skills. A paradox is that there is no one culture but twenty five cultures to adapt to. As there are no norms of behaviour within the EP but the parallel norms, beliefs and values of twenty five European cultures the adaptation skills is somewhat emphasised. Since there does not exist a common criteria of appropriateness and effectiveness the MEPs need to accommodate their own criteria to some extent in order to meet the expectations of the other MEPs. Thus, the core competencies of adaptation skills are recognising the problematic features of one's communication patterns and taking them into consideration when communicating with the foreign MEPs. For the Finnish MEPs this would imply recognising the above mentioned difficulties concerning the direct communication style, succinct communication and quasilogical persuasion style, and passivity in interaction and small talk.

In addition to the goal of defining concrete behavioural indicators of intercultural skills, this study endeavoured to identify intercultural skills that would correspond with the tasks of the politicians, the MEPs, in particular. It can be concluded that examining the intercultural skills in terms of the situational context of the EP produced task-related skills for the profession of the MEPs and thus, possibly extended the intercultural communication competence research to some extent. The study yielded an intercultural skill that is not often considered a constituent of ICC competence: intercultural persuading skill. Intercultural persuading skill is essential to MEPs, in particular, since their tasks include constant influencing of others. By recognising different styles of persuading and utilising various means of persuading in one's speech one can more effectively influence people from different cultures. Nevertheless, in a context where the audience consists of representatives of twenty five different countries it is rather impossible to give a speech that would be considered effective by everyone.

Compared to the diplomats, which was considered a profession similar to politician, both similarities and differences can be pointed out. A diplomatic style of confrontation was considered appropriate by the Finnish MEPs, for instance. Additionally, the

meaning of communication in relationship establishment, prolongation, and discontinuance refers to the phatic function (Solomon 1984: 21) of communication essential to diplomacy as well. As an intercultural context diplomacy differs, however, from the context of the EP. In diplomacy protocol reduces the cultural clashes in styles of confrontation, debating, interpersonal interaction and habits of social behaviour (Fischer 1990: 243). This is not a case in the European Parliament though. In the EP parallel norms exist, are visible and cause cultural clashes. This probably requires even more extensive knowledge of different cultures from the MEPs than from the diplomats who can make use of the norms of the diplomats' professional community and protocol. Diplomats normally handle only a limited number of different cultures at the same time whereas the MEPs work simultaneously with colleagues from twenty five different countries and cultures. Based on the results it could be hereby argued that the context of the European Parliament differs from the context of diplomacy to the extent that the intercultural communication research that has focused on the diplomats cannot as such be applied to the profession of the MEPs.

The Finnish perspective employed in the study turned out to be fruitful. It has been previously found (McDonald 2000 and Hix 1999) that in cultural terms Europe is divided especially in the North-South dimension. Studying the intercultural communication in the EP from a northern perspective yielded similar results; the degree of interculturalness is at its highest when the members of the northern and southern European countries encounter. This information enabled identifying skills as responses to the problematic issues appearing in communication between representatives of these two cultural orientations. As the experiences from a Finnish point of view have now been mapped a natural step in further studies would be examining the experiences of cultural differences, and appropriateness and effectiveness of communication from a viewpoint of southern European cultures. Are those characteristics that the Finnish considered appropriate and effective really appropriate and effective in their opinion too? Including both perspectives would also explain whether those communication patterns which the Finnish MEPs considered as weaknesses or strengths correspond with the judgment of the significant others or remain an auto-stereotype.

In addition to the theoretical implications of the study, some practical implications of the study can be pointed out too. The behavioural indicators provide concrete tools for



the MEPs in defining, assessing and developing their own professionalism. With the help of the findings the MEPs can integrate intercultural skills into their professionalism as international politicians. More importantly, the future MEPs can make use of the results when preparing for a career in the European Parliament. The MEPs hold significant amounts of silent knowledge concerning the working environment of the EP as well as their work as an MEP and some of that knowledge concerns management of the cultural differences. It came out that the knowledge the MEPs possess is not always transferred to their successors because of the competitive spirit prevailing among the Finnish MEPs. Therefore, such a study may release some of the information that facilitates achieving one's goals in the EP for the use of the future MEPs. On the grounds of the study some intercultural training for the MEPs could be developed and provided too. That would require careful planning in order to first make the intercultural communication issues interesting and challenging to the MEPs. Fischer (1989) who has focused on intercultural training among diplomats suggests introducing culture as one aspect that affects the political substance of the interaction, for instance.

The findings of the study might be of interest to the Finnish electorate as well. A previous study (Kemiläinen 1997) has shown that the Finnish electorate considers directness in communication, language skills, good education and willingness to explore new things, the most important qualities of the MEPs. In respect of the directness this study resulted in opposite conclusions. It is understandable that the Finnish as members of individualistic culture value the same characteristics in the Finnish MEPs they elect: direct style of communication. Considering the cultural diversity of the European Parliament and the cooperative nature of the MEPs' work, however, directness in communication may not always be an asset. When communication becomes intercultural it cannot be expected that the interlocutors would prefer the same direct style of communication. Thus, defining behavioural indicators of intercultural skills from the perspective of the intercultural context and MEPs provides more accurate criteria for defining a successful MEP.

It could be questioned, of course, whether such a limited study extends the findings of intercultural communication competence research at any rate. It is needless to say that the eleven questionnaire respondents and six interviewees is a small number of participants and any generalisations cannot be made based on such a data. Nevertheless,

the aim of the research was not to making generalisations but explore the ICC competence in a new context. The intercultural skills found to be significant within the EP emerged from the research data – not as a result of imposing concepts on the participants. This is expected to increase the authenticity of the findings because the intercultural skills were not chosen by the researcher beforehand but defined with the help of the MEPs' knowledge of the culture and communication in the EP (see Witteborn 2003: 193).

Even though the data was limited the questionnaires and interviews together covered eleven of the fourteen current Finnish MEPs. The most often mentioned cultural differences in the questionnaires were studied further and confirmed to be significant in the interviews which can be considered to add to the credibility of the findings. Additionally, there was only little heterogeneity within the interview data concerning the cultural differences, and the appropriateness and effectiveness of communication. Nevertheless, it cannot be assumed that all the cultural differences were brought up by the MEPs. And every single instance was not examined in the study either. Therefore, the study should be considered as an opening of the research concerning the ICC competence of the MEPs rather than an all-encompassing inventory of the intercultural skills relevant in the EP.

The chosen method inevitably produces subjective information which may, however, increase the understanding of intercultural skills within the context of the EP that has previously remained rather unexplored. The interviewing method allowed studying the subject from certain closeness to the context of the European Parliament that normally is not easily accessible to outsiders. Conducting an ethnographic study would have enabled gathering irreplaceable first hand-observations of the context but was not possible in terms of this study. Whenever such an attempt is to be conducted the findings of this study may work as useful background information.

Much of this research was based on identifying the cultural differences occurring in the European Parliament and finding the best practices to handle them. It has to be remembered that the collected experiences of cultural differences and perceptions of competent behaviour do not describe the reality per se. They are only perceptions of the reality which in turn, are to a great extent affected by one's cultural background. The

cultural diversity of the European Parliament may appear totally different from the view point of another culture. Even so, understanding someone's experiences about the research subject can be reached only by relying on the participant's self-reports (see Cresswell 1998: 86). That is, the experiences of the Finnish MEPs can be inquired only from themselves – not by observing them or asking from the interlocutors.

Finally, the study could be criticised of contributing to the dispersion of the ICC competence research because it did not directly employ any of the existing theoretical frameworks. Scholars of ICC competence may consider it only as another attempt at creating a typology of ICC competence that is not comparable with the previous studies. Nonetheless, I argue that conducting culture and context specific study was necessary for finding accurate constituents of the ICC competence for the MEPs. By identifying task-related intercultural skills for the MEPs it does not compete with the models that define such intercultural skills as display of respect, interaction posture, orientation to knowledge, empathy, self-oriented role-behaviour, interaction management, tolerance for ambiguity, sense of humour, patience, flexibility etc (see e.g. Ruben 1976, Fantini 2000).

Studying the intercultural skills needed by the MEPs was challenging, exciting and rewarding. In the beginning of the study I was attracted by the work of the MEPs because of its internationality. Now, in the end of the study, I am rather inspired. Inspired as a researcher and inspired as a citizen. The work of an MEP is such a multi-faceted profession that even without the intercultural dimension it would be challenging. The intercultural dimension, however, is significant for the success in many other aspects of the MEPs' work and above all, it is significant for European cooperation. Are the MEPs aware that intercultural communication is the only means of balancing unity and diversity? Are the Finnish citizens aware of the intercultural nature of the MEPs' work? Or are they even interested in the MEPs, European Parliament or the European Union?

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1: The letter of approach

Arvoisa Euroopan parlamentin jäsen

Olen kulttuurienvälisen viestinnän opiskelija Jyväskylän yliopiston viestintätieteiden laitokselta ja tutkin pro gradu – tutkielmassani, millaisia kulttuurienvälisiä viestinnän taitoja vaaditaan Euroopan parlamentin jäseniltä. Koska te Euroopan parlamentin jäsenenä olette avainasemassa kertomaan työn kansainvälisyydestä, pyytäisin teitä osallistumaan tutkimukseen vastaamalla ensin muutamiin työhönne liittyviin kysymyksiin kirjallisesti ja keskustelemaan sen jälkeen aiheesta haastattelun merkeissä.

Tarkoituksena on lähestyä aihetta suomalaisesta perspektiivistä, minkä vuoksi olisi tärkeää saada mukaan kaikkien suomalaisten edustajien näkökulma. Tutkimus ei tavoittele kulttuurienvälisen taitojen arviointia vaan pyrkii lisäämään tietoa kansainvälisen työympäristön asettamista haasteista ainutlaatuisessa Euroopan parlamentin kontekstissa. Tutkimuksen tulokset voisivat olla kiinnostavia myös oman työhönne, seuraajienne ja suomalaisten äänestäjien kannalta. Tulokset asetetaan luonnollisesti myös teidän käyttöönne. Työn ohjaajana toimii professori Liisa Salo-Lee ja sen on tarkoitus valmistua syksyyn 2005 mennessä.

Alustavat kysymykset, joihin toivon saavani vastauksen 15.4.2005 mennessä, ovat sähköpostin liitteenä. Vastaukset voi palauttaa sähköpostitse tai lähettää ao. osoitteeseen.

Ystävällisin terveisin

Kaisa Lipponen

Kekkolantie 31 a A 5  
40520 Jyväskylä  
puh. 040 833 9988  
s-posti: kailipp@cc.jyu.fi

## **Appendix 2: Preliminary questionnaire**

### **Euroopan parlamentin jäsenten työn kansainvälisyyteen liittyvät kysymykset**

Seuraavilla kysymyksillä toivon saavani perustietoa Euroopan parlamentin jäsenten työn kansainvälisyydestä. Varsinaisen haastattelun kysymykset muodostetaan osittain vastauksienne perusteella. Voitte halutessanne vastata kysymyksiin laajemmin kuin olen niille tässä varannut tilaa. Vastaukset käsitellään luottamuksellisesti. Pyydän palauttamaan vastaukset sähköpostitse 15.4.2005 mennessä osoitteeseen [kailipp@cc.jyu.fi](mailto:kailipp@cc.jyu.fi) tai postiosoitteeseen, Kaisa Lipponen, Kekkulantie 31 a A 5, 40520 Jyväskylä.

**Mitkä työtehtävänne sisältävät vuorovaikutusta jotakin toista kulttuuria ja/tai maata edustavan henkilön kanssa? Mitä näistä pidätte työnne kannalta merkittävimpinä?**

**Missä nämä kulttuurienväliset vuorovaikutustilanteet tapahtuvat? (Esim. toimistossa, neuvotteluhuoneessa, istuntosalissa, käytävällä, kahviossa)**

**Keiden kanssa olette pääasiassa tekemisissä muiden Euroopan parlamentin jäsenten lisäksi?**

**Mitä yhteistyötä teette muiden maiden edustajien kanssa?**

**Missä tehtävissä ja tilanteissa olette erityisesti huomannut kulttuurieroja?**

**Missä työtilanteissa teillä on käytössänne tulkkauspalvelu?**

**Missä työtilanteissa teillä ei ole käytössänne tulkkauspalvelua? Mikä on silloin yleisin viestinnässä käyttämänne kieli?**

**Voitteko ystävällisesti keskustella tarkemmin edellä mainituista asioista haastattelun merkeissä? (Voitte ilmoittaa tässä teille sopivan ajankohdan tai voin sopia siitä avustajanne kanssa.)**

**KIITOS YHTEISTYÖSTÄ!**

## Appendix 3: Interview structure

### Haastatteluteemat

#### Taustatiedot

- Ammatti
- Poliittinen kokemus
- Aiemmat kansainväliset tehtävät
- Tiedot kulttuurienvälisestä viestinnästä (esim. kurssit, kirjat)
- Miten valmistauduite mepin tehtävään tullessanne valituksi?
- Oletteko kouluttautunut europarlamentaarikkouran aikana? Miten?

#### Monikulttuurinen työympäristö

- Mitä ajattelette Euroopan parlamentin monikulttuurisuudesta?
- Miten arvioitte monikulttuurisuuden vaikutusta työntekoon?
- Missä tilanteissa näkyy erityisesti? Esimerkkejä konkreettisista tilanteista?

Poliittinen kulttuuri (= politiikkaan ja politikointiin liittyvät uskomukset, asenteet ja arvot)

- Miten kuvailisitte Euroopan parlamentin poliittista kulttuuria? (esim. ero suomalaiseen verrattuna)
- Miten jäsenmaiden erilaiset poliittiset kulttuurit näkyvät työtavoissa? (esim. päätöksenteko, argumentointi, poliittinen käyttäytyminen) Esimerkkejä?

#### Kulttuurierot ja viestintä

- Millaisia kulttuurieroja olette huomanneet kommunikoidessanne toisesta kulttuurista tulevan henkilön kanssa (esim. käsityksissä, keskustelutyylissä, puheenaiheissa, huumorissa, suoruudessa, muodollisuudessa, kohteliaisuudessa, eleissä)?
  - o Voitteko antaa esimerkkejä vuorovaikutustilanteista, jossa kulttuurierot ovat johtaneet väärinkäsityksiin tai ristiriitaan?
  - o Miten tilanteesta selviydyttiin?
  - o Millä keinoin väärinkäsityksiä ja ristiriitoja voisi välttää?

## Viestintäkäyttäytyminen

- Millaista meppiä pidätte taitavana viestijänä? Miksi?
- Millaista huonona? Miksi?
- Voitteko kuvailla jotakin mielestänne onnistunutta keskustelua jonkin ulkomaalaisen kolleganne kanssa?
  - o mistä aiheesta, missä, milloin, kenen kanssa, kuinka kauan?
  - o mikä teki siitä onnistuneen?
- Miten luonnehtisitte vaikuttavaa puheenvuoroa täysistunnossa/poliittisten ryhmien ja valiokuntien tapaamisissa? Kenen näkökulmasta katsottuna? Onko muodostunut jokin hyvän puheenvuoron normi?
- Miten luonnehtisitte viestintää poliittisten ryhmien tapaamisissa?
  - o Millaista vuorovaikutusta?
  - o Mikä on sopivaa ja asianmukaista viestintäkäyttäytymistä?
- Miten luonnehtisitte viestintää valiokuntien tapaamisissa?
  - o Millaista vuorovaikutusta?
  - o Mikä on sopivaa ja asianmukaista viestintäkäyttäytymistä?
- Miten erimielisyydet ilmaistaan neuvottelu-/väittelytilanteessa? Mitä pidätte sopivana tapana? Miksi?
- Oletteko omaksuneet joitakin uusia ominaisuuksia omaan viestintäkäyttäytymiseenne meppiuranne aikana? (esim. kohteliaisuus, kuunteleminen, aggressiivisuus)
- Millä osa-alueilla haluaisitte itse kehittyä tulevaisuudessa?

## Kulttuuritausta ja vuorovaikutustilanteet

- Tuleeko kulttuuritausta mielestänne esille vuorovaikutustilanteissa?
- Voitteko antaa esimerkin tilanteesta, jossa huomaatte toimivanne suomalaisittain? Esimerkiksi itse...
- Millaisina viestijöinä arvelette suomalaisia pidettävän? Kenen näkökulmasta? Minkälaisissa tilanteissa tämä tulee esiin?
- Pidättekö joitakin suomalaisille tyypillisiä piirteitä ongelmallisena mepin työn kannalta? Missä työtilanteissa?

## Sosiaaliset suhteet

- Miten tärkeänä työnne kannalta pidätte verkostoitumista?
- Miten olette luoneet omat verkostonne ja miten ylläpidätte niitä?

- Miten kuvailisitte suhdetta kollegoihinne? (esim. ammattimainen/henkilökohtainen, etäinen/läheinen, muodollinen/epämuodollinen)
- Miten suhteen luonne vaikuttaa viestintäkäyttäytymiseen? Esimerkkejä?
- Vaikuttaako kollegan ikä, sukupuoli tai status viestintään jollakin tavalla? Miten?
- Esiintyykö meppien kesken kilpailua? Millaista? Miten näissä kilpailutilanteissa voi onnistua?

#### Kieli

- Miten luonnehtisitte kielitaidon merkitystä mepin työssä?
- Millaista kielitaitoa mepin työssä mielestänne tarvitaan
  - o mitä kieliä?
  - o mitä erityissanastoa?
  - o ymmärtäminen/osallistuminen/keskusteleminen?

#### Neuvot seuraajille

- Millaisia neuvoja saitte tai olisitte toivonut saavanne ennen meppiuranne alkamista? Entä kulttuurienvälisen viestinnän kannalta?
- Millaisia kulttuurienväliseen viestintään liittyviä neuvoja antaisitte seuraajillenne, jotta nämä voisivat hoitaa tehtävänsä mahdollisimman onnistuneesti?

Tuleeko mieleen jotain muuta aiheeseen liittyvää, jonka haluaisitte tässä tuoda esille?

