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## **Accountability in transgovernmental networks**

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# CHAPTER VI

EReg: A case of a network administrative governed  
information network

## 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter we will address the accountability type of a network administrative governed information network. In accordance with our expectation, we will need to find a predominance of the bureaucratic accountability type. Bureaucratic accountability is a type of accountability that is based on close supervision with a subordinate-supervisor role stressed. The emphasis on obedience is high. This type of accountability has a strong vertical dimension with codification of rules and directives being particularly visible here. We expect to find this type prevalent over the others as the impact of an information network is not considered too great. Which would not necessitate a stringent accountability relationship with oversight from third parties but rather keeping accountability within the organisation attending. However, due to the network administrative part, the network has a formalised component to it which would make supervisors involvement more likely than if the network was participant governed. To assess the credibility of our expectations we will make use of the transgovernmental network EReg (Association for European Vehicle and Driver Registration Authorities) as a case. In the policy domain of transport, they deal with technical issues regarding vehicle and driver registration. Due to the opening up of the European market, problems with tracking vehicles and driver across borders ensued. As the technicality of the matters do not permit a general foreign affairs approach, the registries themselves form a network. The registries are the members of the network. They have taken steps to formalize the network.

The network itself is structured along the lines of a network administrative governed network. This means that an administrative component is created to coordinate and partly steer the network. The administrative component of EReg is made up of a fixed secretariat. They together with the chairman, operate as a facilitator to the network. They hold a key or hub position in the network. The acceptance of this position by the other members is crucial for the progress of the network. After we address the history of the network we will outline how this governance style is reflected in the organisational structure of EReg.

The function of the network is an information network. This means that the majority of the work of the network is directed at the sharing of knowledge and experiences. Best practices are shared between the members to be able to enhance the capacity of their own national organisations. For instance, the network organises one-day conferences called: EReg Academy. These are sessions in which policy makers and/or academic professionals come together to discuss a subject more in depth (EReg a, n.d.). The last session that the EReg website refers to was in 2018 and dealt with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). This piece of European Union legislation concerns rules for the protection of personal data both inside and outside of the European Union. As vehicle and driver registration authorities deal with personal data, the GDPR had consequences for their work. During the Academy, the members of EReg could discuss with each other how the legislation would affect their work.

The Academy is not the only activity of EReg. The network also has activities that deal with for instance; the enhancement of registration and licensing by means of digital service channels, how to deal with self-driving vehicles, as well as the exchange of mileage information. Which are mentioned in the current work programme of the network. We will discuss why the activities of EReg would fall in the category of an information network rather than an enforcement or harmonisation network.

We will outline the background of the network. After which the organisational structure of the network and its function will be discussed. Given our expectations we would need to find that this type of network would yield towards a bureaucratic accountability prevalence. By making use of the table 4.7 of distinguishing features for this type of accountability we will go through the different aspects of the relationship. We will assess this by means of the distinguishing features for each type, as presented in the methodological chapter. To simplify this, we will focus on three questions: To whom? On what? And how is account given. These three questions will form the systematic structure to our assessment of the accountability type present in this network. Moreover, they are the basic structure as presented in the table.

## 6.2 Background of EReg

EReg is an association of vehicle and driver registration authorities. The reason for EReg existence was born out of a different transgovernmental network, which members are also national vehicle and driver registration authorities, called EUCARIS (European Car and Driving License Information System). A respondent said that the reason for EReg is basically a problem that arose due to the fall of the Berlin Wall. This created a surge in vehicles being moved across borders. This meant that it became easier to move illegally exported or stolen cars in Europe as well (Eucaris, n.d.). Essentially the registration authorities could no longer keep track of the vehicles. Vehicle registration is a way to track if taxes are paid and if the vehicle is eligible to be driven on public roads. Not being able to track vehicles thus created a problem. In order to solve this registration authorities of The Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg and the United Kingdom came together to address this issue. The authorities of these countries already had links because of cooperation which made the start on this subject easier. They started with exchanging data in 1994. This was the start of EUCARIS.

EUCARIS is a network that revolves around a data exchange system. This system is explained on the website of EUCARIS as:

“(it) is a system that connects countries so they can share vehicle and driving licence information and other transport related data. EUCARIS is not a database nor a central repository but an exchange mechanism that connects the Vehicle and Driving Licence Registration Authorities in Europe. EUCARIS is developed by and for governmental authorities and supports a.o. the fight against car theft and registration fraud.” (Eucaris, n.d.)

This system together with the bond it forged between authorities also identified other common problems. Difficulties and developments that stretched beyond the exchange of information on licenses and vehicle registries. The cooperation grew with the inclusion of more and more countries. With the growing of the network the realisation also grew that cooperation beyond data exchange could also be beneficial to the registration authorities. Where EUCARIS really deals with the technical issues regarding a registration system, EReg is more involved in general policies that ties the work of the different authorities together (Respondent EReg II). The foundation for the association was laid after European Vehicle and Driver Registration authorities first came together in 1998, in Stockholm (Respondent EReg I).

On EReg's website it is suggested that the initial meeting was a formal affair that was followed up "on a less formal basis with an annual meeting attended by European Vehicle and Driver Registration authorities" (EReg b, n.d.). The actual inception of the organisation called EReg, however was rather a process than a moment. A meeting in 2002 is highlighted on the website of EReg. At that meeting, the decision was made to hold annual meetings with the authorities to discuss developments in the field of driver and vehicle registration. In the coming years the number of attendees to these meetings rose, culminating in 2006 to 20 participating authorities. At the annual meeting held in Cyprus it was decided that an association of European Vehicle and Driver Registration authorities should be established. This led to the establishment of EReg. On April 25<sup>th</sup> 2013, EReg was registered as an Association under Belgian Law. A presentation was held in Bucharest to discuss the establishment of EReg as a legal entity. In the words of the chair the establishment of EReg as an association was necessary because of:

"Growing professionalization, better accountability, stronger international position and legal ability" (Van der Bruggen, 21 November 2013).

The same presentation also stated that the statutes did not change the current agreements but that in order to become an Association, EReg needed a formal office in Belgium, that the advisory group's role would be turned into a formal board position and including the creation of an EReg Chairman who was also the Advisory group chairman (Van der Bruggen, 21 November 2013). EReg currently has 29 member authorities from both in and outside the European Union.<sup>10</sup> Next to that EReg has forged alliances with partner organisations: AAMVA (American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators) and Austroads (the peak organisation of Australasian road transport and traffic agencies). Both alliances were formalised through the signing of an agreement. On the website of EReg the aim of the alliances is clarified as promoting cooperation and communication to the benefit of both partners in the agreement (EReg c, n.d.). The exchanging of information and best practices is highlighted as a way to ensure this. The signing of the agreements and the increase in

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10 Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Gibraltar, Greece, Guernsey, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Isle of Man, Jersey, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

members signals the success of the network. The expansion by adding new member and cooperating partners shows the value of this network.

### 6.3 Governance structure of EReg

EReg is an association under Belgian Law with members who are public authorities on vehicle and driver registration. They should hold a central legal status in their home country in order to join EReg as a member. EReg is registered as a non-profit association. The organisation of EReg currently consists of 29 members. These members are authorities in the field of vehicle registration and/or driver licenses. Ireland is currently the only country represented by two different institutions, as the tasks of vehicle registration and driving licenses are divided over these. There are two types of membership. An authority can either be a full or an associate member. Unlike the full members, associate members do not have a right to vote but they can partake in the activities of the network. The network is organised in four different components: topic groups, secretariat and chair, general assembly and advisory board. First, the technical discussions and technical transfer of knowledge is done in specialized work groups. These work groups are named topic groups. They are established when a particular topic gains enough impetus for members to address the topic together. A new directive from Brussels is an example that would merit the establishment of a topic group. Topic groups can either be long standing or have a definitive end time. They are set up by formulating the objectives first. This will indicate the amount of time that needs to be allocated to the existence of a topic group. In the topic group delegates of the different member authorities designated to the specific topic meet up. They discuss interpretations of guidelines, exchange their practices and anecdotes on how to deal with particular issues. In addition, they discuss ways forward for their respective authorities in terms of regulation and practice. Depending on the topic, the delegate might have a legal background when discussing interpretation of legislation or a more executive background in licensing if virtual drivers licences are discussed. This is highly dependent on the status of the topic as well as the nature of the topic. The topic group is chaired by a delegate of one of the member authorities and there is always a secretary in the topic group. This can either be another member but more often it is a member of the secretariat of the network (Respondent EReg III).

The secretariat operates from the headquarters of one of the member organisations the RDW (Rijksdienst voor het Wegverkeer) in Zoetermeer, the Netherlands. EReg formally holds a seat in Brussels. The address in Brussels functions more or less as a postal address. The secretariat is currently staffed by personnel of the RDW however they are outsourced to the secretariat. They operate externally from the operations of the RDW (Respondent EReg III, Respondent EReg IV). The secretariat is partly financed by the RDW. EReg has a small loan at RDW. Respondents however remark that it is essential to keep their independence. As one respondent mentions that together with the current chair, the network is taking steps professionalising its activities and this includes financial independence to be reached within the next two years

(Respondent EReg IV). The chair and the secretariat work in close cooperation with each other and both are currently from the same country i.e the Netherlands. The position of the chairperson is not necessarily from the Netherlands, as the previous chairperson was from Luxembourg. Several respondents have however mentioned that a balanced involvement from other countries is desirable in order to maintain credibility as the position of both the secretariat and the chair are seen as initiator and facilitator (Respondent EReg I, Respondent EReg IV, Respondent EReg VI). The secretariat's independent position was however also emphasised when the organisation established itself as an association under Belgian Law (Statutes 2012). The statutes were presented by four delegates from four countries. Moreover, it proved another step in professionalising the network (Respondent EReg IV).

The pivotal role in brokering the network by the chair and secretariat, which is key for a network administrative governed style, is seen in the observations conducted within the network. During the annual meeting the chair and the secretariat were the ones presenting documents most often, and also provided additional explanation for them. In addition, the balancing of the power in the network is also addressed here. The setup of the network is such that the chair is supported by an advisory board. During the annual meeting the chair informed the audience that the board was understaffed but underlined their helpfulness to the execution of the tasks of the chairman (Observation EReg II). The advisory board advises both the chair as well as the secretariat. Including the chair, it needs to have six members stemming from different countries for a maximum term of five years. It is within the competences of the advisory board to advise on everything related to the organisation of the network. Unless it is strictly the responsibility of the annual meeting of the general assembly or the chair (Statutes EReg).

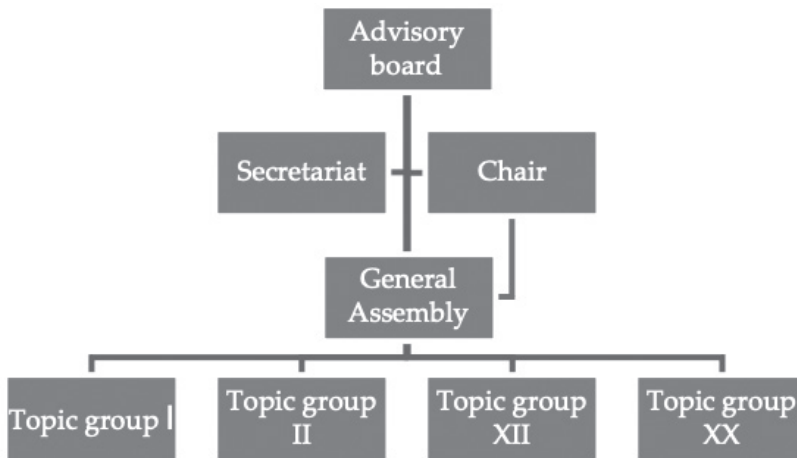
The advisory board works with the chair and the secretariat to devise the working program. Most often, the input for the working program is provided by the topic groups (Respondent EReg IV). The topics for the topic groups are filtered out by means of surveys conducted by the secretariat of the network. A proposal for a specific subject to be tackled by the network is at times put forward by a member authority to the secretariat or the chair of the network as well as by the advisory board (Respondent EReg III, Respondent EReg IV). They translate the mission of the network to a working programme (Respondent EReg III). The actual working programme is prepared for and written by the secretariat in cooperation with the chair of the network (Respondent EReg I, Respondent EReg IV). The input of the members thus gives a sense of direction to the network. Nevertheless, the secretariat of the network; headed by the chair is very much in control of the final product. As one respondent formulated it, the secretariat always makes sure to have some room to influence the agenda of the network as it is important to be able to address changes in the legislation (Respondent EReg IV). The secretariat acts as a key player within the network. Its key role played by the chair is also indicated in the current Work Programme 2019 -2022. Regarding the safeguarding of both continuity and professionalization of the network the following paragraph is added in the document:

“In the future, the Chairman’s responsibilities would preferably be divided between the Chairman, the Deputy Chairman and the other Advisory Board members, where possible. To ensure continuity and efficient handover, and with the elected support of the General Meeting, teamwork between the Chairman and Deputy Chairman could make the Deputy Chairman a logical successor to the Chairman. Also, members of the Advisory Board have a good understanding of what the Chairman position is all about and could therefore be a strong pool of candidates for this position. It will be examined what kind of structures and mechanisms can work to divide the responsibilities and ensure continuity. (...) The EReg Secretariat takes care of the daily operations and is a valuable sparring partner for the Chairman, Deputy Chairman and Members of the Advisory Board. Next to this the Secretariat takes care of the preparations of meetings and events and can act as a representative of EReg upon request.” (EReg, 2019a).

This paragraph signals that the chair currently holds a lot of responsibilities, as it is mentioned that responsibilities should be shared in future. In addition, the key role of the secretariat is mentioned. This is further proof that the network currently operates as a network administrative governed network. The strong position of the chair might, given the content of the paragraph, change in the future but currently its role is not to be dismissed. Nor is the work of the secretariat given the emphasis paid as “valuable sparring partner”.

The role of the secretariat is also to monitor the progress of topic group, and this progress is subsequently reported to the general assembly. The general assembly convenes annually. During which the financial and operational reports are discussed. Moreover, changes in the composition of the administration chair and or advisory board are voted for in this setting. The general assembly is the highest deciding unit of the network. In day-to-day operations it is however the chairman together with the secretariat, with the consent of the advisory board that is in charge. The secretariat offers more than just a facilitating role and thus surpasses the participant governed style proclaimed by Provan and Kenis (2007). With the network not simply linked to a single member, and the aspirations to be and remain independent we also see that the secretariat is external to the member organisation. In other words, the secretariat operates as an independent entity within the network. Hence, it goes beyond the lead organisation governance structure. Moreover, given the position as a broker for the network the particular role of the secretariat offers proof for EReg being a network administrative governed network. Even though the fact that the employees of the secretariat do stem from one member organisation and part of the secretariat function is paid for by the same member organisation offers a bit of a grey area. The provisions in place to counter dependence on one member organisation over the others validates that EReg is indeed a form of network administrative governance. If we take all the different sections together, we see a secretariat that exerts itself as a broker. It is visible in all the different units of the network. The secretariat works as an agent to initiate and facilitate. Yet, it does so in a format in which it places itself external, or independent from the member authorities. The organigram below exemplifies the relations between the different units of the network.



**Figure 6.1: Organisational chart EReg**

The empirical findings clearly indicate that EReg is a network administrative governed network, with an external administrative entity steering and coordinating the network. It facilitates and governs the activities of the network. This form of network is highly centralized. As the entity is external, the members are no longer in the lead regarding the governance structure of the network. The secretariat and chair are effectively the network broker in the case of EReg

## 6.4 Function of EReg

EReg is an information network. This can be seen in the objectives of the network, the activities deployed by the network as well as the impact of the network. We will go through these three subjects in more detail below.

Information networks are one out of three types of transgovernmental networks based on their functions. If we take a look at the division of networks along the lines of function we can distinguish three: information, enforcement, and harmonisation. Information networks concerns the dissemination of data and knowledge helpful in relation to technical assistance of the members. Although transgovernmental networks do not need to fall completely within one type or the other, we can genuinely distinguish a predominance for one over the other within them. This means that even though some activities could be considered to belong to one of the types, the bulk of the activities may lie within the scope of a different one.

When looking at the objectives of EReg we can clearly see a prevalence for an information network type. The objectives of the EReg network are listed below:

The main objective of EReg is to bring together the European Registration Authorities to be able to:

1. Share knowledge, experience and good practices
2. Identify, follow and influence European developments and regulations
3. Take initiatives aimed at improving the performance of tasks by the members as European partners
4. Establish exchange and cooperation arrangements with relevant other parties
5. Promote effective and efficient data exchange (EReg b, n.d.)

Looking at the objectives listed, the definition of the information network seems to fit all of the objectives however, we must take note of objective 2. In that objective the word “influence” is included. When this influence includes the capacity to have an effect on regulations this would stretch beyond an information network and would fit better with a harmonisation network. In addition, objective 3 makes clear that it aims to improve performance of tasks. If this includes regulatory performance, that hint at an enforcement network. According to a respondent this is not the case. The respondent testified that the two main goals of the network are: 1. sharing knowledge to ensure we can better execute policy and 2. making sure the knowledge we already have is extended to policy makers for them to improve policy. The respondent went on to clarify that they limit themselves to the sharing of knowledge so as not to intervene in the political process of policy making (Respondent EReg 1). Noteworthy to mention is a conversation during the observation of the Annual meeting. On the participant list a delegate of the European Commission was included. Upon asking a delegate what the role of the European Commission delegate was, the EReg delegate discussed the inception of EReg:

EReg was founded because the national authorities wanted to show the Commission that it can't just move forward. The EC thus was rather defensive about EReg it was on the fence about what to make of it as they were scared that some of their powers would be taken away. The delegate said in recent years this has changed. EReg really tries to portray itself as an adviser to the Commission and show that when they work together, they can make policies that are easier in implementation. According to the delegate this change really comes down to the role played by the chairman of EReg. Commission is now actively seeking cooperation regarding policy making. (Observation EReg I).

During the annual meeting the level of cooperation with the European Commission was discussed. A topic group that had already rounded up its work had gained prominence, and reconvened.

The information that is now coming in, and contacts with the EC on this issue, is being transferred to the delegates. (Member of secretariat) mentions that a cooperation with the EC on this topic is now in place. The chairman says he wants to give the delegates the

opportunity to discuss this or give remarks. There are none. The chairman then goes on to discuss things he thinks are worth noting for instance getting other stakeholders on board and also being a partner in policy making. (Observation EReg I).

The stressing of being a partner in policy making, rather than showing a focus on how the organisation could itself steer policy is key as this would not indicate a harmonisation network function. It does show that parts of the work of the EReg is moving beyond an information network function. Although this is not its main focus.

Moving to what the network mainly does we understand four active topic groups to be in existence. These groups are an important part of the activities of EReg. They are aimed at sharing knowledge (EReg b, nd.) but also are the vehicles for progress of the objectives of EReg. Members discuss technical subjects during the meetings of these topic groups in detail, so it is there where we can see the actual translation of the function of the network. During a full-day observation of a meeting of a topic group on the GDPR<sup>11</sup> in International Data Exchange (topic group XX) we encountered an exchange between the chair of the meeting and several of the members present. The exchange was on creating agreement on a to be newly formed document on conduct regarding data. Members discussed problems that they would encounter in their home country and asked for changes, to which the chair of the meeting kept reiterating that “We only deal with overarching issues”, other things should be dealt with at the local level (Observation EReg I). This statement, which was repeated over and over, indicates that EReg focuses more on general issues relating to the information function rather than an enforcement or harmonisation network. EReg is not aiming to level the playing field which we would expect in a harmonisation or enforcement network. In those type of networks ensuring similar enforcement and alleviating differences between member states is the actual aim.

In addition, when members were asked by the secretariat of EReg to fill out a questionnaire which asked which activities of EReg are considered most useful, the members ranked the “Sharing of knowledge, experience and good practices” highest. The more enforcement function answer categories such as: “Take initiatives aimed at improving the performance of tasks by members as European partners” were ranked lowest.

In the results of the questionnaires of 2016 and 2019 we can see that the information function are considered more important than enforcement or even harmonisation function of the other activities mentioned. Even so, we should take note that the first activity “Share knowledge, experience and good practices” was listed as least important by seven out of twenty delegates that filled out this part of the questionnaire in 2019 (EReg, 2019a). In the Work Programme of 2016-2019 the first activity was considered the most important with 18/22 stating so, while the other categories of importance scoring 1/22 (EReg, December 2016).

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<sup>11</sup> GDPR: General Data Protection Regulation: Regulation by the European Union that entered into force in May 2018, that addresses issues of privacy and data protection.

The subject matter of the topic groups provides another indication that the work of the network is mostly concerned with an information function. We have already addressed the topic group concerning the GDPR which showed to fall within the information function category. We will now go over the other current topic groups. Although the information on the content of the topic groups remains limited we see that the work of Topic group I: International Data Exchange is described as:

“Currently the Topic Group is focusing on the following two subjects:

- The exchange of information supporting technical vehicle inspections (PTI and RSI) in cooperation with CITA;
- Issues related to the exchange of vehicle owner/holder information within the framework of enforcement on traffic offences, parking and toll, including cooperation with and outsourcing to private companies for the collection of data and all kind of traffic fines.” (EReg d, n.d.).

The objectives of the topic group show the emphasis given to the information function. The same can be said of topic group XXI: On Harmonization of Registration Procedures and Data Quality. Although harmonisation is in the title of the topic group the work of this topic group, based on the objectives do not by themselves lead to harmonisation. It seems the topic group is still very much exploring. Although the topic group could develop into a harmonisation function it is not there yet. As each case would inevitably be in transition based on one aspect or another, one cannot avoid this. Nevertheless, at this point we argue that EReg is an example of a network administrative information network. When we redirect our attention to topic group XXI, we find that these are the objectives for the group:

“Topics to be discussed in this Topic Group are:

What data is stored and for what goals?

How do we guarantee the quality and actuality of the data?

What vehicle modifications are registered and what procedures are used for that?

What events in the life cycle of a vehicle have to be registered?

What procedures are used to register changes in the holdership or ownership of a vehicle?” (EReg, e, n.d.)

This topic group is still very much focused on the collection of information even though this might be a first step towards harmonisation. As it stands now, this activity is not considered a harmonisation function. The same holds for Topic group II. During the annual meeting the progress of this topic group has scored an orange smiley. This indicates that progress seems to be stalled. During the meeting in 2018 it was noted that the topic group had not convened that

year but that a meeting was scheduled (Observation EReg I). On the online agenda of EReg nor on the site of the topic group itself or in the newsletters of EReg can such a meeting be found. We therefore conclude it did not take place. Topic Group XII: CoC Data Exchange has convened regularly. This group's function is more in line with a harmonisation function than the other topic groups. The topic group deals with Certificates of Conformity (CoC). These certificates list the technical points of a vehicle built after 1996. It is a measure that has eased the burden of importing or exporting a vehicle as CoC has replaced the previous type approval. Where the type approval documents needed to be sent to different countries by the manufacturer, CoC only needs to be supplied once. It will then be registered digitally by one of the member states participating in it. Data exchange will happen from there. The process of setting up CoC was instigated as countries like Germany and the Netherlands were already trying to migrate from type approval systems to CoC systems (EReg f, n.d.). In 2011 the topic group was then created within the context of EReg. The process is described on the Topic group page as:

“Since the installation of the Topic Group a lot has happened. First of all the group started the definition of a structured electronic CoC XML-format. Via this standard format the information can be easily electronically exchanged. In addition, a preferred exchange model has been selected by the Topic Group. This model describes the way the CoC information can be distributed by the manufacturers via the Type Approval Authorities to the Registration Authorities. Also checks have been defined by the Topic Group to check the CoC information, among others against the respective Type Approval information.

Already in an early stage the ideas have been discussed with the European Commission. The provision for a CoC in electronic format can be found in article 37 of the new Framework Regulation on approval and market surveillance of motor vehicles and their trailers, and of systems, components and separate technical units intended for such vehicles which will replace directive 2007/46/EC. ACEA<sup>12</sup> and ACEM<sup>13</sup> are involved in the Topic Group meetings as well.” (EReg f, n.d.).

The description of the process shows that the work of EReg has led to CoC to be included in legislation. In addition, the blanket approach for authorities on vehicle and driver registration shows the intent of the topic group to create a harmonised approach. This topic group is more in line with a harmonisation function of a network than the information function. However, it should be noted that the project is still in the trial stages. As the newsletter of April 2019 mentions:

“Topic Group XII on CoC Data Exchange will meet in April to discuss the electronic exchange of Certificates of Conformity (CoC) and in the future possibly type approval data” (EReg, April 2019).

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12 The European Automobile Manufacturers' Association.

13 The European Association of Motorcycle Manufacturers.

In addition, the topic group released a document on the progress and participants of CoC exchange. It emphasises the pilot phase the project is still in, but it also showed that, although in different stages most participating members are implementing the new system (Topic Group XII, n.d.: full table in Annex I).

This is the only topic group currently operating which we can link more to a harmonisation function over the other functions. Which is why we can conclude that currently the network needs to be considered as an information network. Although elements, or better some activities deployed by the network have the potential to lead to a harmonisation function, the main activities remain within the information function realm. This is supported by the members and the objectives of most of the topic groups. In future, there is a possibility that this might change.

## 6.5 Account giving

The work of EReg is in effect comprised of smoothening the process of vehicle and driver registration. This pertains to discussions on how different authorities deal with registration process issues, for instance with regards to the possibility for digital drivers' licenses in the future. A way EReg is fulfilling this objective is through the Vehicle Chain. This is a survey which is published every four years. It provides an overview of how the different members of EReg are structured and how they perform their tasks. The idea of the survey has originated from the Dutch member of EReg but is now a tool produced by EReg. It offers the participants insight in the state of affairs and helps with seeking out the right partners to collaborate with (EReg, 2019b). This is one way in which EReg performs its information function. EReg is a network administrative governed information network. Although we have seen some aspects of other functions (such as harmonisation) and have discussed the possibility that the network could be moving in another direction we still, in this time, argue that it is predominantly an information network. The structural aspect in the way that it is organised within EReg leads to the conclusion that this is a network administrative governed network. Even though, the secretariat is operating in a grey area in the sense that it is composed out of employees from one participant but they functionally operate at quite a distance from it. Networks, like any social construct, are not static. They evolve and change over time. In the section below we will go into how the work of EReg is disseminated and to whom. We have divided this into two sections. First, we shall address how the network itself has structured its accountability relationships after which we shall go into how account is given to the national line of the Dutch participants.

### 6.5.1 Account giving structure of the network EReg

Account giving in the structure of EReg is focused on two tiers of the organisation; the annual meeting and the topic groups. Because of this we need to take a close look at the process of reporting by topic groups and in the general assembly. In the topic groups the operational

level comes together. The preparatory work, the technical work is done in the topic groups. A clear instance of what the level of technicality is in topic groups can be seen in the example below. It describes a scene during the observation of one of the topic groups and shows the level of technical detail with which the participants convers with one another:

When discussing a policy document, a discussion ensues about the meaning of one word in the article: non-compliance. How to look out for a breach? What is meant? What do we want it to be? These are questions of 'what if'-nature. The chairman says we need to have it in there. He is not challenged. The Chairman, the Belgian representative and the English participant are most involved. Eucaris representative tries to offer a clarification. One of the Dutch participants is raising the question again on what is non-compliance in order to stay on track and on point with the meeting. The chairman takes a consensus strategy. (Observation EReg I).

The above example shows the level of detail in which discussion ensue. In this case the meaning of the wording in a document. In addition, the discussion went into quite far-out hypotheticals; what ifs? This discussion went on for quite some time before the chairman brought it back.

Before a topic group can actually start it needs to have approval of the annual meeting/general assembly. It is essentially organised in such a way that the work of the topic groups needs to have had a go ahead from the general assembly. However, at times issues pop up in a topic group that come with a sense of urgency. Waiting for approval of the general assembly might take too long, which could lead a topic group to move forward with an issue. If this occurs the report clearly mentions that it is the position of the topic group rather than EReg (Respondent EReg V). The level of participation within the topic group thus becomes of special interest in the speed of progress of the network. Next to that, the position of the chairman is crucial regarding both discussions and progress. This is shown by the example given, but also by the fact that the chair holds many responsibilities as we have seen previously.

During the observation of a topic group session it became apparent that the chair of the network is keen to stay on the international level of discussions. What should be done on a local level should be discussed at the national level, information that can be shared or agreed upon by all members should have the focus (Observation EReg I). However, it becomes clear that for moving forward some of the participants are of the opinion to lack the authority to discuss a matter or propose a direction. In one instance a participant of the topic group tells the other members that part of the discussion is not in her dossier but befalls a different department (Observation EReg I). As the network is really focused on involving operational level delegates, this also comes with its own set of difficulties. Being low in the food chain also means a lack of mandate (Respondent EReg I). In addition, in order to move forward you need to have the right level of people at the table (Respondent EReg V). Professionalization in

the sense of incorporating those more higher up in the food chain is however well underway (Respondent EReg I, Respondent EReg V). This alludes to the fact that accountability towards a vertical line of command is necessary for those operational level delegates before than can sign off or approve of EReg activities. The incorporation of more senior level staff can be seen for instance in the setting up of the CEO meeting that precedes the general assembly. Which we shall discuss later. As we will finish our discussion on the topic groups first.

The preparatory work for the topic groups is often done by the participant of the topic group itself. Meaning that the expert on the topic is asked to attend the meeting of the topic group that is mostly suited to their own expertise. For the Dutch participants there is a general consensus on the fact that they are ultimately responsible for a specific topic for which they are in a topic group (Respondent EReg II, Respondent EReg V, Respondent EReg VII). However, it depends if the topic is clearly defined or not (Respondent EReg VII). In essence the Dutch line of accountability seems dependent on the member attending. Meaning that there is no structure available to discuss the progress or work of EReg as a team. Rather each participant to the network informs their own manager (Respondent EReg VII) on their progress. In addition it is mentioned that the subject matter gives the instruction to whom account is given. Currently there is a discussion in the network to categorize what would be necessary if authorities are to move towards a mobile digital driving license. That discussion is not very tangible yet, as it is still in the preliminary stages. However, the subject matter is put forth to the Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment. This is done on an informative basis but as it is not a real policy issue yet, the ministry is just kept in the know (Respondent EReg VII). When a topic group moves in the direction of devising a statement, members do need to go back to their national experts and policy makers. Depending on the topic this could mean involvement of several ministries (Respondent EReg II, Respondent EReg V).

Regarding the reporting of meetings of the topic groups it is mentioned that for each session a report is made by the chair and/or secretary (Respondent EReg II). A format on how to devise such a report is being brought under the attention of the annual meeting of EReg at the moment. This is done to professionalise the organisation (Respondent EReg V). The format itself as well as the communication in terms of reports is set up by the secretariat of the network. The secretariat has highlighted the importance of this during the annual meeting as well (Observation EReg I).

The reports of the topic groups are sent to the secretariat and to the annual meeting of the general meeting. Although on most topics, the decisions are reached within the topic group. Especially on clearly defined topics. When a topic does not have consequences for policy, the amount of account giving is limited (Respondent EReg VII). This is the case for most topic groups, as they do not deviate from standing policy but rather focus on information dissemination. As already addressed, the topic is key, meaning that topics that touch upon different policy areas or the mandates of different institutions need to be dealt with more



broadly. There are more stakeholders involved, so when consensus cannot be reached beforehand, voting by senior level staff in the general assembly becomes necessary. As such the network is mostly based on the input of the members in the topic groups. Instances in which the topic proved difficult to come to an agreement have occurred during the observation. For instance, during a topic group session a referral to the mandate designated to a member was discussed. As one participant mentioned that it was not in her portfolio to discuss the matter at hand (Observation EReg I). During the same observation when discussing a policy document for the network, another referral to standing legislation was made. When the chair of the meeting asked if consensus could be reached a representative of a Nordic country said: “we cannot agree due to national law”. This had to do with privacy issues on the login and access data requested by the document. This led the chair of the meeting to defer the final discussion to the general assembly later that year (Observation EReg I).

The referral to the general assembly is not surprising as the reports of the topic groups are sent to the general assembly to inform and to get approval. Furthermore, it is here that the progress of the different topic groups is presented by the secretariat as they provide an overview complete with traffic light indicators. The reporting within the topic groups used to be based just on simple final reports of the work of the topic group at the closing of the topic group. This has changed as the secretariat of the network became more involved in the monitoring. They have set up a format which includes an executive summary that highlights the recommendations. Next to that, a monitoring sheet was created. In this sheet the progress of the different subjects has been included. The date of finalising activities and the most important conclusions and recommendations can be directly assessed on the sheet. In addition, follow up activities are also mentioned in the sheet (Respondent EReg IV).

This highest decision-making body, the general assembly, provides the actual approval and support to proceed. During the general assembly, the members attending are not necessarily the same as those attending the topic groups. The members of the topic groups being of the operational level, the attendees to the general assembly are more on the executive level (Respondent EReg I, Respondent EReg VII). During the observation it was apparent that the ‘top brass’, the highest ranking executives of the member authorities, were in attendance. This can be seen by both the attendance list, the fact that some of the executives come to the meeting with their own translator (often an operational level functionary who has participated in a topic group) (Observation EReg I). These executives are the ones to vote and give approval to the projects and activities of the network.

The referral of final decisions to the general assembly occurred multiple times during the topic group observation. When discussing a possible template for possible peer reviews this is for instance also referred to the general assembly. During the topic group the point is raised that it should be presented there for approval (Observation EReg I). This is a clear submission to another’s authority in the matter. Considering the general assembly’s voting members are not

the same as those attending the topic groups, and that these voting members are of a higher level of the internal structure of the member authorities, obedience is a clear indicator here. During the annual meeting of the general assembly it was striking that very few questions were raised, remarks were few and seldom. Explanations on votes have not occurred during the general assembly attended. The lack of contention in voting is striking. When asked if this was normal the chair of the session said it was, but also because the agenda was made in such a way that most difficult dossiers had already been discussed and decided upon. One difficult dossier was pulled from the agenda as the chair felt it needs more discussion in the topic group and this was not the venue to start a discussion about it (Observation EReg I). However, an alternative explanation could be the differences between the attendees in proficiency of the English language. For example, one of the CEO's for instance does not speak English and has a staff member translating everything. When remarks are asked for, the chairman does not wait for a response before moving on, resulting that the translation was not yet completed before a new subject was presented by the chair (Observation EReg I). In addition, the position a delegate in the room determined the ability to hear the speakers clearly. For instance, during the annual meeting a delegate seated in the front of the room stood up, did not make use of a microphone and was inaudible in the back of the room. Even though whispers ensued in the back rows there was no one who made a point of the delegate being inaudible (Observation EReg I). This makes it difficult for delegates to both assess and take part in the discussions which is key to an accountability relationship (Bovens, 2007).

With regards to discussions that took place we can see a clear distinction in the set-up of the agenda. During the general assembly the first day is spent on approving the annual budget and more general administrative issues. Whereas day two is really focused on "our own work" in the words of the chair (Observation EReg I). This referenced work, is the activities and progress of the different topic groups. Each chair or secretary of a topic group presents the work of the group to the general assembly. Which is then met with no questions. For instance, a long standing topic group presented its work. They have been involved in devising an informative report on roadworthiness of vehicles for the European Commission (EC). On what the chair of the topic group gives account is discussed below:

The roadworthiness package is discussed with the EC and now we see that in the new directive (Mobility package) our points are put in. They take our advice into account pretty fast. And make use of it. However, there are some difficulties, and we need to take count for who is having these difficulties so we can be involved in the review process as well. We also had a request from CITA (umbrella organisation of PTI) they wanted us to cooperate more with US, Australia and Africa on the vehicle import dossier. Which is why we now set up a questionnaire in which we take stock of the current legislation on this in each countries and what the possibilities are. She ends her speech by inviting members to join the topic group. As joining and being active is key in the success of the topic group. The chair of the network asks if there are questions. There are none. (Observation EReg I).

In this example the chair of the topic group highlights the success of the topic group. The secretariat in their presentation of the annual report gave a more general overview of the progress made by offering smileys. A green smiley with a broad smile signifying good progress and a yellow or orange smiley with a sad face a lack of progress (Observation EReg II). The presentation of that section is observed by the researcher as follows:

Next point is the State of Affairs, a member of the secretariat gives a brief overview; she goes through each topic group and includes a progress indicator. The first topic group headed by a Dutch representative is given a green smiley. Topic group II is chaired by Germany and the progress indicator is an orange smiley with a sad face. The topic group has not been in contact last year, but an event is scheduled this summer. The Topic group xii is chaired by Finland and is given a green smiley. The group is really busy. They already met twice this year and a next event is this summer. Topic group XVIII is also chaired by Finland they have drafted guidelines for public private partnerships that was based on questionnaires. The progress indicator is also a green smiley. Topic group XIX, also chaired by Finland also had several meetings, the cooperation with researchers' study on the implementation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> driving licence directive which is a very active group and is given a green smiley. (Observation EReg I).

What has become clear, is that the actual discussions on activities of the network occur in the topic groups and are relayed back to the general assembly and the home organisation of the members, which we shall discuss later. The submission of authority to another is evident in the referral of decisions to the general assembly. The awareness of procedures and directives have been showcased by the participants. Nevertheless, we need to bear in mind that this could be related to the type of topic discussed. We know that there is a standardized format in which reporting takes place. However, we have not uncovered any definitive proof that discussion on the forms and procedures are followed by administrative actions. This latter point is one of the requirements of bureaucratic accountability. We can however confirm that obedience, by means of submission to another's' authority is very much in existence.

### **6.5.2 Account giving by participants to the home organisation**

As mentioned already the reports of the topic groups are sent to the member authorities. These reports are made by the chair of the topic group together with the secretary of the topic group. This structure signifies how account giving is done in theory, but a member of a topic group who has been in the position of secretary of a topic group has provided more insight into this type of account giving. The respondent spoke of the fact that most topic group sessions are single day meet ups. The respondent states that because of that it is paramount that you get the most out of the meeting. This means that a document is prepared to be discussed together with the chair and sometimes the general secretariat beforehand. During the topic group session, the participants will discuss the prepared document and will make an outline

regarding a revised document. In the course of the meeting participants will be asked to join in the writing of the document as they are asked to write particular sections. This means that the document is a product of collaboration (Respondent EReg VII). This process of sending documents ahead of meetings of topic groups was labelled by one of the respondents as:

“Getting your homework up front” (Respondent EReg VI).

Reports of topic groups are, in first instance, shared amongst the participants of the topic group. When a report becomes final, it is sent to the annual meeting of the general assembly. As we have seen, in the annual meeting those higher up in the national authorities attend these voting sessions. According to the respondent the voting members in the room of the General Assembly are mostly head of business operations or the director of an authority (Respondent EReg VII).

The attendance of participants whom are higher up in the internal hierarchy of the national authority is of interest to the type of accountability relationship. The vertical line of the internal organisation of an authority is included in the account giving structure of EReg participants. In addition, when asked about the dissemination of topic group reports to their own authority the respondent replied that how this is done depends on the topic. In some cases the subject matter discussed in the topic group is on the theme as the participant’s final responsibility. According to a respondent the delegates are often chosen based on the fact that they are the experts or have a final responsibility over the subject matter in their home organisation. This is done to ensure that “you can actually get something out of meeting” (Respondent EReg VI). Feedback on the topic group will then be given to those working on the same team in the internal structure of the authority. The feedback will mostly be on general lines rather than the specific minutes or reports of the meeting (Respondent EReg VII). When a subject has potential effect on the policies or working procedures of the authority, the manager will be kept in the loop. Regarding preparatory work, meaning before a report becomes final, advisers from within the national authority will also be questioned on the legal implications of a specific process (Respondent EReg VII). However, respondents mention that what is discussed, essentially what is brought to the agenda is pre-discussed in the national authority, in case of the Netherlands this is the RDW (Respondent EReg V, EReg VI). Simultaneously, it is also mentioned that most of the preparatory work of the network takes place in the topic groups.

The reporting within the topic groups used to be based just on simple final reports of the work of the topic group at the closing of the topic group. This has changed as the secretariat of the network became more involved in the monitoring. They have set up a format which includes an executive summary that highlights the recommendations. Next to that, a monitoring sheet was created. In this sheet the progress of the different subjects has been included. The date of finalising activities and the most important conclusions and recommendations can be directly assessed on the sheet. In addition, follow up activities are also mentioned in the sheet

(Respondent EReg IV). The reports as well as the monitoring documents are accessible on the shield-of section of the EReg website. Only members of EReg have access to them. This is to ensure that discussions in the topic groups can be as open as possible (Respondent EReg III). The monitoring of the activities is of particular interest to those attending the annual meeting. These participants, as mentioned, are mostly on a higher hierarchical level. When going over the participants list it becomes clear that the directors of the public authorities together with national contacts join these meetings. The national contacts are participants stemming from the national authority that are given the specific task to coordinate the activities of the member state. The role of this contact point is described by a respondent as follows:

“[it is the role of the contact point to] participate in the general assembly. In between these meetings the first point of contact for questionnaires that EReg sends out. Next to that if a new topic group is introduced making sure the right person is sent to that topic group. In addition, you need to make sure that this will subsequently run smoothly. In case a national position is asked the participants need to check with the national authority that you know the position of the national authority. You are not in a topic group based on a personal capacity.” (Respondent EReg VIII).

The check with the national authority does not necessarily run via the national contact. This depends on the topic as well as the function and responsibilities of the participant (Respondent EReg VII, Respondent EReg VIII). When a national position needs to be determined and the national contact is involved, the management team of the national authority will be asked for a position. It will be discussed in that setting. However, participants of topic groups do not always offer feedback after a topic group session voluntarily. The contact point monitors what occurs and when necessary start the conversation with the participants (Respondent EReg VIII). A way to monitor is the discussion of a progress report which is discussed in the management team of the national authority. As the current chair of EReg is also part of the management team of the national authority, reports of EReg or news articles concerning EReg in the internal newsletter are shared often (Respondent EReg VIII). The structure with the national contacts is however perceived as imperfect at the moment. As one respondent observed:

“Sometimes I am just curious to what extent the national authority is aware of what their participants are doing. With a contact point you think you are dealing with the position of a country, but sometimes it feels that it is just one person’s opinion.” (Respondent EReg I).

The imperfections of this current structure, or at the least the differences in execution by the national authorities can also be seen in the current work programme that specifies the necessity to include national contacts and strengthen their position in the network. In the work programme in the text the importance of national contacts are highlighted as well as activities regarding this position are outlined see below:

Assisting the EReg contactpersons in their responsibilities:

- Have regular contacts with the national contact persons.
- Help new EReg representatives understand their roles and the EReg organisation.
- Draft function profiles to inform EReg Members what it entails to function as a national contact person.
- Record video material / have interviews with contact persons about their work. (EReg, 2019a: p. 20)

The monitoring tasks are restricted to those with access to the restricted access section of the website. But the results of activities are shared with other stakeholders. This ensures that EReg and its activities are becoming increasingly visible to others (Respondent EReg IV). The added value of EReg are seen by other stakeholders (Respondent EReg I). This added value should also be in the foreground of EReg as it is of importance to ensure interest and relevance. This is particularly visible in the response of one of the respondents:

“We try to include them and keep them posted. I think this is also very important. An organisation such as EReg can only work properly if you show what you do. Is this still ok? Am I not overstepping and or should I seek coordination with others? It demands managerial sensitivity.” (Respondent EReg I).

The relationship with other stakeholders is also emphasised as a means to further their own position. When referencing an occasion in which the European Commission had acted counter to efforts of EReg, EReg has benefitted from the connections it shares with others such as Permanent Representatives to convey to the European Commission that the direction they were heading in was not in accordance with EReg, and that the Permanent Representatives wanted to back the network. This was set up due to contacts with the ministries in the Netherlands that made their opinion clear to the permanent representatives. The respondent mentioned that he believes that, in the future, the European Commission will first come to talk to EReg (Respondent EReg I).

The focus on internal networks of the authorities in the relationship is clear from this. What is also clear is that the techniques of review are focused on monitoring. Account giving is done based on regular reports and the use of monitoring sheets. Next to that, verbal communication to supervisors (Respondent EReg V, Respondent EReg VI) is also mentioned as a method. However, this method is also focused a monitoring review technique. Regardless, the actual approval for work of the topic groups takes place in the annual meeting of the general assembly. One respondent outlined the procedure of the network as follows:

“In principle, nothing happens without the approval of the annual meeting of the general assembly. However, sometimes it takes too long for it to take place and steps should be

taken on a certain subject. In such instances the decision-making in the topic group takes prevalence. Although in such cases it will be made clear that this then does not resemble a general position of the network, rather it is the position of the topic group.” (Respondent EReg V).

Being part of topic groups that are salient is a must, being at the table is key for both input in the network as for the relevance of the network to the authority one is part of (Respondent EReg V, Respondent EReg VI, Respondent EReg VII). In case a subject is discussed that is in need of a rapid response, the participant often coordinates with others at the home authority to discuss how to proceed. In a next session of the topic group the participant can give input that represent the national perspective on the issue. Sometimes the coordination is done simply by sending an e-mail, other times the participant seeks out experts for the authority and if a subject is also part of the responsibility of a ministry they will also be included (Respondent EReg V). When asked about the contacts with the ministry, and whether coordination occurs with the same individual or group a respondent remarked:

“I wish, the ministry has a lot of policy officers. We are in contact with the people of the ministry and relationship management of our authority knows to connect with the right people” (Respondent EReg VII).

If the case arises that EReg moves in a more managerial or even political direction, then coordination with different departments is necessary, nevertheless one respondent mentioned that a national position within the context of EReg is often taken based on coordination with the management of the home authority rather than with the ministry (Respondent EReg VIII). In addition, the ministry is only involved in cases that touch upon their specific responsibilities (Respondent EReg VII). Support for a national position is sometimes also sought by asking authorities from other countries (Respondent EReg VIII). In that case the level of account giving increases. Regarding the annual report of EReg, there is coordination beforehand between participants of the network and the directors of the authorities participating in EReg. In most cases there is a rather passive attitude stemming from directors towards EReg activities (Respondent EReg I). They do not seek out or ask for the monitoring of activities. Their involvement is seen as limited (Respondent EReg VIII). This is, arguably, further exemplified by the lack of contention in the general assembly.

The account giving structure in the internal structure of the authority is understandably context dependent. In this section we have a particular focus on how the Dutch authority structures its accountability relationship. What has become clear is that there is a vertical hierarchical line discernible, as respondents mention the need for approval by senior staff. This vertical line is also exemplified in the sending of executives to the general assembly. Simultaneously there are reports that the individual participants, based on their own responsibilities within the network do not always provide feedback. Monitoring by the national contact as well as

the management team can however be done and is reportedly done via the readily available structured reports of the network. The professional structure of reporting, which is led by the secretariat, is mentioned throughout. What also is interesting is the level of voluntary reporting on activities by the network. In particular the inclusion of CEO meetings and the sending of reports to stakeholders. This is seen as a way to ensure relevance of the network, which in turn would allude to a form of reputational accountability. Nevertheless, the bulk of the accountability line remains in the internal management structure, the representatives participating in the activities of EReg give account to their home organisation by sending their reports to their executives.

## 6.6 EReg: Bureaucratic accountability

The empirical findings presented in this chapter confirm the dominance of bureaucratic accountability in EReg – an example of a network administrative governed information network. The vertical line between a subordinate and a supervisor is present. The subordinate is very focused on its activities on the submission of authority to a supervisor. In addition, there is an awareness of the boundaries of the own mandate. The incorporation of different stakeholders and departments is seen in the empirical evidence. However, it is mentioned that the accountability line lies mostly with the own home organisation, the ministry is sometimes involved but the manner in which is considered limited by the respondents.

The manner of monitoring the progress and activities is increasingly embedded in the network, as is the pivotal role of the secretariat in professionalising the network further. The emphasis on obedience with regards to account giving can be seen in the sensitivity on disseminating statements as either reflecting an EReg or a topic group position. In addition, a referral to seeking feedback from team members of the national authority and input from the managerial team of said authority is also indicative of this.

Although we have not been able to find proof for the sanctions: resignation or dismissal, which would be expected in case of a bureaucratic accountability line we did find evidence for the fact that control over actions could be considered high. Respondents have mentioned that they do not consider the control over actions by their supervisors as high, nevertheless the fact that monitoring is used as a technique does suggest otherwise. In addition, we have found that when discussions ensue over account giving this is predominantly over procedures followed by administrative action. The inability to find direct proof of sanctioning examples should as such not be presumed as indicative for the absence of this form of accountability. It could simply be that transgressions are picked up early due to high level of control or that there are no transgressions that would allude to dismissal.

On several occasions the empirical evidence showed us that the topic discussed is key to the accountability structure. To provide a bit more background to how EReg scores based on the components we will go through these one by one.



**Table 6.2: Results EReg and bureaucratic accountability**

	<b>Bureaucratic Accountability</b>	
<b>Definition</b>	Vertical relationship between an actor answering to a forum in which the source of control is internal and the degree of autonomy is low.	
<b>Components</b>	<b>According to framework</b>	<b>EReg</b>
<b>Forum</b>	Supervisor role to actor within bureaucracy	When the national contact functions as it should there is a definite supervisor role to the forum. In addition, the fact that the highest decision-making body of the network is attended by more senior staff is an indication as well. Nevertheless, forums of peers in case a participant of a topic groups needs expert input can be seen as well. Moreover, the reporting to third parties such as stakeholders is also found in this networks' accountability relationship.
<b>Relationship</b>	Vertical	Yes, mostly vertical.
<b>Source of control</b>	Internal	The vertical line displayed in the accountability relationship is of employees within the same public authority. The inclusion of outside sources such as a ministry are considered limited and only on specific topics.
<b>Information on what conduct?</b>	Obedience to organisational directives	Yes, we have seen several references that indicate this. A referral to national context as well as needing feedback and input from managerial teams.
<b>Emphasis</b>	Obedience	Yes, although it should be noted that depending on the function of a participant in the national authority, a participant can work rather independent. However, the monitoring structure set up is used to keep an eye out on progress.
<b>Techniques of review</b>	Auditing Licensure Monitoring	Monitoring is the technique most used. Reports on outcomes of activities are also often used which is a technique associated with both professional and political accountability.
<b>Discussion on what</b>	Forms and procedures followed by administrative action	During the observation of a topic group we could clearly see this. In addition, the monitoring by a national contact and the internal management team of an authority would also testify to this.
<b>Control over actions</b>	High	By participants of topic groups this is not perceived as high. Though the monitoring of activities, even if not aware, could be perceived as such.
<b>Sanctions</b>	Resignation or dismissal	Discussions on sanctions are not found in the data. Yet, the instance that a participant within EReg represents the national authority and is not there in a personal capacity does support this level of sanction in case of transgressions.

## 6.7 Reflection and considerations

This assessment of a network administrative governed information network showed us that a brokering role of the secretariat is also key in devising methods for accountability. The EReg

secretariat showcase that professionalization is to be reached with an active secretariat. Their influence combined with an activating and ambitious chair is a strength to the potential to the network. This belief is also attested by our respondents (Respondent EReg I, Respondent EReg IV, Respondent EReg V, Respondent EReg VII). It is also a reason as to why more senior level staff are involved. The active board of this network ensures regular reports in a systematic manner. Disseminating information regularly is a way to update but also show the strength of a network.

The function of this network seems to move from information network to a harmonisation network. The indications for this are seen in participants mentioning they cannot agree to EReg policies before speaking with their supervisor or even because of standing legislation (Observation EReg I). The referral to the need to involve executive level officials seems to be increasing. This could be because the work of EReg is developing in such a manner that it will have policy consequences. Nevertheless, currently EReg still seems to focus on reaching consensus on general issues rather than the creation of a level playing field as there is no emphasis on addressing the contextual differences of the participating member states. Moreover, when a discussion ensued that highlighted the differences it was made clear that this discussion cannot be had at the EReg level (Observation EReg I). This signifies that EReg should still be considered an information network.

The activating role of the chair as the prime source of connections should not be underestimated. The level of progress in the topic groups is dependent on the chair as well as the active input of participants. There is also a side note to make in that respect. Even though the amount of membership fee is kept as low as possible, the actual costs of the network are in working hours of the participants. Attending meetings can be costly because of traveling, accommodation, but also being away from day-to-day operations. Having the position to be able to send participants to meetings is not always an option for all member authorities. Especially those on tight budgets or those suffering from budget cuts in personnel.

In addition to that, when you have the ability to join, the language barrier should not be underestimated. Being active in this case also means being able to express yourself on a technical level in English. The translator of one of the CEO's showed that it is not always commonplace to be able or even be confident enough to address your peers in a different language. Together with the inability to attend this could lead to a two-speed network. Those attending can set the agenda, and those attending will set the agenda in accordance with their wishes. We have seen, but also heard from respondents (Respondent EReg I) that Western and Nordic European countries have the ability to attend more often than authorities from Eastern or southern countries. For instance, Portugal that was a member needed to step out of the network due to budget cuts and could only recently re-join. A delegate of Portugal said re-joining has allowed him to do his job properly (Observation EReg II). Not being present can have consequences. For instance, a delegate from a non-Western European country mentioned

that some of the issues highlighted now (digital driving license, automatic driving) are a bit too out of a “Jules Verne book” (meaning too out there) according to the delegate. Moreover, in some non-Western European countries it is too far from the more pressing problems they are dealing with. It could mean that the authority would leave EReg (Observation EReg II).

Being unaware of the position of countries that do not have the same opportunities or abilities, is a real threat to transgovernmental networks. These networks are very much based on the input of their members. Moreover, the added value of the networks is the connections between authorities across borders. The ability to present a consensus on technical topics could prove instrumental to policy makers. When that ability is put under strain as not all authorities can be present, or the network is moving in a direction not suited to all, this is a problem.

Is it also a problem for accountability? Perhaps. Monitoring even if it is made easy would still cost time. It still poses a strain on the organisation. Moreover, monitoring is done and conducted digitally. This could be a barrier for member authorities that share computers for instance. Monitoring is also done in English. This barrier keeps popping up. Although the insert of smileys is a smart addition. Time needs to be allotted to inform superiors, and perhaps even translate. Showing added value to those same superiors may prove to be increasingly difficult if it is moving away from the reality of the home country. This is something transgovernmental networks should be mindful of, especially in cases where they want to show their added value and relevance. With the setting up of CEO meetings the ambition to do so by EReg is clear. It is not inevitable to avoid a two-speed network. Incorporation of and connections with as many member authorities is vital to both the survival and success of a transgovernmental network.

For further research, one needs to be made aware that networks are continuously developing and transitioning. EReg being an information network now does not mean it will continue to be so in future. Efforts are deployed that belong to a harmonisation function of a network. This is something scholars studying transgovernmental networks need to be mindful of. The aspect of time is essential in research on this topic. Nevertheless, the expectation to find bureaucratic accountability in this context of an information network administrative network holds.



