Accountability in transgovernmental networks

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CHAPTER IX

Conclusion and reflections

9.1 Introduction

This dissertation studied the effect that TGNs have on practices and principles of democratic accountability in the national central government. Studying TGNs is of importance given that they are increasing in numbers as well as being used as a venue for policymaking (f.i. Eberlein and Newman, 2008; Keohane and Nye, 1974; Mastenbroek and Martinsen, 2018, Raustiala, 2002). In addition, academic literature has focused mostly on the threat TGNs could pose to democratic ability but has not addressed how day-to-day activities of TGNs shape the accountability relationship with national central governments. This study has filled that gap. In this chapter we will first reiterate our main objectives and discuss the main findings of this study. The second part will center around the implications of this study on the principles of accountability. The third part of this chapter will consider the theoretical implications this study holds for research on TGNs. The last part of this chapter will focus on suggestions for future research on this topic.

9.2 Main objectives and findings

In this study we found that different types of accountability arise in TGNs due to the combination of governance style and function of the network. Moreover, we found that accountability deficits are often less problematic in practice than described in literature on TGNs. However, when they do arise they could have grave consequences.

Academic literature on TGNs assumes an accountability deficit. Empirical proof for this deficit was lacking. In addition, the literature has a general focus on political accountability. This general focus obscures the various types of accountability that can be used in the setting of TGNs. This dissertation has addressed specifically these two issues by focusing on how accountability is arranged for in TGNs.

The creation of TGNs is often seen as a necessary form of international cooperation between civil servant with a high level of expertise. Transboundary issues can be addressed by these TGNs. However, as civil servants partaking in these TGNs are often employed by national administrative agencies which are not an integral part of a ministry, it is assumed that an accountability deficit will arise. Account giving to a political forum such as a national parliament will be difficult due to the distance between the civil servant and the forum.

By focusing on the day-to-day workings of a TGN, we have assessed how accountability is arranged for in TGNs. Based on the function (Slaughter, 2004) and governance style (Provan and Kenis, 2008) of TGNs we were able to determine different types of TGNs. With the creation of a typology, the different types of TGNs could be linked to different types of accountability. This led us to our main finding that variation in the governance style combined with the function of TGNs determine, to a large extent, which type of accountability is dominant. We therefore claim that the type of accountability present in a TGN is causally related to the

function of a TGN and the governance style of the network. To assess how TGNs incorporate accountability into their day-to-day functioning, we were sensitive to the context of TGNs. A typology of TGNs has been devised in this study, by combining literature on the function of TGNs (Slaughter, 2004) with governance styles of networks in general (Provan & Kenis, 2008). The typology resulted in a differentiation of TGNs into nine ideal-type varieties.

How a TGN operates is based on two elements. Firstly the function of the network and secondly the governance style of the network. Starting with the former, the function of a network describes the intended end of a TGN. Slaughter (2004) finds three distinct functions that a network can hold: information, enforcement, and harmonization. The potential impact of a TGN on policy is also linked to the function of the network (Lavenex, 2007). The three functions each have their own potential of steering policy making away from the central government level. By linking the work of Slaugher (2004) to that of Lavenex (2008) we can assess the potential for influence in the domestic level by the network. The bigger the potential to steer policy, the bigger the shift away from the home organization of the network participants in relation to the network itself. This will have an effect on the direction of accountability as well as the amount of oversight.

An information network has the least ability for potential impact, as the main objective is to formulate best practices and exchange information. An enforcement network has a bigger potential of steering policy as this function focuses on enhancing the ability of peer organisations to enforce regulations. A harmonization network has the function of setting benchmarks and standards, and as such it has the greatest potential to steer policy making.

How a TGN achieves the aims of its function is locked into the governance style it adopts. In order to assess which governance styles can be adopted we turned to the work of Provan and Kenis (2008). They discerned three types of governance style to be in existence with regards to networks in general. This distinction has not been tested or theorized in the context of TGNs but is widely used in network literature. The three governance styles they discern are: participant-governed network, lead-organisation networks and network administrative governance. They differ in terms of the level of centralisation and formalisation. The participant-governed network is one end of an extreme, as it is the least centralized whereas the network administrative governed network is the most centralized. The level of centralisation determines the type of accountability instruments that can be deployed (Hollis, 2010).

The dimensions that cause the varieties of TGNs, function and governance style, can be considered as institutional design. This institutional design has not been considered regarding how accountability can be affected by it. Nevertheless, scholars have argued that accountability is bound by circumstances of organisational structure (f.i. Deleon, 1998; Romzek, 2000).

9

We propose that the potential impact of a TGN, which is based on the function (Lavenex, 2007), will partly determine the amount of oversight, with those with less potential for impact having less and those with a higher potential having stricter oversight based on authority. In addition, we theorize that the level of formalization of the governance style will have an effect on the accountability relationship (Hollis, 2010; Provan and Kenis, 2008). Because of this, we have included these rationales in the typology by linking them with the different varieties of democratic accountability as introduced by Romzek and Dubnick (1987). Based on control over an agent's actions (high or low) and the source of this control (internal versus external) four distinct accountability types arise: bureaucratic, professional, political and legal. Placing the theoretical underpinnings that influence accountability relationships over the typology, we filled in which variety we would expect.

First, we expect that *when a TGN is an information network and participant governed, the TGN incorporates professional accountability into its day-to-day functioning*. In an information network, civil servants from different national public administrations come together on a voluntary basis, discuss their problems, and formulate best practices. When the governance style of a network is participant-governed the members themselves collaborate, without a secretariat coordinating or supporting the collaboration. Given the horizontal actor-forum relationship in participant-governed information networks, the actors within the TGNs are peers. These characteristics increase the likelihood that this type of TGN incorporates professional accountability into its day-to-day functioning. This type of accountability consists of peer-to-peer accountability based on relatively loosely formulated professional norms and standards, with high discretion for the civil servant.

Second, *when an information network is network administrative governed, the TGN incorporates bureaucratic accountability into its day-to-day functioning*. When an information network is network administrative governed**,** its main function is exchanging information between participants. A secretariat is set up within the network to help steer, govern and coordinate the network in a centralized manner. We expect bureaucratic accountability to be dominant here. In this type, the relationship between actor (i.e. the civil servants in the TGN) and forum (i.e. the supervisor in the home organization at the domestic level) is based on close supervision. The civil servant participating in the TGN faces internal controls on a regular basis through the occasional participation in the TGN by the supervisor from the home organization. There is a strong vertical dimension, with a codification of rules. The impact of an information network is not perceived to be great by the home organization, but at the same time the network administrative part leads to a formalized component in the TGN, which institutionalizes the regular involvement of supervisors from the home organization to a higher degree than if the network was only participant governed.

Third, *when a harmonization network is participant governed, the TGN incorporates political accountability into its day-to-day functioning*. In a harmonization network regulations such as benchmarks and standards in a particular policy area are harmonized between

the participating countries through the activities of the TGN. When the governance style of a network is participant-governed the members themselves collaborate without a clear organisational entity within the structural make-up of the network that coordinates or supports the collaboration. The accountability type that fits this institutional set-up of a TGN best is political accountability, in which an actor needs to give account to a domestic political forum such as a national parliament or a minister. Under political accountability, the civil servants have considerable discretion to perform tasks, which is key to ensure that the expertise of the civil servants in the TGN can be used to the full in order to fulfill the important task of harmonizing benchmarks and standards across member states of the network. Given the importance of this type of TGN for the member states because of its high impact on the state, and the need for a high level of discretion for the expert, the civil servants in the TGN need to be responsive to the supervisor in the home organisation but cannot be constantly hampered by strict compliance to legal standards because of the importance of using their expertise in a flexible manner.

Fourth, *when a harmonization network is network administrative governed, the TGN incorporates legal accountability into its day-to-day functioning*. When the main function of the network is to harmonize benchmarks and standards between participating countries and a secretariat within the network is set up to help steer, govern, and coordinate the network in a centralized manner, the impact of the network on the state is likely to be considerable. At the same time, the activities of the civil servants in the TGN are subject to rules externally set at the global level, which are subsequently monitored by audit teams working independently from the secretariat of the TGN. This fits the type of legal accountability because here the emphasis is put on compliance with set rules and procedures.

We have addressed these expectations by making use of four distinct empirical cases of TGNs. These empirical cases were ideal types which could be placed in the outer corners of our typology. This was necessary as it enabled us to assess the variety of TGNs and the differing effect this may have. Assessing the influence of TGNs was done by document analysis, participatory observations of the work of TGNs as well as interviews with participants of these networks located in one country. This was done to isolate the effect as much as possible by leaving out the possible differences in governmental traditions and culture.

9

 In this dissertation we have found that TGNs do indeed make use of accountability. The type of accountability is not necessarily political accountability as it is assumed in literature (f.i. Freyburg, 2017; Bignami, 2005; Mastenbroek and Martinsen, 2018), rather the type of accountability is determined by the institutional set-up of TGNs. Out of the four empirical cases three of the TGNs incorporated an accountability type that was expected based on the governance style and function they hold. In addition, this has led to limited accountability deficits. In these three cases there was a clear relationship discernible between an actor and a forum, in which the obligation to explain and justify conduct on the part of the actor was clear; the forum could pose questions and pass judgment, with the actor facing

possible consequences. Small accountability deficits were apparent where sanctions for non-compliance were limited. This was the case for the TGNs: participant governed information network (IMPEL), network administrative governed information network (EReg) and the participant governed harmonization network (WENRA). Given the potential impact of each of these varieties on policy, the deficits in case of an information network should be considered less important. The effect of the network to steer policy is less. This means that the deficit in IMPEL and EReg is of lesser concern than that of WENRA.

The potential impact to steer policy making is related to the saliency of the topic (Lavenex, 20070. In case of high levels of political salience, the potential of impact to policy is bigger. Saliency should also guide the level of interest of a forum, in the sense that more scrutiny should exist, making deficits in networks dealing with less salient topics less serious than in the reverse cases.

As said, in one case our expectation could not be unambiguously identified based on the empirical findings. This was the case for the participant governed harmonization network (WENRA). The expectation was to find political accountability, but we found multiple types of accountability. Although steps are being taken to increase the dominance of political accountability in this TGN, during the time of research this was not fully in place. This case does confirm the difficulties reported in the literature of attracting the attention of the elected politicians regarding the work of the TGN (Raustiala 2000; Slaughter 2002; Papadopoulos 2007; Black 2008; Sabel and Zeitlin, 2010; Busuioc 2010; Papadopoulos 2014). Regardless, this finding that political accountability is in conflict with the way TGNs conduct their daily activities should not result in a dismissal of all TGNs suffering from an accountability deficit. This research has shown that the variety of accountability types should not be ignored when assessing how TGNs incorporate accountability into their day-to-day functioning. In addition, the variation between TGNs with regards to function and governance style should be considered more when discussing accountability and TGNs. This research has shown the effect of these on the relationship between actor and forum.

9.3 Limitations

This section focuses on the implications of the research design followed in this dissertation. First, in this dissertation we have chosen four distinct TGNs, that operate within member states of the European Union. Regarding informal networks between civil servants in the European Union there is a body of literature that defines these as European Administrative networks (EANs) or European regulatory networks (ERNs) (f.i. Mastenbroek and Sindbjerg Martinsen, 2018). It is argued that these EANs or ERNs are perhaps more vertical or sectoral in structure with more involvement by the European Commission. Because of this structural dimension, other types of functions conducted by the networks could arise. The choice for TGNs in this dissertation focused on the horizontal nature of the networks. In this regard, it could mean that the specific nature of TGNs that could also fall under the definition held by

EAN literature would hold a wider range of functions. This would interlink with the presence of the European Commission in the activities of the network. In the TGNs we have studied the influence and presence of the European Commission was not as distinctly noticeable as EAN literature details. Future research should seek out the differences between networks that befall the definition of EANs/ERNs and those networks of TGNs. The typology and its applicability in the context of EANs/ERNs should be addressed, not in the least in order to also understand the differences between the two types of network.

Next to that, the role of the European Union institutions should be studied as well. In this we follow Curtin and Egeberg (2008) who acknowledge that account giving should not solely be considered for national governments but that it should be complemented with forums and mechanisms regarding supranational bodies and national agencies with dual loyalties (2008: 639). In each of the cases there was a role for the European Union (i.e. European Commission), sometimes at a distance but sometimes attending meetings, for instance at IMPEL. Their role seemed to align with the embedding European rules within the policy field. When discussing the historical background of TGNs, the role of said TGN in the development of a policy field is necessary. The role WENRA has played in the development of the policies regarding nuclear safety should serve as an example for this necessity. To explain the development of this network an acknowledgement of the push from the European Union as well as the ensuing discussions with member states informed the progress and mandate of the network and also in part informed the accountability structure, as both the content and type of activities were influenced. The position of European Union institutions in TGNs should be reviewed, to determine the appropriateness of the creation of new or complementing accountability relationships. This again is a turn away from the old conceptions of traditional forms of accountability by including other types of accountability as well.

Secondly, a conscious choice was made to study networks that not only differ in terms of governance style and function but also in policy field. By adopting maximum variation sampling, the generalizability of the results would be possible. The typology holds in three out of the four different case studies. The respondents of this research acknowledge that the organisational structure of the policy field regarding account giving also instructs how they give account of the work for the TGN, which somewhat follows the reasoning of Deleon (1998) and Romzek and Dubnick (1987) who argues that accountability is partly based on institutional context. However, the policy field as an institutional factor is not explicitly mentioned by either of these authors. The function and governance style seems to align with the context of the policy field its serves. The policy field determines the amount of formalisation that is necessary. Next to that it instructs the potential to change or make policy. The policy field of a TGN could therefore also prove to have an effect on how accountability is structured. For instance, the level of salience as well as the distinction of whether the policy field is regulatory or distributive in nature could be instructive to the institutional set-up of the network.

9

Future research should thus include networks with differences in governance style and function but within the same policy field. Further research should take this consideration into account, especially considering the link between saliency and ability to impact policy (Lavenex, 2007). A network with the potential to steer policy should be scrutinized more than a network with a limited potential of impact. This potential of impact is very much linked to the topic the network deals with or the policy field it is part of. The fact that in the case of nuclear safety (WENRA) the deficit in accountability has been identified and has met with a change in the accountability relationship is indicative of this. A forum not being aware or not interested in the work of a network in this policy field given its perceived saliency, would furthermore be damaging to its own reputation. This would not be the case for networks in policy fields where the saliency is lower. It will be of interest to learn whether a policy field steers the type of governance style and function of TGNs.

Third, the typology of this dissertation is based on structural drivers for accountability drivers, meaning constructs that are somewhat fixed, and bound by negotiations between participants before they can be altered. Both governance style and function of a network can be perceived as such constructs. This suited the purpose of this dissertation as we focused on how traditional forms accountability are affected by TGNs. There are therefore drivers of accountability that we have not considered. For instance, we understand that saliency can drive choices for the type of accountability. Arguably, saliency is incorporated into the typology in that the function of a TGN is connected to the potential impact of policy. This impact could very well link to saliency. Another example of an alternative driver is agency. By this we mean the capacity of individuals within the network to act independently of these constructs. The level of agency might be related to personal characteristics and to the position (of influence) of the individual in the network. Future research should consider alternative drivers of accountability such as these as well.

Related to the previous is the mention of the organisational distance between ministries and agencies. Respondents mention that organisational distance affects the involvement and interest of the parent ministry as the account holder. This assessment is in line with the position held by Keohane and Nye (1974) that participants of TGNs are not closely controlled or monitored by their parent ministries. According to Brown (2007), Raustiala (2002) and Sabel and Zeitlin (2010) this divorce between authority and autonomy can create an accountability deficit. Their research has focused on democratic accountability. Given the fact that accountability is context-dependent, placing a sole focus on one type of accountability means obscuring others. In this research the focus was on researching which type of accountability was in place. It also directed questions into the involvement of specific parties in the process. Although differing for each policy field, the distance between the home organisation of the participant and the parent ministry was often addressed. All the home organisations in the empirical cases operated at a functional and operational distance from central government while simultaneously being part of it. This determined their relationship regarding international activities. This research has only

focused on the Dutch aspect of accountability of TGNs. The distance between agency and central government could just be indicative for the Netherlands, although we are aware that functional and operational distances exist between ministries and agencies in other national governments (f.i Maggetti, 2009). The level of distance between the ministry and the agency in the network should, however, be addressed in future research. This distance influences the accountability relationship between the actor and forum; a difference in distance could therefore have a distinct effect. The distance between a parent ministry and an agency might be different due to the level of centralisation in a country. For instance, the organisation of a federalist country would create more distance between actor and forum than a unitary centralised state would. This distinction should be taken into account in future research.

9.4 Implications for accountability

In addition to the main results of this study as presented above, this study also has broader implications for studying accountability. In this section we will address these implications specifically.

This research has effectively challenged the notion that TGNs lead to accountability deficits. Account giving as a process is intertwined with other aspects of the policy making process. This murkiness forces us to turn to the manner in which individuals who are part of this process experience it. Empirical evidence of accountability in TGNs was lacking due to a rather abstract and meso approach (f.i. Papadopoulous, 2007, Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2007). A micro level approach was long overdue (Papadopoulos, 2018). This research has shown based on a micro-level approach that accountability relationships are forged based on function and governance style. The findings are important as they offer a reconsideration of the effect TGNs have on accountability. Participants of TGNs are aware of the need for accountability, which is in sharp contrast to the work of Black (2008) and Thurner and Binder (2009), who argued that civil servants will have only a limited regard for this. The awareness of a need for accountability by civil servants is exemplified by the fact that they take notes, create annotated agenda's, and so forth. This is in line with the expectation held by Barr and Miller (2006) who speculate that civil servants may set up their own procedures regarding accountability. The accountability relationship with the central government is safeguarded by these actions in so far as the actors are doing their part; how the forum responds is the next step.

Accountability is a relational concept (Mashaw in: Dowdle, 2006). To study this, the activity of giving account between an actor and a forum needs to be isolated from other activities. This however is difficult to achieve, due to the fact that in TGNs multiple lines of accountability are in existence (Curtin and Egeberg, 2008; Messner, 2009). To whom one should give account depends on the experienced relationship by the actor and the forum. Account can be given towards the national central government but in the context of TGN this is not the sole avenue to take. Peers in the network as well as external actors or supranational organisations involved

9

also prove to consist of an accountability relationship. We have noticed this in all of our cases. The response of the TGNs to accommodate to a certain extent to these different forums should therefore be considered the answer to the questions raised by Curtin and Egeberg (2008) who argue that integrated administrations, of which TGNs are a good example, should not only be accountable to national central governments. Even though TGNs do not replace traditional forms of government they do offer a shift in paradigm making it essential to view accountability as not simply a singular line between civil servants and voters (Yesilkagit, 2012).

When we direct our attention to the theoretical implications of this research on the conceptualisation of accountability, we see that in all the cases the topic of sanctions seemed somewhat problematic. The most severe sanction was to be found in the case of network administrative harmonization network (EA), namely the expulsion of a national accreditation organisation. The consequences of this is that products and services in need of accreditation in a particular country have limited ability to prove their quality of standards. This will have clear economic consequences. In the other TGNs there were no clear signs of sanctions, or at the very least these were not experienced as detrimental to the participants. Although sanctions need not be formal sanctions for an accountability line to be present, a referral to possible consequences is part of the definition we followed. In the context of accountability in TGNs this seemed to be different than for perhaps more traditional structures of accountability. This could well be due to the fact that the monitoring of elected principals is missing as mentioned in the literature (f.i. Keohane and Nye, 1974; Raustiala, 2002), but we also need to take into consideration the impact of multiple accountabilities on integrated administrations (Curtin and Egeberg, 2008; Hofmann and Türk, 2007; Maggetti, 2009; Yesilkagit, 2012). By this we specifically refer to sanctions of informal networks such as TGNs, which might be difficult to enforce, because of the compounded structure (being part of national central government, international cooperation and the linkage with peers) and therefore sanctions might present themselves differently than traditional views of sanctions have led us to expect.

The conceptual implications for accountability in TGNs can also be seen in the setting of a mandate, by which the participants conduct their work on behalf of the home organisation. Often this mandate is not specified, and the participant is to decipher it from more general or strategic policy plans of the home organisation. There is a lack of a clear mandate from the home organisation. Oftentimes a mandate is decided upon either by the individual or by a small team within the home organisation. A clear mandate with regard to more technocratic work is also not desirable, as it would impede the expert's autonomy. It is in this setting that the definition of accountability needs to be understood. Understanding how a mandate is intended by the forum is left to the actor. The accountability relationship therefore hinges on the interpretation of the participants of the network. This coincides with the fact that participants of TGNs are sent out by their home organisations on the basis of trust. They have earned their stripes. Without trust, accountability will be problematic. This is because in its essence accountability is a social relationship. With this we argue against the notion that a strict mandate from and control by a principal is always needed (f.i. Busuioc, 2010; Brown,

2007) in an accountability relationship. Our research has shown that the determinants of an accountability relationship is not so much a procedural but a social understanding.

The social relationship of accountability in the definition we follow is one between an actor and a forum. The involvement of the two is essential. We have, however, found some (political) forums less involved in the request for account giving. Clarifications or explanations are not often sought. There is a general lack of interest by account holders in the work of transgovernmental networks. Questions on the work conducted in TGNs are not often asked. This would hint at what in the literature has become known as forum drift (f.i. Schillemans and Busuioc, 2015). The reason this occurs could have to do with "(.) demanding agendas, shorter time-frames and limited interests in the intricate details of policy implementation" (Schillemans and Busuioc, 2015: 17) of the forums. There was interest from political forums in the case of WENRA. The Belgian parliament for instance raised questions regarding the safety levels of nuclear reactors. In contrast in the context of EReg limited to no oversight was reported on behalf of the ministry. The possible salience of a topic could place the interest of a forum higher up the list of priorities. Again, the policy field and the possible function of a TGN could prove an influential aspect and should be explored.

We should however be aware that accountability is pliable depending on the circumstances (f.i. Fisher, 2004; Romzek, 2000). Accountability should be understood as a dialogue, that takes place between an actor and a forum establishing the norms and standards they consider worthy to uphold. This is dependent on evolving discussions. Tailoring accountability to the work of TGNs to make it fit within the organisational governmental structure but also within the larger policy field should be the course of action.

9.5 Theoretical implications for research on TGNs

During this research much has been discovered regarding TGNs and their effect on accountability. This research has made three main contributions. Firstly, that political accountability should not be considered the only type of accountability in TGNs. The daily activities allude to other types of accountability as well. This also speaks to perceived accountability deficits, they are not as vast as they are made out to be in literature (f.i Papadopoulous, 2014). The perceived deficits are instead filled or supplemented with other types of accountability such as legal, professional or bureaucratic accountability. Secondly, governance styles and functions have an effect on the type of accountability deployed in a TGN. Ranking governance styles in terms of formalisation and ranking function based on the level of potential policy shift also allowed for the inclusion of the rationale behind the different types of accountability (Romzek and Dubnick, 1987). The empirical cases proved that the theoretical underpinnings of the typology hold, which indicates that the typology should be explored more. The variation in TGNs should not be overlooked. Thirdly, previous research has addressed TGNs top-down and network-centred (see Papadopoulos, 2018). This research has taken a micro-level approach to the intricacies of nested administrative organisation, i.e.

9

the TGN, the home organisation and the central government. This novel approach has offered insights into how the interaction between the three levels works. TGNs are extended arms of national administrations too, which is important to note. This perspective on TGNs and their place in the administrative space should be studied more (Curtin and Egeberg, 2008; Maggetti, 2009; Mastenbroek and Martinsen, 2018). TGNs do not operate as stand-alone organisations. Moreover, their variation as well as their potential to steer policy commands a more in-depth and micro-level approach to understanding them.

The diversity and the difficulty of actually seeking TGNs out proved challenging. Finding a workable definition and literature on general networks helped to fill in the gaps of the literature. Desk research was at times cumbersome as documents were unavailable to the researcher but did offer useful insights into the formal structure of networks. Unsurprisingly, networks were not labelled as transgovernmental network in practice. Nor were they often listed as networks at all. To research transgovernmental networks meant searching LinkedIn-profiles of civil servants who listed activities abroad for their organisations. Searching for international activities on the websites of governmental organisations also helped in finding transgovernmental networks, as did the annual reports of these organisations.

When international arrangements between governmental organisations were found, the next step was to look for a website related to that arrangement. Those websites were often not available and if they were, information regarding individual participants or the actual content of their activities were sealed off from the public. This clearly speaks to the exclusiveness and perhaps clubbishness of TGNs (Raustiala, 2002). A secured part of the website was created for those participating in the international arrangements. For researchers this would be a treasure trove of information, as this secured website offers the foundation documents that not all networks have readily available, together with notes, agenda's and so on.

After the difficulty of finding transgovernmental networks came the obstacle of gaining access to the networks and its participants. The use of formats regarding the generation of e-mail addresses for governmental organisations at times offered the opportunity to decipher work e-mail addresses of potential participants. This proved successful at times but mostly resulted in non replies. Getting a foot in the door was most helpful, as respondents were often helpful in directing us to other participants of the network. Although a side note needs to be made here that for the harmonization networks access remained limited. The reason for this needs to be explored, it could well be that the potential for policy boundary shift (Lavenex, 2007) is an explanation for this.

Doing research in an incremental manner had its advantages as it emphasised the very notion of the informal character of TGNs (Keohane and Nye, 1974) also in terms of gaining access to other respondents, i.e. based on referral. The informal character in TGNs is also seen in the communication between participants. It is heralded as a key feature that enables honest

conversations and discussions. For politically sensitive issues this is particularly useful, as is attested by the respondents. The informal character is also instructive as it hinders intrusiveness, in this way ensuring the frankness of experts in discussions unencumbered by the obstacles of politicking that tends to come with treaty-based international arrangements. This is a real asset for TGNs and is instrumental to their effectiveness (f.i. Slaughter, 2004). Although these political games are sometimes part of discussions in TGNs, it is on a more limited scale than the treaty-based international arrangements. The added value of a TGN is the informal aspect, in particular the ability to discuss and decide without outsiders (non-experts or political superiors). Escalation is not considered a method for reaching an agreement as the focus in each network seems to be firmly placed on collaboration.

We have noticed that transgovernmental networks do not operate in a vacuum, meaning that TGNs are often connected to other international arrangements whether these are other transgovernmental networks or transnational networks or international organisations. This is very much in line with literature on integrated administration (Hofmann and Türk, 2007). Often, they are connected to these arrangements because they have a slight difference in mandate or topic or operate in the same domain but with differing mandates and topics. This structure and cooperation instruct accountability lines within the international arrangements as well. The focus we have on the accountability line towards the national government, when looked at from the perspective of one network, is not the entire picture, as one organisation feeds into the other, and each has its own line(s) of accountability.

Next to the informality of TGNs and the interlinkages with other international arrangements there are other noticeable characteristics. For instance, there is a dependency on those individuals working in and for the network. Their motivation and time determine the success of projects. The participation of individuals in TGNs is very dependent on the culture of the home organisation as well as on the capacity to free up individuals to participate in international activities. Participating in networks is seen as a side-project but not as part of the day-to-day operations of the home organisations, even though the work conducted at the TGNs seeps into the work of the home organisation. This has been noticed by Maggetti (2009) as well. This dependence on the individual participant as well as the ability of an organisation to participate in a TGN is indicative for the advancement of a TGN. The capacity of individuals for instance in terms of English language proficiency determines their potential to contribute to a TGN. The ability of an organisation to send participants to join the work of TGNs offers the ability to decide on the speed and agenda of a TGN. These implications are important as not all organisations have the same ability to free up staff or have staff with the necessary skill set to join a TGN. This could result in a TGN that operates contrary to the need of some of the members. The fact that projects of TGNs are determined by the working groups of the networks more than by the annual meetings where superiors attend, means that it is those organisations that are in a position to attend more meetings (working groups are more frequent) which decide on progress.

9

For all the potential TGNs bring to policy making, it does come with implications. It can be a solution to overcome global problems (Slaughter, 2004). It can even do so at a lower cost than treaty-based international arrangements. Yet, the informality that is its strength could also prove to be an obstacle. There is a of lack visibility for account holders, which is in line with the expectations held by Papadopoulos (2007). This perhaps also ensures that transgovernmental networks are not ingrained in the home organisation as part of its day-to-day operations. To research TGNs it is therefore essential to go to and hear from participants of TGNs. The context of a TGN can only be assessed properly by taking in their views and experiences.

Another observation is that the nature of the work of transgovernmental networks is technocratic. This is mentioned in the literature as well (f.i. Eberlein and Newman, 2008). The strategic discussions of the network occur once or twice a year during general meetings. Most of the meetings by transgovernmental networks are conducted based on specific topics, think of the mincing of words regarding potential guidelines before reaching agreements. This technocratic nature makes it hard to distinguish the influence of participants in TGNs in the general policy directions laid out by the senior and political staff. Participants of TGNs upload information to the senior staff. Who directs who, is a question that needs to be answered. Respondents have attested that this process of uploading their insights is both needed and valued. This is in contrast to the expectation held by some scholars (f.i. Black, 2008; Galmaird and Patty, 2012; Kinney 2002; Raustiala, 2000) who argue that civil servants operate as agents with their own agenda. The participants of TGNs that we have spoken to, do not see their work as being political or strategic. The discussions they have and the decisions they make are in line with the strategies set out by their organisations. The participants of the network underplay how superiors make use of notes and annotated agendas in determining the position of the network. The collaboration of setting the mandate and giving account is a circular process rather than a procedure. It is not a series of actions conducted in a particular order. The relationship between account giver and accountee is just that, a relationship. To research this is to understand how both see the relationship.

9.6 Research agenda

In this research the focus has been placed firstly on examining transgovernmental networks and secondly on the way they affect accountability. By assessing four different cases and studying these from a Dutch perspective by means of interviews, observations and document analysis, we are able to gauge the relation between TGNs and accountability. There are reflections to be made on the choices in this research which could help future researchers on either topic. In the following section we will address four observations that could help guide future research.

First, the four cases all come from different policy fields. In the considerations we mentioned the influence the policy field might have on the type of accountability deployed. This is a venue

worth exploring. Each policy field has its own historical development and entrenchment in organisational structures. This, combined with policy salience, is not accounted for in this research as the focus was on function and governance style. The influence of the policy field could however prove to be a variable in the relationship between TGNs and accountability.

Second, this research focused on actor-forum relationships of TGNs from a Dutch perspective. This was done both for theoretical as well as practical reasons. The institutional governmental context in a country was considered an element that could create differences. By limiting the research to one country and so avoiding this as an intervening variable we can first assess if the function and governance style by themselves offer enough for theoretical expectations to hold. The cases themselves are, however, extremes in our typology which ensures a higher level of generalizability so that in these types of cases in similarly organized countries (decentralized, neo corporatist and having a tradition of cabinet governments) similar results can be expected. During the interviews and the desk research the mentioning of different accountability structures being dependent on the organisation at home arose. Future research would do well to assess the effect of governmental characteristics on accountability.

Third, the focus on the actor was made consciously in this research, since actors are the key player in the relationship between the TGN and the home organisation. The forum was established based on the experience of the actor. If possible, we reached out to the forum identified. But more often than not, contact was shut down. Discussing accountability as a topic proved to be difficult as potential respondents stated that they did not like the idea that they were being judged. Nevertheless, the cooperation of the respondents in this research proved invaluable. Their insights and especially the opportunity to observe the networks was indispensable. Researchers studying this topic might want to think of taking these steps as well, hoping to include both forums and actors as much as possible.

Fourth, the examined cases are four out of a possible nine varieties. It goes without saying that opening research up to include other varieties would be an interesting venue to take. That said, we understand that the varieties are ideal types, meaning that it is unlikely to find exact varieties of each. It is theorized that the varieties are not as clear cut. For instance, activities in a TGN could concern more than one function simultaneously. We have seen this for instance in the case of IMPEL, which mostly has an information function. To study which variety a TGN is, is to assess the prevalence of one function over the others. In addition, it is not unimaginable that the governance style also will show elements of each of the varieties in a TGN.

Studying TGNs is about understanding the inner workings of a network both in terms of institutional set-up as well as of participants' behaviour. Future researchers and students on this topic would do well to acknowledge the effect of differing characteristics. The definition of TGNs used in this dissertation is general, allowing us to fit a wide variety of organisations

9

under its umbrella. The characteristics have an effect on behaviour, both by the participants but also on concepts such as accountability. Accountability in turn is a concept that is context dependent. In new organisational set-ups such as TGNs we need to study the effect from the ground up before reverting to general statements regarding deficits. Accountability as a relational concept is what the actor and forum determine it to be.

9