European Parliament's Political Groups in Turbulent Times

Edited by
Petra Ahrens · Anna Elomäki ·
Johanna Kantola

OPEN ACCESS

palgrave
macmillan

Palgrave Studies in European Union Politics

Series Editors
Michelle Egan, American University, Washington, USA
Neill Nugent, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK
William E. Paterson, Aston University, Birmingham, UK

Following on the sustained success of the acclaimed European Union Series, which essentially publishes research-based textbooks, Palgrave Studies in European Union Politics publishes cutting edge research-driven monographs. The remit of the series is broadly defined, both in terms of subject and academic discipline. All topics of significance concerning the nature and operation of the European Union potentially fall within the scope of the series. The series is multidisciplinary to reflect the growing importance of the EU as a political, economic and social phenomenon. To submit a proposal, please contact Senior Editor Ambra Finotello ambra.finotello@palgrave.com. This series is indexed by Scopus.

Editorial Board

Petra Ahrens · Anna Elomäki ·
Johanna Kantola
Editors

European Parliament's Political Groups in Turbulent Times

palgrave
macmillan

Editors
Petra Ahrens
Tampere University
Tampere, Finland

Anna Elomäki
Tampere University
Tampere, Finland

Johanna Kantola
Tampere University
Tampere, Finland

PREFACE

We have spent the last three years reading the numerous important articles and books that the authors of the chapters of this volume have written elsewhere about the European Parliament, its political groups and democracy. It has been an absolute pleasure and honour to have their input for this volume on European Parliament's political groups, which—we believe—is the first volume to focus solely on all of the political groups of the Parliament. Our biggest thank you goes to the authors of the chapters: Nathalie Brack, Edoardo Bressanelli, Anne-Sophie Behm, Tanja A. Börzel, Miriam Hartlapp, Karl Magnus Johansson, John Morijn, Tapio Raunio and Ariadna Ripoll Servent, as well as to our close research project colleagues Valentine Berthet, Barbara Gaweda and Cherry Miller.

Planning, writing and editing the book have indeed happened in the context of the European Research Council (ERC) Consolidator Grant funded research project EUGenDem (Gender, Democracy and Party Politics in Europe: A Study of European Parliament's Political Groups), which runs from 2018 to 2023 at Tampere University, Finland. The aim of the project has been to provide a systematic analysis of the gendered practices and policies of political groups and the findings have been published in various journal articles. While being a project about gender and equality, we have ventured deep into so-called mainstream research on the European Parliament's political groups to realise that the concepts, theories and methods used in our gender and politics informed project have a number of contributions to make to these debates too. That was the main

motivation behind this book. It has therefore been particularly rewarding to forge a dialogue between EU studies, political science and gender research, all so close to our hearts.

None of this would have been possible without the joint work of our project team and we want to thank—over and again—our colleagues Valentine Berthet, Barbara Gaweda and Cherry Miller with whom we have both worked hard and had a lot of fun (including winter swimming in the sauna capital of Finland, Tampere). The project has constituted a unique knowledge building and sharing exercise for us all, allowing us to work a sustained period on a shared topic. We would like to thank Valentine, Barbara and Cherry for the time spent together in reading groups, projects seminars and workshops, and conferences, discussing, presenting and commenting on the work and the ideas which form the basis of this book. Valentine, your role in building us up as a team through your commitment to our academic exchanges and fun get-togethers has been absolutely crucial for making us the project we have been. Barbara, we are so indebted to you not just for your research input but also for your tireless organisational support, particularly as regards managing the different time zone issues of our online workshops. Thank you Cherry for undertaking a big part of the data gathering in Brussels and Strasbourg, including both research interviews in the European Parliament and the parliamentary ethnography. Without those, our research would not have been possible.

We would also like to acknowledge here the generosity of all of our 140 interviewees in the parliament, and that of the parliamentary staff who often made these interviews and fieldwork possible. We would like to thank them all for sharing their time and insights about the political groups and beyond with us. We have shared a joint experience of team coding of all of the interview data and the ethnographic fieldnotes, which form the basis for the analyses of our chapters.

The book originates in an international workshop 'European Party Politics: Transforming Equality and Democracy' we were organising for September 2020 in Helsinki together with the European Union Research Programme of the Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA) chaired by Juha Jokela. To our greatest regrets, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic made this event impossible. Having already agreed and scheduled many of the chapters for this event, we decided to move forward with the book anyway. We initiated our EUGenDem workshop session 'Gender, Democracy and Polarised Politics in Europe' with seven

online workshops from December 2020 to June 2021. Many of the book chapters now included in this volume have been presented and discussed during these events with often more than 100 participants from academia, politics and civil society registered for each session. We thank all our presenters for making this virtual exchange possible and especially our fantastic audience for their critical comments and questions.

We have been privileged in the EUGenDem research project to have an excellent advisory board committed to engage in this endeavour. To our deepest regret, all our face-to-face meetings have been cancelled so far because of the pandemic. We are very grateful that many of our advisory board members—Gabriele Abels, Sarah Childs, Simon Hix, Laura Huttunen, Anu Koivunen, Emanuela Lombardo, Diana Mulinari, Tapio Raunio, Juho Saari, Mieke Verloo and Georgina Waylen—have participated in EUGenDem in other ways, including the workshops.

We particularly admired the enthusiasm and enduring support since the start of the project which fed into our workshops and thus also into the book by our dear colleagues Gabriele Abels, Ben Crum, Gülay Caglar, Rosalind Cavaghan, Karen Celis, Sarah Childs, Cristina Chiva, Emma Crewe, Pauline Cullen, Josefina Erikson, Silvia Erzeel, Eva-Maria Euchner, Lynda Gilby, Roberta Guerrina, Toni Haastrup, Sophie Jacquot, Paula Koskinen Sandberg, Andrea Krizsan, Roman Kuhar, Sabine Lang, Emanuela Lombardo, Amy Mazur, Petra Meier, Emilia Palonen, David Paternotte, Jennifer Piscopo, Conny Roggeband, Lise Rolandsen Agustín, Tuija Saresma, Birgit Sauer, Marco Siddi, Mieke Verloo, Anna van der Vleuten, Markus Warasin, Claudia Wiesner, Stefanie Wöhl, Wouter Wolfs, Alison E. Woodward, Hanna Ylöstalo and Elena Zacharenko.

Likewise, we made exciting new connections with colleagues at many events, for instance, at a Cevipol Annual Webinar on Legitimacy, Université libre de Bruxelles, invited by Caroline Closa; at the Gothenburg University Political Science Department Research Colloquium, co-sponsored by the Centre for European Research (CERGU), invited by Ann Towns; University of Bocconi, Dondena Centre Seminar Series invited by Veronica Toffolutti; the SCRIPTS workshop 'Eurosceptic Contestations in EU Legislative Politics' at Free University Berlin organised by Tanja A. Börzel, Philipp Broniecki, Miriam Hartlapp and Lukas Obholzer; and Women and Leadership in the European Union International Author Conference, University of Osnabruck organised by Henriette Müller and Ingeborg Tömmel. Unquestionably, our research and chapters included in this book benefitted also from presenting—often

Berlin, Germany/Helsinki,   Petra Ahrens
Finland   Anna Elomäki
September 2021   Johanna Kantola

Praise for *European Parliament's Political Groups in Turbulent Times*

"This volume explores exciting avenues for understanding the European Parliament, its internal practices and its position in the EU polity. It provides crucial insights by integrating concepts of gender, power and contestation into the analysis of the parliament's political groups. The authors make an important contribution to the study of democratic practices in EU politics. The book is a must-read for gender and EU scholars as well as for those interested in the European Parliament."

—Gabriele Abels, *Professor, University of Tübingen, Germany*

"With the *Spitzenkandidaten* procedure and the growing politization of the EU regime, the political groups of the European Parliament (EP) have become major actors of the European polity. The deep evolution of the EP's partisan landscape announces a new era of EU politics, that requests new studies and approaches. This book gathers a unique set of papers analysing the European political groups from various angles, and providing a fresh view on the political dynamics within the EP."

—Olivier Costa, *Professor, CNRS-Sciences Po, Paris, France, and College of Europe, Bruges, Belgium*

"This book brings together some of the best new research on the political groups in the European Parliament. Based on an impressive set of interviews and careful field research, the scholars uncover the interconnection

between formal and informal processes, and shed new light on how democratic representation and equality play out inside the EU's only directly elected institution. This is a must-read for anyone interested in EU politics or democratic representation in Europe."

—Simon Hix, *Professor, European University Institute, Italy*

"This edited volume collects a diverse array of authors and perspectives on the changing character and role of the EP political groups in the 21st century. The contributions provide a comprehensive and cohesive review of the political groups in the context of a European Parliament experiencing increased polarization, high expectations and increased responsibilities. Together these contributions highlight the complexity of the EP political groups while confirming their centrality within the broader EU political system."

—Amie Kreppel, *Professor, University of Florida, USA*

Contents

Notes on Contributors

Petra Ahrens is Senior Researcher in the ERC-funded research project EUGenDem, Tampere University, Finland. She focuses on gender policies and politics in the European Union, civil society organisations and gender equality in Germany. She has published in journals such as the *Journal of Common Market Studies*, *Parliamentary Affairs* and *West European Politics*. Her latest books cover *Gender Equality in Politics: Implementing Party Quotas in Germany and Austria* (2020, co-authors Katja Chmilewski, Sabine Lang, Birgit Sauer), *Gendering the European Parliament. Structures, Policies, and Practices* (2019, co-editor Lise Rolandsen Agustín), and *Actors, Institutions, and the Making of EU Gender Equality Programs* (2018).

Anne-Sophie Behm is a Doctoral Researcher at the Cevipol, Université libre de Bruxelles. Her work mainly focusses on the parliamentary behaviour of MEPs, territorial interest representation in the EP and Euroscepticism.

Valentine Berthet is a Doctoral Researcher in the ERC-funded research project EUGenDem at the Faculty of Social Sciences at Tampere University, Finland. Her research focuses on the gendered violence policies of the European Parliament's political groups and includes issues of sexual harassment and the EU's ratification of the Istanbul Convention. Her work has been published in *Social Politics*; *International Feminist Journal of Politics*; and *European Journal of Women's Studies*.

Nathalie Brack is currently Assistant Professor at the Cevipol and Institute for European Studies at the Université libre de Bruxelles. She is also Visiting Professor at the College of Europe. Her areas of expertise include Euroscepticism, radical parties, the European Parliament, Brexit and Sovereignty.

Edoardo Bressanelli (Ph.D., EUI) is 'Montalcini' Assistant Professor at the Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna, Pisa and Senior Visiting Research Fellow at King's College London. His research concentrates on EU institutions and decision-making, legislatures and political parties, and has been published in journals like *Comparative Political Studies*, *European Union Politics*, *European Journal of Political Research* and *Journal of European Public Policy*, among others. He has authored two books and edited five special issues on EU, British and Italian politics.

Tanja A. Börzel is Professor of Political Science and holds the Chair for European Integration at the Otto-Suhr-Institute for Political Science, Freie Universität Berlin. She is also the director of the Cluster of Excellence 'Contestations of the Liberal Script', together with Michael Zürn. Her most important publications include *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism* (Oxford University Press, 2016, co-edited with Thomas Risse), *Effective Governance Under Anarchy. Institutions, Legitimacy, and Social Trust in Areas of Limited Statehood*, with Thomas Risse (Cambridge University Press, 2021), and *Why Noncompliance. Law and Politics in the European Union* (Cornell University Press, 2021).

Anna Elomäki is Senior Researcher in the ERC-funded research project EUGenDem at Tampere University, Finland. Her research focuses on the interconnections between economy, politics and gender in Finland and in the EU, including the neoliberalisation of gender equality policy and the gendered impacts and practices of economic governance. Her work has been published, for example, in *Journal Common Market Studies*, *International Political Science Review*, *Gender Work and Organization*, and *Social Politics*.

Barbara Gaweda is Postdoctoral Researcher in the ERC-funded research project EUGenDem, Faculty of Social Sciences at Tampere University, Finland. She studies social policies of the European Parliament political groups from a gender equality perspective. She has also published on backsliding of gender equality policies in Poland.

Miriam Hartlapp is Professor for Comparative Politics: Germany and France at the Freie Universität Berlin. She teaches and researches European integration and comparative politics, in particular questions of power, contestation and conflict in the EU Multilevel System, the intersection of economic and social integration, as well as EU soft law.

Karl Magnus Johansson is Affiliate Professor of Political Science at Södertörn University, Stockholm. His primary research interests are European integration and politics, political parties and transnationalism, and political communication and executives. His doctoral thesis from 1997 examined processes of transnational alliance formation among political parties in the EU. He has published extensively on various aspects of European politics and transnational party cooperation within and throughout the EU, for instance in journals such as *European Journal of Political Research*, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, *Journal of European Public Policy*, *Party Politics* and *West European Politics*.

Johanna Kantola is Professor of Gender Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Tampere University, Finland. She has published extensively on gender and politics including the monographs *Gender and Political Analysis* (Palgrave 2017, with Emanuela Lombardo) and *Gender and the European Union* (Palgrave, 2010), and edited volumes *Gender and the Economic Crisis in Europe* (Palgrave, 2017, with Emanuela Lombardo), *The Oxford Handbook on Gender and Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2013, with Georgina Waylen Karen Celis, Laurel Weldon). She directs the European Research Council Consolidator Grant project EUGenDem (2018–2023).

Cherry Miller is a Postdoctoral Researcher in the ERC-funded research project EUGenDem at Tampere University, Finland. Her primary research interests are gender and parliamentary studies, political group practices and ethnographic methodology. She has published on parliamentary ethnography, the European Parliament's political group activities and the UK House of Commons parliamentary administration. Her monograph *Gendering the Everyday in the UK House of Commons: Beneath the Spectacle* was published in 2021 by Palgrave Macmillan.

John Morijn is a Professor of Law and Politics in International Relations at the University of Groningen Faculty of Law and a Commissioner at the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights. He holds an LLM in EU Law from the College of Europe and a Ph.D. in International Law from

the European University Institute in Florence. He previously worked on EU rule of law-related issues as a civil servant for the Dutch government, including at the Permanent Representation of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the EU in Brussels.

Tapio Raunio is Professor of Political Science at Tampere University. His research interests cover legislatures, executives, political parties and EU decision-making. His doctoral thesis from 1996 examined the EP political groups, and subsequent publications have appeared in journals such as the *European Journal of Political Research*, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, *Journal of European Public Policy*, *Party Politics* and *West European Politics*.

Ariadna Ripoll Servent is Professor for Politics of the European Union at the Salzburg Centre of European Union Studies (SCEUS) and the Department of Political Science and Sociology at the University of Salzburg. She is the author of numerous articles and books on the European Parliament.

Abbreviations

AFCO	European Parliament's Committee on Constitutional Affairs
AfD	Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany)
ALDE	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
APA	Accredited Parliamentary Assistant
APPF	Authority for European Political Parties and European Political Foundations
CDU/CSU	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands/Christlich-Soziale Union (Christian Democratic Union of Germany/Christian Social Union)
CEAS	Common European Asylum System
CEEC	Central and Eastern European Countries
CoFoE	The Conference on the Future of Europe
DRF	Democracy, Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights
EC	European Commission
ECR	European Conservatives and Reformists
ED	European Democratic Party
EFD	Europe of Freedom and Democracy
EFDD	Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy
ENF	Europe of Nations and Freedom
EP	European Parliament
EPP	The Group of the European People's Party/The European People's Party
EPRoP	European Parliament Rules of Procedure
EPRS	European Parliamentary Research Service
ETUC	European Trade Union Confederation
EU	European Union

EWL	European Women's Lobby
FEMM	European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality
FEPS	Foundation for European Progressive Studies
GAL	Green-Alternative-Libertarian
Greens/EFA	Greens–European Free Alliance
GUE/NGL	The Left in the European Parliament (Previously European United Left/Nordic Green Left)
ID	Identity & Democracy
IGC	Intergovernmental Conferences
ITRE	European Parliament's Committee on Industry, Research and Energy
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex and Queer
LIBE	European Parliament's Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs
M5S	Five Star Movement
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MSF	Multiple Streams Framework
NI	Non-Inscrits
OLP	Ordinary Legislative Procedure
PD	Partito Democratico (Democratic Party)
PES	Party of European Socialists
PG	Political Group
PiS	Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice)
Renew	Renew Europe
RoP	Rules of Procedure
RRP	Radical Right Populist
S&D	Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats
SG	Secretary General
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
TAN	Traditional-Authoritarian-Nationalist
TEU	Treaty on European Union
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
UK	United Kingdom
UKIP	UK Independence Party
US	United States
VP	Vice-President

LIST OF FIGURES

List of Tables

Introduction: European Parliament's Political Groups in Turbulent Times

Johanna Kantola, Anna Elomäki, and Petra Ahrens

Introduction

The aim of this volume is to provide innovative inroads into studying political groups as the key political actors in the European Parliament (EP). As alliances of national party delegations, political groups are unique to the EP. Without a European 'government' and with the EP as a legislator on equal footing with the Council of the European Union, political groups' guide proposals through the EP's legislative process and influence their content (Abels, 2019; Corbett et al., 2016). The chapters in this volume analyse the political groups' multiple functions, powers and

J. Kantola (✉) · A. Elomäki · P. Ahrens
Tampere University, Tampere, Finland
e-mail: johanna.kantola@tuni.fi

A. Elomäki
e-mail: anna.elomaki@tuni.fi

P. Ahrens
e-mail: petra.ahrens@tuni.fi

1

practices both in terms of their *formal* institutional aspects and in terms of *informal* practices interacting with and shaping formal rules.

The EP's increased competences as a co-legislator have been praised as a victory for European democracy on the grounds of increasing the representative voice of citizens in European Union (EU) decision-making (Wiesner, 2018). The EP, as the only directly elected EU institution, now adopts (together with the Council) directives from the European Commission (EC) in almost all policy fields, acts as a budgetary authority and approves several nominations, including that of the President of the Commission and the Commissioners (Bressanelli & Chelotti, 2020; Héritier et al., 2019; Rittberger, 2012). Focusing on political groups enables critical scrutiny of whether this is exclusively a victory for democracy. Increased powers for the EP signify more power to its political groups, which necessitates a closer examination of their distinct decision-making and policy-making processes. This endeavour cautions against treating the EP predominantly as a homogenous institutional actor vis-a-vis other EU institutions, highlighting instead the multifaceted internal power struggles between and within the political groups and their impact on the EP's policy-making and EU legislative process.

Recent developments in EP demand renewed attention to political groups. Policy-making in the EP is in flux. The traditional 'grand coalition' of the two biggest political groups, the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) (EPP) and the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the EP (S&D), no longer holds the majority of seats in the parliament nor acts as the sole motor of EP policy-making. Radical right populists formed influential political groups after the 2014 and 2019 EP elections, shifting political dynamics within the EP through increased polarisation, new strategies and enhanced need for broad pro-EU coalitions (Brack, 2018; McDonnell & Werner, 2019; Ripoll Servent & Panning, 2019). So far, the impact of Eurosceptics and radical right populists is mainly seen at the discursive or rhetorical level in EP plenaries and not as a substantive policy impact in committees or trilogues (Brack, 2018; Kantola & Lombardo, 2021a; Ripoll Servent & Panning, 2019). However, after Brexit in 2020, one of these groups, Identity and Democracy (ID), became the fourth biggest group in parliament, with the aim of expanding its policy influence.

The chapters in this book expand the rich extant literature about political groups, where two interrelated topics have been seen as key aspects: (i) political group cohesion and (ii) coalition formation between

the groups (Hix et al., 2007; Kreppel & Tsebelis, 1999; Lefkofridi & Katsanidou, 2018; McElroy & Benoit, 2012; Raunio & Wagner, 2017; Schmitt & Thomassen, 1999). First, scholars have shown how—despite the lack of group discipline in the EP that separates EP political groups from national political parties—group cohesion has increased in parallel with the EP's powers, at least for the main pro-EU groups (Hix et al., 2007). Second, the EPP and the S&D coalition is part of a dynamic where the EU's institutional structure pushes the EP to unity and broad compromises between the pro-EU groups to obtain bargaining power vis-a-vis other EU institutions (Kreppel, 2002; Ripoll Servent, 2015). Most of these studies have drawn on quantitative roll-call vote data, which has enabled comparisons between and within groups and analyses of shifts over time.

An emerging strand of research has started to analyse the practices and processes through which the internal cohesion of political groups and coalitions between them are sought. Using qualitative and mixed methods, these scholars explore how power works at the micro level of politics, examining the role of informality, meanings and actors in the decision-making processes of political groups (Kantola & Miller, 2021, p. 782; see also Berthet & Kantola, 2020; Brack, 2018; Häge & Ringe, 2020; Ripoll Servent & Panning, 2019). Moreover, instead of focusing exclusively on formal institutions, there is an increased interest in understanding informal institutions, such as unwritten norms and practices, that shape how political groups work (see Kreppel, 2002; Bressanelli, 2014; Kantola & Miller, 2021; Ripoll Servent & Panning, 2019).

The aim of this volume is to provide new insights into the practices of political groups and the dynamics between them and, thus, to explain further the decision- and policy-making, including the power relations within and between the groups. To do this, many of the chapters use qualitative methods, including the analysis of interview data or parliamentary ethnography. The volume then illustrates how such qualitative studies can capture existing power relations on a macro level and within and between political groups. This includes revealing democratic practices and their erosion and conditions for equal political representation and participation at the heart of the democratic functioning of these institutions (Kantola & Miller, 2021, p. 782; Kantola & Lombardo, 2021b).

We begin this introductory chapter by discussing the core features of the political groups. We then present new inroads into the study

of political groups to consider how they function and how their practices and work can be analysed. Finally, we link political groups to research broader questions of democracy. We suggest that theorising the democratic functioning within the EP requires casting a critical eye on democratic practices in its different bodies, especially the growing salience of the internal processes, practices and power of the political groups. We close by providing an overview of the chapters of the volume.

The Core Features of Political Groups in the EP

Political groups of the EP are formed after each election. According to EP's rules, a political group must have 23 MEPs from at least seven member states and share political affinities. In the 9th parliament (2019–2024), there were seven political groups—some of which had existed since the 1950s and others which were formed after the elections (see Table 1.1; see also Ahrens and Rolandsen Agustín 2021). This section introduces these seven political groups by focusing on their composition and size, political ideology and policy cohesion. Additionally, many chapters analyse the Europe for Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD) group, which existed in the 8th parliament. Its two biggest national party delegations, the UKIP and the M5S from Italy, forged a 'marriage of convenience', putting aside their political differences to maximise EP resources (McDonnell & Werner, 2019, p. 15). This was insufficient in the long run, and the political group dissolved after the 2019 elections.

The *size of political groups* varies greatly from the largest EPP with 187 MEPs to the smallest, the Left in the EP (GUE/NGL), with 39 MEPs in the 2019–2024 term, after Brexit (see Table 1.1). Historically, the S&D was the biggest group from 1975 to 1999 and the EPP from the 1999 elections onwards. Currently, the Renew group is the third largest, followed by the radical right populist ID group. In the 8th parliament, the European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR), a Eurosceptic group founded by the British Conservatives that split from the EPP in 2009 (called EPP-ED at the time), was the third largest group. Reflecting the importance placed on this hierarchy in size, the way the ECR group bypassed ALDE and Greens/EFA was named one of its significant successes (Steven, 2020, p. 3). Similarly, Ahrens and Kantola (this volume) describe how painful it was for the Greens/EFA group to be bypassed by the radical right populist ID group after Brexit.

Table 1.1 EP's political groups in the 9th parliament (2019–2024) after Brexit

Political group	Full name	Founded (original year)	Number of MEPs	% of women MEPs	Member States of MEPs	Number of national delegations
EPP	Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats)	1953	187	31.55	27	47
S&D	Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament	1953	145	43.45	25	34
Renew	Renew Europe Group	2019 (Liberal group 1953)	98	40.82	22	38
ID	Identity and Democracy Group	2019 (ENF 2015)	75	38.67	10	10
Greens/EFA	Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance	1989 (Rainbow group 1984)	69	50.72	16	22
ECR	European Conservatives and Reformists Group	2009	62	30.65	15	17
GUE/NGL	The Left in the European Parliament	1994 (Communist Group 1974)	39	43.59	13	19

Data sources EP website, November 2020; Ahrens and Rolandsen Agustín 2021

This variation in size matters in policy terms because it impacts the relative political power of the groups in EP decision- and policy-making. Different leadership positions are divided based on the D'Hondt method in the parliament: the bigger the group, the more influence it has in the parliament regarding the President, Vice-President, Bureau and Committee Chair positions. Size also matters in policy-making, as large groups get the most important reports and have more say in inter-group

negotiations than smaller groups, which were often marginalised in the grand coalitions of the EPP and the S&D. Also, bigger groups have more resources for policy preparation.

A similar hierarchy in size and power explains the internal dynamics of political groups. Political groups comprise different *national party delegations,* and the largest national delegations wield considerable power within political groups (Kreppel, 2002, pp. 204–205; Ahrens & Kantola in this volume). For example, political group chairs are often selected from the largest national party delegations. The Germans form the biggest national party delegations for the EPP and the Greens/EFA, while, for example, in the S&D, the three biggest delegations, the Spanish, German and Italian, are fairly equal in numbers. The Renew Europe group, in turn, has shifted from a Northern emphasis in its predecessor, the ALDE group, to a French dominance. The French Rassemblement National and the Italian Lega dominate the ID, and the two strongly outnumber the other smaller groups. As seen in Table 1.1, the ECR fell into sixth place in group size when its previously largest national party delegation and founder, the UK Conservatives, dwindled into four MEPs. After Brexit in 2020, the Polish Law and Justice Party dominated the group, with a significant lead over the second largest group, Fratelli d'Italia, a post-fascist political party. GUE/NGL, characterised by its confederal nature, comprises three larger delegations from France, Germany and Greece and a high number of national delegations with only one or two MEPs.

The EP Rules of Procedure require political groups to share *political affinities*. Extant literature has illustrated how political affinity, defined as a shared political ideology, becomes very contested in political parties' diversity within political groups (McElroy & Benoit, 2012; Whitaker & Lynch, 2014). Political ideologies and ideological contestations matter internally for political group identities and policy positions. They also form a basis for distinguishing groups and their politics and for analysing cooperation and conflict between them. In previous studies, the EP was seen as a two-dimensional competitive arena structured along a socio-economic left–right cleavage (Hix et al., 2007), while others suggested classifying political groups as pro- or anti-EU integration (Otjes & van der Veer, 2016). Recently, the GAL (Greens, Alternatives, Libertarians) versus TAN (Traditionalists, Authoritarians, Nationalists) dimension was seen as useful (Ahrens et al., 2022; Hooghe et al., 2002, p. 985; Brack, 2018, pp. 56, 83; see Brack & Behm; Börzel & Hartlapp; Ripoll Servent in this volume).

Taking a brief look at political groups' ideological outlooks, it is evident that the EPP builds its political affinity on a conservative Christian Democrat and pro-European integration identity (Bardi et al., 2020), whereas the S&D is a social-democratic, pro-integration group. Renew builds its political affinity around 'liberalism', which often applies to both the economy and values. The Greens/EFA build their political affinity around environmental issues, human rights, equality and their decidedly pro-European integration position (Lefkofridi & Katsanidou, 2018). The left group GUE/NGL represents a soft Eurosceptic group critical of neoliberalism as an ideology and a policy approach (Brack, 2018). Finally, the ECR and the ID are radical right populist groups that oppose European integration and promote highly conservative norms built on radical right populist opposition to, for instance, equality (Gaweda et al., 2021; Steven, 2020). Given the diversity of the national party delegations within the political groups, any attempt to pin down the groups' ideologies can only be partial. Therefore, the book chapters delve deeper into their positions, internal negotiations and contradictions around them (see Brack & Behm; Börzel & Hartlapp; Ripoll Servent; Kantola in this volume).

Despite this diversity within groups, *voting cohesion* remains high for the most established groups. Research on this topic identified factors influencing group cohesion, such as group size, type of national party delegations and the policy issue available (Lefkofridi & Katsanidou, 2018; Warasin et al., 2019; Whitaker & Lynch, 2014), highlighted internal cleavages within the groups, such as between debtor and creditor countries (e.g. Vesan & Corti, 2019) and analysed whether and when MEPs vote with their national parties instead of the group (e.g. Rasmussen, 2008).

Three political groups reached significantly high voting cohesion in the previous full legislative term (8th Parliament). The Greens/EFA was the most cohesive group, with 96% cohesion (Warasin et al., 2019, p. 149). Despite the internal differences in economic policy and with the EFA and independent MEPs within the group, the political group tends to find a common line (see Elomäki et al. in this volume). The EPP and S&D voted cohesively on most issues, with 94% and 92% voting cohesion, respectively (Warasin et al., 2019, 149). This is enforced by formal rules in the groups and through a bottom-up policy negotiation structure (see Elomäki et al.; Bressanelli in this volume). EPP voting cohesion is slightly lower in employment policies, with a North–South split over its market-oriented approach to emphasising employability (Vesan & Corti, 2019). Gender

equality and LGBTQI issues, such as sexual and reproductive health and rights, are among the divisive issues for the group (Ahrens et al., 2022; Berthet & Kantola, 2020; Kantola & Rolandsen Agustín, 2016). Unlike the EPP, the S&D is fairly united regarding social policy (Vesan & Corti, 2019) and gender equality issues (Warasin et al., 2019).

Extant research shows that Renew's predecessor ALDE was less cohesive than the EPP and the S&D, reaching 88% cohesion in the 8th EP (Warasin et al., 2019, p. 149). Similarly, GUE/NGL is less cohesive than the pro-EU groups, with a cohesion of 83% in the 8th EP (Warasin et al., 2019, p. 149). GUE/NGL finds joint positions on policies such as social welfare, immigration and equality issues (Lefkofridi & Katsanidou, 2018). The ECR was the most cohesive of the right-wing Eurosceptic groups, with 79% in the 8th EP (Warasin et al., 2019, p. 149). The group is fairly cohesive in economic and social policies (Lefkofridi & Katsanidou, 2018), where it joins EPP and ALDE in calling for austerity and opposes more EU integration in social policy (Elomäki, 2021). The ID's predecessor ENF had a comparatively low voting cohesion of 69.5% in the 8th EP (Warasin et al., 2019, p. 149). The group opposed EU integration on economic and social matters but lacked clear policy lines on issues, such as austerity, given the mix of pro-welfare and pro-market attitudes within the group (Cavallaro et al., 2018).

Evidently, studying political groups induces numerous analytical questions about their powers and influence, ways of operating and the roles of MEPs and national party delegations within them. Any findings on the political groups tend to differ greatly depending, for instance, on the group's political ideology and the national party delegations' impact on the groups. Therefore, this makes the study of political groups both complex and interesting.

New Inroads into the Study of Political Groups

Here, we discuss some new avenues for studying political groups. We suggest that the political groups' multiple functions, powers and practices can be usefully analysed regarding their *formal* institutional aspects and *informal* practices, which interact with the formal roles and shape them. We begin by drawing on (new) institutionalism to define formal and informal institutions and then provide examples of how such approaches can inform analyses of political groups' activities and practices at inter-group, intra-group and inter-institutional levels.

Many chapters of this volume use the different variants of new institutionalism, which have developed an analytical distinction between formal and informal institutions (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004; Lowndes, 2020; Lowndes & Roberts, 2013; Mackay et al., 2010). While formal institutions are defined as codified rules communicated and enforced through official channels, informal institutions signify customary elements, traditions, moral values, religious beliefs and norms of behaviour (Chappell & Waylen, 2013, p. 605). They are 'hidden and embedded in the everyday practices disguised as standard and taken-for-granted' (ibid.). Regarding political groups, formal institutions comprise parliamentary rules of procedure and group statutes that regulate everything from how the EP functions as an institution and workplace to plenaries and the formation of political groups (Kantola & Miller, 2021, p. 786). Examples of informal institutions, in contrast, include unwritten practices, such as a cordon sanitaire or power hierarchies that are followed, although they are unwritten (Kantola & Miller, 2021, p. 786; Ripoll Servent, 2019). Like formal institutions, breaking informal institutions may involve sanctions. The relationship between formal and informal institutions may be competitive or complementary since informal rules may subvert or reinforce formal ones (Waylen, 2014, p. 213). Nevertheless, the distinction between formal and informal rules is not to be interpreted as clear-cut and dichotomous. Francesca Gains and Vivien Lowndes suggest analysing the mixtures of both formal and informal rules where some rules sit at the most formal end of a continuum, others in the middle and still others positioned at the most informal end (Gains & Lowndes, 2022).

The different dimensions of EP's political group's work can be studied through this dual focus on formal and informal aspects. First, this can be illustrated referencing *inter-group* activities—how political groups work with and against other political groups. These include parliamentary work undertaken in the plenary and committees, inter-groups, Conference of Presidents and co-hosted outreach events (see Kantola & Miller, 2021). In plenaries, political group leaders sit in the front row, followed by members of the bureau and heads of national party delegations (Corbett et al., 2016, p. 219). However, the majority of the EP's legislative work takes place in committees where reports are distributed between the groups using a competitive points system and where the groups negotiate for EP's positions. One example of an informal practice that influences all these activities is the *cordon sanitaire*—an informal and negotiated practice by which the 'mainstream' groups have closed off radical right

populist groups or MEPs from committee chair positions and do not allocate important reports to these groups nor seek their support during inter-group negotiations on policies (Kantola & Miller, 2021; Ripoll Servent, 2019; Ripoll Servent in this volume).

The most studied inter-group activity from the perspective of the interplay of formal and informal institutions is their negotiations over policies. Despite the wishes for more party-political competition in the EP (Hix et al., 2007), its negotiation culture is geared towards consensus-seeking and compromising (Ripoll Servent, 2015; Roger, 2016). Negotiations and compromises between the groups mainly occur in the so-called shadows meetings between the rapporteur and shadow rapporteurs and informal private meetings between key groups. In these negotiations, the groups are in an unequal position. Coalition formation also often entails creating issue-based alliances between MEPs and national delegations across groups (Vesan & Corti, 2019). Smaller groups and their interests are often marginalised, and they may struggle to integrate their views, particularly in situations where their votes are not needed to form a majority (Elomäki, 2021; Kreppel, 2002), thus illustrating the impact of informal negotiation practices on the power dynamics between the groups.

A second way to look at the usefulness of focusing on formal and informal institutions in political group activities is to focus on *intra-group* activities. These comprise political and administrative activities, which occur in the bureau of the political groups, secretariat, political group meetings and working groups, and constitute internal policy negotiation processes (Kantola & Miller, 2021). The political groups' internal processes and structures have become more formalised and centralised over the years, notably due to the increased group size after the 2004 EU enlargement (Bressanelli, 2014; see Bressanelli in this volume). Unlike some other political group functions, there is relatively little academic research into intra-group activities—both formal and informal. Intragroup activities, however, matter because they shape MEPs' political work and efficacy, including the democratic and efficient functioning of the political groups themselves. Negotiating and regulating group leadership are prime examples of intra-group activities. Political groups have notably different selection procedures for these positions, combining both formal rules and procedures and informal norms. Formal rules in political group statutes can make for open and transparent selection procedures and enhance equality and democracy, while informal norms—prominent

in the radical right groups—induce more opaque and less democratic processes (Kantola & Miller, 2022; see Ahrens & Kantola in this volume).

Formal and informal aspects of intra-group activities also matter for political groups' policy positions. Compared with national political parties, political groups lack well-defined legislative agendas that highlight the role of political negotiations (Roger & Winzen, 2015). Here, the scarcity of research on intra-group policy-formation practices, both formal and informal, is notable (see however Roger & Winzen, 2015). The topic is addressed explicitly by Elomäki, Gaweda and Berthet (in this volume), who analyse the formal and informal institutions shaping the internal policy-making processes and political groups' practices and how they differ.

Our third example comes from the *inter-institutional* activities of the political groups in the EP. Johansson and Raunio (in this volume) describe the significance of both formal (official roles given to political groups) and informal (such as personal contacts, networks and dinners) inter-institutional activities in the context of EU reform processes. Inter-institutional activities are also exemplified by the so-called trilogues. Trilogues constitute a 'secluded fora' and a set of informal meetings during which representatives of the EP, the Council and the Commission negotiate compromises (Ripoll Servent & Panning, 2019; Ripoll Servent in this volume). They were introduced because of the EP's increased powers and responded to the consequent challenges around large numbers of files and the complexity of the issues, as well as to ensure an early-on and smooth dialogue between the institutions during the first stage of the codecision procedure (Farrell & Héritier, 2004; Roederer-Rynning & Greenwood, 2015). Over the years, the EP's negotiating practices have been formalised in parliament's rules of procedure.

Trilogues have been suggested to make policy more efficient, yet they have been criticised for the new level of informality. There is a severe lack of transparency and public scrutiny regarding how decisions are reached, how political conflicts play out and how power is wielded between the different political actors (Ripoll Servent & Panning, 2019, p. 756). Regarding democracy, the EP is in danger of becoming a rubber stamp with negotiations outside committee meetings and the plenary (Ripoll Servent & Panning, 2019, p. 756). A focus on political groups, in turn, further highlights the challenges to democracy posed by the trilogues. Hard Eurosceptic groups have been excluded from the trilogues using the informal institution of *cordon sanitaire* (Ripoll Servent & Panning, 2019).

Alternatively, Ripoll Servent (in this volume) shows how the EPP co-operated with the radical right on the level of ideas—making the *cordon sanitaire* meaningless—which led to easier inter-institutional negotiations with the resulting EP report reflecting the positions of member states.

This section has discussed what combining a focus on formal and informal institutions could bring to the study of political groups. Many chapters in this volume adopt this perspective to highlight new aspects of the power relations and struggles between and within the groups and in the workings of the groups with other EU institutions. The work of political groups extends to relations and cooperation with different stakeholders, civil society, lobbyists and media, Europarties and different parliamentary actors within the EP. The ways to study the formal and informal activities and practices proposed here could easily be extended to these dimensions. Johansson and Raunio (in this volume) cover these aspects of political group activities by focusing on the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) and the political groups' struggles to set the agenda for it in cooperation with other EU institutions, such as the Commission, Europarties and civil society.

EVALUATING POLITICAL GROUPS: FOCUS ON DEMOCRATIC PRACTICES

The struggle for democratic legitimacy is a well-known and widely discussed issue for the EU on which its fate is often thought to hang. The EP is often described as the most democratic actor of the EU institutions since it is the only directly elected body. Its political groups, in turn, are key to the functioning of democracy within the EP because of the party's political competition they represent (Hix et al., 2007; Lindberg et al., 2008). Simultaneously, democracy across Europe is challenged with increasing radical right populism, authoritarianism and illiberalism (Kelemen, 2020; Morijn, 2019). The examples above, such as the trilogues, describe how policy-making in the EP has become removed from democratic ideals about openness, participation and public scrutiny. Some have argued that this tendency towards professionalisation, technocratisation and depoliticisation is common to EU policy-making and fuels illiberal populism (Mudde, 2021; Schmidt, 2020). How democratic are the groups, how do they hold up liberal democracy and democratic practices within them? In this endeavour, the scholarly attention to formal and informal institutions of political groups, as discussed above, can

usefully be combined with critical questions about the *democratic practices* of political groups, an issue we turn to in the final section of this chapter.

Democratic legitimacy has traditionally been conceptualised regarding output and input legitimacy. Output legitimacy entails that policies are provided for the common good; it requires attention to policies' effectiveness and performance (Schmidt, 2020, p. 8). Input legitimacy, in turn, enquires whether policies reflect the 'will of the people' and highlights citizens' engagement with political processes and the government's responsiveness to citizens' concerns (Schmidt, 2020, p. 8). Schmidt adds a third dimension: *throughput legitimacy* is the procedural quality of the policy-making processes, which 'sits in between the input and the output, in the "black box" of governance' (Schmidt, 2020, p. 8). It requires the policy-making process to be democratic. Democratic practices that ensure this include participation, accountability, transparency, inclusion and equality (Schmidt, 2020, p. 8).

Political groups have mainly been discussed from the perspective of input legitimacy. Scholars have long considered the weak electoral connection between EU citizens and their representatives in the EP, reflected in the low voting turnout in European elections and owing to the second-order nature of these elections (Hix et al., 2007; Lindberg et al., 2008). The link between the political groups and EU citizens was severed because it is the national and not the EU-level parties that nominate the candidates to European elections. Furthermore, the citizens' vote is based on domestic concerns rather than on expressing their view on who should be the largest group in the EP and what the EP's political agenda should be (Hix et al., 2007, p. 28). This has raised the question of whether the political groups can fulfil the traditional role of political parties as 'transmission belts' between the citizens and the EU level (Lindberg et al., 2008; see Johansson & Raunio in this volume). The *Spitzenkandidatur* system proposed to remedy the situation (e.g. Hix et al., 2007) has not significantly increased voters' interest and participation in the EU elections, although it empowered the EP in 2014 (e.g. Hobolt, 2014).

Another key question identified with input legitimacy and political groups was whether there is enough party political competition to reflect citizens' concerns in the parliament's policy-making. The challenge that the EP is more effective when it presents a united front in

inter-institutional negotiations has been discussed above and is perti-
nent here. While some suggested that the EP's increased powers induced
more party's political competition and thus a more 'democratic struc-
ture of politics' based on left–right competition (Hix et al., 2007), others
have argued that hopes for such 'democratic politics' should be treated
with caution, provided the inter-institutional bargaining process pushes
for EP unity. The EP's increased powers as a budgetary authority and
co-legislator since the Lisbon Treaty have increased the long-standing
pressure for left–right compromise and the grand coalition between the
EPP and the S&D (Ripoll Servent, 2015). Moreover, the pro-/anti-EU
cleavage in the EP has become more important due to the growing repre-
sentation of Eurosceptic and populist parties in the EP and the Eurozone
crises (Brack, 2018; Otjes & van der Veer, 2016; see Brack & Behm;
Börzel & Hartlapp; Ripoll Servent in this volume). This was also the case
in economic policy, where ideological contestation along the left–right
axis has traditionally been dominant.

Importantly, while input legitimacy is well debated, less scholarly
attention has been paid to throughput legitimacy: democratic practices
regarding decision-making within the political groups. Yet, democratic
practices such as transparency, the inclusion of diverse voices, public
deliberation and participation shape interactions and power hierarchies
between the groups and influence policy outcomes. Democratic prac-
tices are important to political decision-making within political groups,
where the divergent views and interests of national political parties
are consolidated into a policy line of the transnational political group.
Analysing democratic practices requires considering formal and informal
practices and their interactions (see Ahrens & Kantola; Elomäki et al.;
Kantola in this volume). Miller (in this volume) shows how parliamentary
ethnography can particularly well reveal informal institutions regarding
democratic practices. Formal and informal practices within the groups
for the allocation of leadership positions, policy-formation processes,
deliberation and expression of dissent and representation significantly
impact policy outcomes, including the groups' ability to channel citizens'
interests in EP's decision-making (Johansson & Raunio in this volume;
Kantola & Lombardo, 2021b).

Such democratic practices become particularly interesting when consid-
ering the turbulent times EP faces due to the rise of radical right populism
and illiberalism. The EP commonly upholds the values of democracy in
EU policy-making, including equality, human rights and minorities' rights

(Ahrens et al., 2022; see Kantola; Morijn in this volume). However, the EP is far from a united actor regarding these values. Rather, right-wing populist parties from different political groups use similar anti-gender rhetoric to oppose the EU's advancement of gender equality (Kantola & Lombardo, 2021a). Kelemen (2020) and Morijn (2019) argued that the current system incentivises parliament's political groups to protect the illiberal national elements within them (see also Morijn in this volume). Mainstream parties have relied on radical right populists to enhance their political groups' bargaining power in an environment where political groups compete in size and influence parliamentary positions and votes (Kelemen, 2020, p. 484). This explains Fidesz's position within the European People's Party (EPP) Europarty and the EPP political group within the EP until 2021, when Viktor Orbán, not the EPP, announced Fidesz's leave from the political group. The S&D political group similarly struggled with its Romanian and Bulgarian delegations, indicating the existence of anti-democratic forces within the political left (Zacharenko, 2020, p. 17). Populist politics accentuates questions about the possibilities for democratic politics within the EP and the role of political groups in it.

The Chapters of the Book

This volume's chapters differently address these core themes. In Chapters 2–4, the internal dynamics and practices of the political groups and the broader implications for the EP legislative process and supranational democracy are analysed. Chapters 5–7 move the focus towards intergroup dynamics, focusing specifically on the behaviour of the radical right populist groups and MEPs and their relationship to mainstream groups and their impact on EP policy-making. In Chapters 8–10, the political groups regarding the broader EU context, including interinstitutional negotiations for the Conference on the Future of Europe and broader normative issues about democracy and equality, are considered. Finally, Chapter 11 takes a methodological approach evaluating what can be gained by researching political groups through parliamentary ethnography.

Petra Ahrens and *Johanna Kantola's* chapter 'Negotiating Power and Democracy in Political Group Formation in the European Parliament' develops a framework of four layers of political group formation. It illustrates how informal practices and norms added to the formal rules

of the EP and shape political group formation processes throughout the legislative term. The four intertwined layers are characterised by differing democratic practices. They include formal political group formation after EP elections, internal political group formation via core functions, internal political group formation via consolidation through policies and distributing policy field responsibilities and changes to political group composition during the term. The chapter reveals similarities and clear differences between political groups for each of the four layers, which enhances the understanding of variations in negotiating power and democracy among the different political groups.

Edoardo Bressanelli's chapter, 'The Political Groups as Organisations: The Institutionalisation of Transnational Party Politics', investigates the process of institutionalisation of the two largest political groups in the EP, the EPP and the S&D, over the past four decades, explaining the internal organisation and organisational development of the groups. He argues that organisational development was triggered by external events, such as the enlargement towards Central and Eastern Europe and the legislative empowerment of the EP due to the Lisbon Treaty. The chapter shows that, over time, the groups have become both more complex, differentiated and autonomous from the national member parties. Still, the latter plays an important but often overlooked roles within the group organisation.

In their chapter 'Democratic Practices and Political Dynamics of Intra-Group Policy Formation in the European Parliament', *Anna Elomäki, Barbara Gaweda and Valentine Berthet* dive deeper into the internal processes of the political groups, focusing on internal policy-making processes and practices. Elomäki, Gaweda and Berthet approach the topic from the perspective of formal and informal democratic practices regarding inclusion, deliberation and transparency, which influence whose voice is heard. The chapter reveals differences between the groups' practices and the value given to unified positions linked to the group's size and position in EP decision-making. Elomäki, Gaweda and Berthet argue that intragroup struggles about policy are as important for the democratic functioning of the EP as party's political contestation between the groups.

Turning to the issue of Euroscepticism, *Tanja A. Börzel* and *Miriam Hartlapp's* chapter 'Eurosceptic Contestation and Legislative Behaviour in the European Parliament' reveals how Eurosceptic contestation translates into voting behaviour and how the members of Eurosceptic groups engage in committee work and plenary debates. Börzel and Hartlapp find

that Eurosceptic contestation is stronger in policy fields characterised by cultural cleavages and weaker in fields dominated by left–right ideologies or national interests; also, Eurosceptic opposition may form alliances with MEPs from mainstream parties. An alternative view on democratic practices in the EU policy-making is offered in this chapter, suggesting that Eurosceptic contestation is a vital feature of democratic practices within the EP rather than something undermining policy-making and European integration.

Ariadna Ripoll Servent's chapter 'When Words Do Not Follow Deeds: An Analysis of Party Competition between Centre-Right and Eurosceptic Radical-Right Parties in the European Parliament' analyses the pressure that Eurosceptic and populist parties put on mainstream centre-right parties. It focuses specifically on the EPP's pivotal position in the EP and how the group has negotiated the impact of the far-right. A detailed content analysis of legislative amendments from two files on the contested issue of migration is provided in this chapter. Ripoll Servent examines whether and under which conditions the positions of the EPP can be delimited from those of far-right Eurosceptic and populist parties. The findings of the chapter reveal, on one hand, the intense practical and ideological engagements with the radical right by the EPP. On the other hand, the EPP did not engage with the most radical far-right contenders and continued to apply the cordon sanitaire. Paradoxically, the acceptance of the language of the far-right made the cordon sanitaire meaningless.

Nathalie Brack and *Anne-Sophie Behm's* chapter 'How Do Eurosceptics Wage Opposition in the European Parliament? Patterns of Behaviour in the 8th Legislature' analyses how Eurosceptic MEPs behave within the parliament, what they criticise and oppose and how the differences between Eurosceptics can be explained. Brack and Behm analyse the parliamentary behaviour of Eurosceptic MEPs in the 8th EP legislature (2014–2019). The findings demonstrate that there are diverging patterns of engagement among the three different types of opposition actors. These include, first, MEPs of the non-Eurosceptic, 'loyal' opposition who aim to provide an alternative to the grand coalition and focus strongly on legislative and scrutiny activities. Second, the soft Eurosceptic MEPs, the 'critical' opposition, are less integrated in the EP but still engage in parliamentary life. Finally, hard Eurosceptics constitute an 'anti-system' opposition, concentrating on activities with a potential publicity character.

Karl Magnus Johansson and *Tapio Raunio*'s chapter 'Shaping the EU's Future? Europarties, European Parliament's Political Groups and

the Conference on the Future of Europe' focuses on the most recent attempts to reform the EU and the role that Europarties and political groups play in such processes. The two sets of actors have a history of influencing EU Treaty amendments. Johansson and Raunio explore the different avenues and strategies of the three largest Europarties—European People's Party, Party of European Socialists, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe—and their EP groups utilised for shaping the agenda of the Conference on the Future of Europe. The authors examine the distribution of power between Europarties and political groups and particularly consider the dynamics inside EP political groups. The findings suggest that the agenda-setting stage of the conference was strongly influenced by political group leaders and other more senior individual MEPs, many of whom are seasoned veterans of inter-institutional bargaining and EU constitutional development.

John Morijn's chapter '(Disap)pointing in the Mirror: the European Parliament's Obligations to Protect EU Basic Values in Member States and at EU level' illustrates the EP's so far lukewarm engagement in handling national party delegations in political groups and Europarties opposing the fundamental values enshrined in Article 2 TEU. Morijn examines the setting for the political groups in the broader context of the ongoing Article 7 procedures against Hungary and Poland and EU regulations for Europarties. By engaging with the revised EP Rules of Procedure, the hidden barriers for political groups in holding each other responsible for respecting EU values are explored in the chapter, especially when some of their national delegations are prone to question them. Morijn suggests that—to effectively protect EU values—the EP and particularly its political groups would need to further substantiate existing formal rules.

Johanna Kantola's chapter 'Parliamentary Politics and Polarisation around Gender: Tackling Inequalities in Political Groups in the European Parliament' focuses on the issue of gender equality, which, while being a fundamental EU value, has become increasingly contested in the EP. Kantola analyses the internal functioning of parliament's political groups from the perspective of gender equality. Rather than focusing on policies and policy-making processes, she analyses how MEPs and staff perceive political groups as gendered actors. This involves examining both remaining gender inequalities and practices for advancing gender equality at the political group level. The findings show that despite the

political groups' differences, gender inequalities persist across the political spectrum. In the chapter, how political groups show different levels of commitment to gender equality and employ different practices in advancing it with the potential for democratic representation and political work is considered.

Cherry Miller's chapter '"Ethno, Ethno, What?": Using Ethnography to Explore the European Parliament's Political Groups in Turbulent Times' asks for what insights parliamentary ethnography adds to our study and understanding of EP political groups. The chapter provides a detailed account of three ethnographic practices and their usefulness for studying political groups: shadowing, meeting ethnography and hanging out. Miller suggests that ethnographic enquiry is perfectly placed to explain the three interlinked themes that are the heart of this volume: democracy, party politics and turbulent times.

The final chapter by *Anna Elomäki*, *Petra Ahrens* and *Johanna Kantola* 'Turbulent Times for the European Parliament's Political Groups? Lessons on Continuity and Change' discusses the contributions of the individual chapters and the book by focusing on three issues: the significance of the findings for questions about democracy, the turbulence caused by Euroscepticism and radical right populism and the benefits of analysing both formal and informal institutions to the political groups.

References

Abels, G. (2019). The powers of the European Parliament: Implications for gender equality policy. In P. Ahrens, & L. Rolandsen Agustín (Eds.), *Gendering the European Parliament. Structures, policies and practices* (pp. 19–34). Rowman & Littlefield.

Ahrens, P., Gaweda, B., & Kantola, J. (2022, forthcoming). Reframing the language of human rights? Political group contestations on women's and LGBTQI rights in European Parliament debates. *Journal of European Integration.*

Ahrens, P., & Rolandsen Agustín, L. (2021). Party politics. In G. Abels, A. Krizsan, H. MacRae, & A. van der Vleuten (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook on gender and EU politics* (pp. 235–249). Routledge.

Bardi, L., Gagatek, W., Germond, C., Johansson, K. M., Kaiser, W. & Sassano, S. (2020). *The European ambition: The group of the European People's Party and European integration*. Nomos.

Berthet, V., & Kantola, J. (2020). Gender, violence and political institutions: Struggles over sexual harassment in the European Parliament. *Social Politics, 28*(1), 143–167.

Brack, N. (2018). *Opposing Europe in the European Parliament: Rebels and radicals in the chamber*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Bressanelli, E. (2014). Necessary deepening? How political groups in the European Parliament adapt to enlargement. *Journal of European Public Policy, 21*(5), 776–792.

Bressanelli, E., & Chelotti, N. (Eds.). (2020). *The European Parliament in the contested Union: Power and influence post-Lisbon*. Routledge

Cavallaro, M., Flacher, D., & Zanetti, M. A. (2018). Radical right parties and European economic integration: Evidence from the seventh European Parliament. *European Union Politics, 19*(2), 321–343.

Chappell, L., & Waylen, G. (2013). Gender and the hidden life of institutions. *Public Administration, 91*(3), 599–615.

Corbett, R., Jacobs, F., & Neville, D. (2016). *The European Parliament* (9th ed.). John Harper.

Elomäki, A. (2021). 'It's a total no-no': The strategic silence about gender in the European Parliament's economic governance policies. *International Political Science Review*. Advance Online Publication. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512120978329

Farrell, H., & Héritier, A. (2004). Interorganizational negotiation and intraorganizational power in shared decision making: Early agreements under codecision and their impact on the European Parliament and Council. *Comparative Political Studies, 37*(10), 1184–1212.

Gains, F., & Lowndes, V. (2022). Identifying the institutional micro-foundations of gender policy change: A case study of police governance and violence against women and girls. *Politics & Gender, 18*(2), 394–421.

Gaweda, B., Miller, C., & Siddi, M. (2021). *What's in a name? 'Conservatives' in the European Parliament: The case of the European Conservatives and Reformists group*. Paper presented at the ECPR virtual General Conference, 31 August 2021.

Häge, F. M., & Ringe, N. (2020). Top-down or bottom-up? The selection of shadow rapporteurs in the European Parliament. *European Union Politics, 21*(4), 706–727.

Helmke, G., & Levitsky, S. (2004). Informal institutions and comparative politics: A research agenda. *Perspectives on Politics, 2*(4), 725–740.

Héritier, A., Meissner L. K., Moury C., & Schoeller M. G. (2019). *European Parliament ascendant: Parliamentary strategies of self-empowerment in the EU*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Hix, S., Noury, A. G., & Roland, G. (2007). *Democratic politics in the European Parliament*. Cambridge University Press.

Hobolt, S. B. (2014). A vote for the President? The role of *Spitzenkandidaten* in the 2014 European Parliament elections. *Journal of European Public Policy, 21*(10), 1528–1540.

Hooghe, L., Marks, G., & Wilson, C. J. (2002). Does left/right structure party positions on European integration? *Comparative Political Studies, 35*(8), 956–989.

Kantola, J., & Lombardo, E. (2021a). Opposition strategies of right populists against gender equality in a polarized European Parliament. *International Political Science Review, 42*(5), 565–579. https://doi.org/10.1177/019251 2120963953

Kantola, J., & Lombardo, E. (2021b). Challenges to democratic practices and discourses in the European Parliament: Feminist perspectives on the politics of political groups. *Social Politics, 28*(3), 579–602.

Kantola, J., & Miller, C. (2021). Party politics and radical right populism in the European Parliament: Analysing political groups as democratic actors. *Journal of Common Market Studies, 59*(4), 782–801.

Kantola, J., & Miller, C. (2022). Gendered leadership in the European Parliament's political groups. In H. Müller & I. Tömmel (Eds.), *Women and leadership in the European Union* (pp. 150–169). Oxford University Press.

Kantola, J., & Rolandsen Agustín, L. (2016). Gendering transnational party politics: The case of European Union. *Party Politics, 22*(5), 641–651.

Kelemen, D. (2020). The European Union's authoritarian equilibrium. *Journal of European Public Policy, 27*(3), 481–499.

Kreppel, A. (2002). *The European Parliament and supranational party system: A study in institutional development*. Cambridge University Press.

Kreppel, A., & Tsebelis, G. (1999). Coalition formation in the European Parliament. *Comparative Political Studies, 32*(8), 933–966.

Lefkofridi, Z., & Katsanidou, A. (2018). A step closer to a transnational party system? Competition and coherence in the 2009 and 2014 European Parliament. *Journal of Common Market Studies, 56*(6), 1462–1482.

Lindberg, B., Rasmussen, A., & Warntjen, A. (2008). Party politics as usual? The role of political parties in EU legislative decision-making. *Journal of European Public Policy, 15*(8), 1107–1126.

Lowndes, V. (2020). How are political institutions gendered? *Political Studies, 68*(3), 543–564.

Lowndes, V., & Roberts, M. (2013). *Why institutions matter. The new institutionalism in political science*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Mackay, F., Kenny, M., & Chappell, L. (2010). New institutionalism through a gender lens: Towards a feminist institutionalism? *International Political Science Review, 31*(5), 573–588.

McDonnell, D., & Werner, A. (2019). *International populism: The radical right in the European Parliament*. Hurst.

McElroy, G., & Benoit, K. (2012). Policy positioning in the European Parliament. *European Union Politics, 13*(1), 150–167.

Morijn, J. (2019). Responding to the "populist" politics at EU level: Regulation 1141/2014 and beyond. *International Journal of Constitutional Law, 17*(2), 617–664.

Mudde, C. (2021). Populism in Europe: An illiberal democratic response to undemocratic liberalism. *Government and Opposition, 56*(4), 577–597.

Otjes, S., & van der Veer, H. (2016). The Eurozone crisis and the European Parliament's changing lines of conflict. *European Union Politics, 17*(2), 242–261.

Rasmussen, M. K. (2008). Another side of the story: A qualitative case study of voting behaviour in the European Parliament. *Politics, 28*(1), 11–18.

Raunio, T., & Wagner, W. (2017). *Ideology or national interest? External relations votes in the European Parliament*. ACCESS EUROPE Research Paper, No. 2017/01. Retrieved September 13, 2021, from https://ssrn.com/abstract=2988821

Ripoll Servent, A. (2015). *Institutional and policy change in the European Parliament*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Ripoll Servent, A. (2019). The European Parliament after the 2019 elections: Testing the boundaries of the cordon sanitaire. *Journal of Contemporary European Research, 15*(4), 331–342.

Ripoll Servent, A., & Panning, L. (2019). Eurosceptics in trilogue settings: Interest formation and contestation in the European Parliament'. *West European Politics, 42*(4), 755–775.

Rittberger, B. (2012). Institutionalising representative democracy in the European Union: The case of the European Parliament. *Journal of Common Market Studies, 50*(1), 18–37.

Roederer-Rynning, C., & Greenwood, J. (2015). The culture of trilogues. *Journal of European Public Policy, 22*(8), 1148–1165.

Roger, L. (2016). *Voice(s) in the European Parliament. Deliberation and negotiation in EP committees*. Nomos.

Roger, L., & Winzen, T. (2015). Party groups and committee negotiations in the European Parliament: Outside attention and the anticipation of plenary conflict. *Journal of European Public Policy, 22*(3), 391–408.

Schmidt, V. A. (2020). *Europe's crisis of legitimacy. Governing by rules and ruling by numbers in the Eurozone*. Oxford University Press.

Schmitt, H., & Thomassen, J. (1999). *Political representation and legitimacy in the European Union*. Oxford University Press.

Steven, M. (2020). *The European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR): Politics, parties and policies*. Manchester University Press.

Vesan, P., & Corti, F. (2019). New tensions over social Europe? The European Pillar of Social Rights and the debate within the European Parliament. *Journal of Common Market Studies, 57*(5), 977–994.

Warasin, M., Kantola, J., Rolandsen Agustín, L., & Coughlan C. (2019). Politicisation of gender equality in the European Parliament: Cohesion and inter-group coalitions in plenary and committees. In P. Ahrens & L. Rolandsen Agustín (Eds.), *Gendering the European Parliament. Structures, policies and practices* (pp. 141–158). Rowman & Littlefield.

Waylen, G. (2014). Informal institutions, institutional change and gender equality. *Political Research Quarterly, 67*(1), 212–223.

Whitaker, R., & Lynch, P. (2014). Understanding the formation and actions of Eurosceptic groups in the European Parliament: Pragmatism, principles and publicity. *Government and Opposition, 49*(2), 232–263.

Wiesner, C. (2018). *Inventing the EU as a democratic polity. Concepts, actors and controversies*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Zacharenko, E. (2020). *Anti-gender mobilisations in Europe. Study for policymakers on opposition to sexual and reproductive rights (SRHR) in European Institutions*. Greens/EFA of the European Parliament. Retrieved January 31, 2021, from https://heidihautala.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Anti-gender-Mobilisations-in-Europe_Nov25.pdf

Negotiating Power and Democracy in Political Group Formation in the European Parliament

Petra Ahrens and Johanna Kantola

INTRODUCTION

Political groups in the European Parliament (EP) were once considered less significant by the general public: their leaders were unknown figures, and their powers and roles were inconsequential to the media, politicians or citizens (Kelemen, 2020). While scholars widely recognised the increased powers of the EP and its role as the key democratic actor, indepth analyses of organising political groups within the parliament were seldom, if ever, undertaken.

P. Ahrens (✉) · J. Kantola
Tampere University, Tampere, Finland
e-mail: petra.ahrens@tuni.fi

J. Kantola
e-mail: johanna.kantola@tuni.fi

Political groups are unique to the EP. As alliances of national party delegations,[1] they are distinct from parliamentary parties and party coalitions in national contexts. The formal and most cited requirements for establishing a political group include written notification from at least 23 Members of the European Parliaments (MEPs) from seven member states and demonstrable 'political affinity'. Previously, political group formation in the EP has been explained by policy congruence (Hix & Lord, 1997; Hix et al., 2007; McElroy & Benoit, 2010), pragmatism with access to resources and office positions as motives (Bressanelli, 2012, 2014) or for achieving respectability, especially in domestic politics (Bressanelli & De Candia, 2019; McDonnell & Werner, 2019).

Recent developments in EP demand a robust re-evaluation of the role and importance of political group formation in the EP. Radical right populists formed noteworthy political groups after the 2014 and 2019 EP elections, generating attention among political commentators and academic scholars. Furthermore, the failure of the Parliament's biggest group, the European People's Party (EPP), to suspend Viktor Orbán's Fidesz,[2] and French President Emmanuel Macron's striving for a new liberal group after the EP 2019 elections, received high levels of coverage.

Thus, intense political struggles shape the formation of political groups well beyond the formal rules. Negotiations between parties may succeed or fail, follow well-trodden paths or take new unexpected turns. The start of the parliamentary term, the consequence of the popular vote, is only the beginning of the ongoing process(es) of political group formation, which is inevitably shaped by diverse norms and practices within different political groups.

Drawing on unique research material of 130 interviews with MEPs, political groups and parliamentary staff conducted in 2018–2020 in the 8th and 9th Parliaments, we analyse, in this chapter, how political group formation is perceived by MEPs and political staff. We reveal that pervasive informal practices and norms, adding to the formal rules of the European Parliament Rules of Procedure (EPRoP), shape political group formation processes. Moreover, we explore political group formation from the perspective of democratic requirements: its meaning for political participation in different groups; transparency of procedures and decision-making within the political groups shaped by formal and informal institutions, practices and norms. More precisely, we address the following research questions: What are the different layers of political

group formation in the EP? How are the groups formed formally and informally in practice? What are the differences between political groups?

Our findings originating from analysing how interviewees describe the process suggest a framework that encompasses four intertwined layers as important in political group formation: (1) formal political group formation after EP elections, (2) internal political group formation via core functions, (3) internal political group formation by consolidation through policies and distributing policy field responsibilities and (4) changes to political group composition during the term. This framework allows for a holistic analysis of political group formation, adding to the extant literature, which either focused on the initial stage, discrete aspects of political group formation or scrutinised selected political groups (Bressanelli, 2012, 2014; Bressanelli & De Candia, 2019; Hix et al., 2007; McElroy & Benoit, 2010; McDonnell & Werner, 2019). By proposing a holistic and dynamic framework attentive to formal and informal aspects, we show how political group formation is a process of constant negotiation, with each of the layers dependent, though not necessarily in any particular order, on others. Furthermore, the framework lends itself to the analysis of democratic practices, which can be assessed relative to each layer and to formal and informal institutions. Finally, our findings show similarities and clear differences between political groups regarding each of the four layers, giving a more nuanced view of the EP's political dynamics, struggles and differences. Collectively, these aspects affect how well the parliament functions and how democratic those functions are.

Background of Political Group Formation

The first direct EP elections in 1979 doubled the number of representatives and induced the formalisation of political group structures within it (Bartolini, 2005). To keep pace with the increased law-making powers of parliament, especially since the Single European Act (1987), political groups have adapted their structures by codifying informal norms and developing structures to better monitor group members' behaviour (Bressanelli, 2014, p. 778). Previously, scholars explicated political group formation in EP through *policy congruence*, whereby national parties join political groups whose policy stances are closest to theirs (McElroy & Benoit, 2010). Also, more *pragmatic reasons*, such as political group resources and committee positions, were highlighted as motives for joining political groups (Bressanelli, 2012). Political party behaviour,

explained as either office-, vote- or policy-seeking, was used to account for these different motivations. For example, the pragmatic motivation for choosing political groups fits office-seeking parties, and policy congruence may be more important for policy-seeking parties, while vote-seeking provides unclear results at the EP level (Whitaker & Lynch, 2014).

Names and compositions of political groups have fluctuated significantly over time, with two major factors impacting their formation.[3] First, European Union (EU) *enlargements* to Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC) in 2004 and 2007 increased the total number of MEPs from 626 in 1999 to 751 in 2014 and brought more than 50 new national parties to the EP. The national CEEC parties integrated into the existing political groups with profound effects (Bressanelli, 2014). Initially, the sizes of the three biggest groups, EPP, the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) and the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE),[4] grew significantly after enlargement, while the Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA) or the Left in the European Parliament (GUE/NGL)[5] was unaffected; their relative size saw a de facto reduction (Bressanelli, 2014, p. 782). The impact on the functioning of the groups was also substantial. Organisational adaptation across the groups induced more effective coordination mechanisms to guarantee voting cohesion and ensure functioning decision-making processes in the post-enlargement dynamic (Bressanelli, 2014, p. 777).

Second, Euroscepticism and radical right populism (RRP) have fundamentally impacted political group formation. Unlike the CEEC enlargement, the emergence of the RRP resulted in the establishment of new political groups in the EP (Gómez-Reino, 2018; Startin, 2010). Whitaker and Lynch (2014) showed how the presence of Eurosceptics in the EP induced different motivations underlying political group formation in the 7th Parliament (2009–2014). The British UKIP, for example, reluctantly formed the Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD) group 'to gain specific practical advantages while policy-seeking behaviour and party management explain' the Conservatives' desire to form the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group (Whitaker & Lynch, 2014, p. 242). In the 8th Parliament (2014–2019), some RRP parties in seeking to be 'respectable radicals' (McDonnell & Werner, 2019, p. 14) joined the British Conservatives in the ECR to appear more trustworthy nationally. Meanwhile, the UKIP Party and Italian M5S undertook a 'marriage of convenience', forming the Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD), putting aside their political differences to optimise their

access to EP resources (McDonnell & Werner, 2019, p. 15). Likewise, the Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF) group illustrates how RRP parties attempted to create one united political group in the 8th legislature to maximise their political influence (McDonnell & Werner, 2019, p. 15). The formation of the bigger Identity and Democracy (ID) group in the 9th legislature was the next step in this strategy.

Political group formation is driven by incentives to increase group size. Larger groups receive more positions (and more powerful ones) in the EP (e.g. Presidency, Committee Chairs) and more resources, including increased plenary speaking time. As Bressanelli (2014, p. 779) stated, 'The application of voting power indexes to the EP shows that the size of a party group may determine its ability to influence legislation'. This also explains why the EPP kept the radical right populist Hungarian party, Fidesz, within its ranks (Kelemen, 2020), until Viktor Orbán announced Fidesz's leave in March 2021. Furthermore, changes in group composition—whether due to enlargement or other factors—give *formal rules* greater salience. As groups expand, personal ties and informal structures are gradually replaced by formal structures and procedures; this 'formalisation' is generally justified by the desire for more efficiency and is then motivated by functional reasons (Bressanelli, 2014, p. 780).

In this chapter, we explore these issues in greater detail by analysing how our interviewees describe what contributes to political group formation. Engaging with their perspectives allows us to differentiate them by political groups and attend to how they differ across the four layers of group formation we propose.

Theoretical and Methodological Framework

The democratic quality of the EU can be assessed through the efficiency and quality of its policies and decision-making processes, including its democratic accountability (Eriksen & Fossum, 2000; Innerarity, 2018). As the only directly elected EU institution, the EP is central to the EU's democratic accountability. Its political groups—like national political parties—are central democratic actors in these processes and should be assessed as such. Open and transparent, participatory and inclusive political processes fulfil democratic principles and provide legitimacy to the EP and its political groups. Likewise, political group formation processes can be far removed from the electorate and the public, closed off from

parliamentary scrutiny and the majority of parliamentarians, with decisions made in small circles involving deals and trade-offs. This, in turn, diminishes the democratic legitimacy of political groups.

Parliamentary practices for political group formation—and the extent to which they enhance democracy and democratic legitimacy—can be formalised or remain informal. Exploring the interplay between formal and informal institutions is a key objective of our empirical analysis. Different variants of new institutionalism, influenced by rational choice, historical, sociological and feminist methodologies, have developed the analytical distinction between *formal* and *informal institutions* (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004; Lowndes & Roberts, 2013). Formal institutions are those governed by codified rules with clear enforcement mechanisms and legitimacy, while informal institutions embody one or more customary elements, traditions, moral values, religious beliefs and norms of behaviour that are 'hidden and embedded in the everyday practices disguised as standard and taken-for-granted' (Chappell & Waylen, 2013, p. 605; see also Kantola & Lombardo, 2017). The relationship between formal and informal institutions may be competitive or complementary, given that informal rules may subvert or reinforce formal ones (Waylen, 2014, p. 213). We contend that analysing the interaction between formal and informal institutions is necessary to develop a more comprehensive account of political group formation.

The insights provided by our interviewees facilitated the analysis of the informal institutions surrounding political group formation. In a field often characterised by studies of formal rules and their significance, we used material gathered from interviews with MEPs and EP staff (e.g. assistants, political group staff) from all political groups, including non-attached MEPs. A total of 130 interviews were conducted over two stages: 53 in Brussels during the final year of the 8th legislature (2014–2019) and a further 77 in Brussels, MEPs' home countries, and through Skype in the first year of the 9th legislature (2019–2024). Political group formation appeared as a topic in both interviews but was more explicitly and systematically addressed in the second set of interviews. Seniority, and functions such as (deputy) secretary generals, played a crucial role in reporting organisational issues such as political group formation (Bressanelli, 2014). We interviewed six (deputy) secretary generals during the first set of interviews before the EP elections and two (deputy) secretary generals afterwards. However, the views of all other MEPs and staff added substantial details about the dynamics around political group

formation and organisational and political coherence. We also analysed political group statutes as primary documents regarding provisions for membership and decision-making procedures.

Building on grounded theory, the research team coded interviews deductively and inductively with Atlas.ti. Grounded theory is an originally micro-sociological approach enabling to generate metatheoretical explanations grounded in coded interview data (Creswell, 2013), a 'unified theoretical explanation' (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 107). It allowed us to simultaneously capture practices, their institutional context and how actors construct meanings, thereby generating a single case 'thick description'. For this chapter, we analysed mainly the code 'PG formation' supplemented by 'PG organisation statutes', 'leadership' and 'SG role' (Secretary General). The approach was particularly effective in identifying underlying power relations and (un)democratic practices that would remain concealed if only focusing on formal institutions.

Four Layers of Political Group Formation

In the following analysis, we discuss political group formation regarding the four layers discerned from our research material. Layer 1 comprises the formal steps needed to assemble a political group after EP elections and negotiations within established and newer political groups. Both Layers 2 and 3 satisfy some goals of national delegations and thus secure their loyalty and continued association. In Layer 2, political groups distribute leadership positions between national delegations, acquire EP resources and continue attempts, sometimes even throughout the legislature, to increase group size by approaching national delegations, particularly small ones with one to two MEPs. In Layer 3, substantial decisions for policy-making are made, a process whereby the size of national delegations and policy positions come into play, especially by negotiating committee and policy field responsibilities. In Layer 4, MEPs or national delegations shift their allegiances to and from political groups, while political groups take measures to secure the integrity of their group or, in some cases, discuss the expulsion of national delegations.

Layer 1: Formal Political Group Formation After EP Elections

We argue that the first layer shapes all the others because political groups decide upon their potential composition, impacting inter- and intra-group democratic practices and power relations (Kantola & Miller, 2021). Before EP elections, and with the final results published, 'head hunting' begins for all groups, including established groups who will look for potential new members. Only Europarty members can automatically become political group members and thus constitute the core, while the remaining national delegations are either approached or can seek group membership themselves. Becoming a group member is a complex negotiation process guided by informal practices and power plays. As the political group leaders' fate fluctuates in elections, Secretary Generals—the administrative leaders of the political group secretariat—play a central role in political group negotiations and ensure continuity between different parliaments (Kantola & Miller, 2022).

Formally, political group formation is determined by Rule 33 of the EP Rules of Procedure (2020), requiring at least 23 MEPs from seven member states to form a group. It further states that 'Members may form themselves into groups according to their political affinities' whereby the principle of 'political affinity' avoids the formation of purely technical groups, a principle held up by the European Court of Justice, confirming the EP's right to dissolve purely technical groups (Ripoll Servent, 2018, pp. 38–39; Settembri, 2004). Interestingly, an interviewee challenged the assumption of political affinity for older groups, since 'more mature groups, they have this kind of collection of people who historically have sat together, (…) over time, their values have diverged a lot and they have very different views within them, so I often do not know where the EPP's line will be' (ECR MEP F 060219). Many of our interviewees noted that political affinity is 'difficult', 'political' and 'impossible to define objectively'. Further, the openness to political debate and lack of transparency potentially challenge democratic principles.

Next to the EPRoP, all political groups have statutes with varying degrees of formulating formal membership rules and political affinity requirements, excluding GUE/NGL, who due to their confederal nature struggle to formally adopt statutes (GUE/NGL MEP M 010419). The EPP statutes mention 'principles such as freedom and democracy, and the rule of law, respect for human rights and subsidiarity' (EPP, 2013). As in its name, the EFDD emphasised direct democracy and its statutes

state that it 'rejects xenophobia, anti-Semitism and any other form of discrimination' with a footnote of the Italian M5S rejecting 'all forms of discrimination' following the Italian constitution (EFDD, 2017).

We discerned three different strategies from our interview material for political group formation in this first layer. The first strategy is to get as many seats as possible, regardless of its potential impact on shared policy positions. The EPP, ECR, EFDD and ID are representative of this.

Maximising group size may result in intensive power struggles, with the example of EPP and ECR illustrating how attracting additional national delegations can include actively impeding other groups. When forming the ECR in 2009, the UK Conservatives attempted luring other EPP parties to join them to fulfil the EPRoP (Whitaker & Lynch, 2014). Simultaneously, the EPP tried to obstruct ECRs' attempts to secure the required seven nationalities by promising undecided national delegations with only one MEP better condition (ECR MEP M 040320). For the EPP, UK Conservative MEPs who changed groups in 2009 dramatically shifted the EP's power balance(s). Although ECR was dominated by two big delegations—UK Conservatives and Polish Law and Justice— they needed the single MEP national party delegations to ensure group survival.[6] Individual MEP's choices thus matter for new groups.

RRP parties reveal sizeable differences regarding negotiating political group formation (McDonnell & Werner, 2019), with some radical right populists considering the whole issue of political group formation as ridiculous and simply as another structure imposed by the EU, which they opposed:

> Oh, the EFDD. We don't recognise the EFDD. As far as we're concerned these names European Parliament give us, we don't really care about that. We have to fit into a group, so we do, but quite frankly we don't believe in it, we are elected as UKIP and we consider ourselves to be UKIP. (EFDD MEP M 290119_3)

Simultaneously, other UKIP MEPs were happy to overcome the political differences between national delegations in the EFDD for the bigger cause:

> I'm very happy to serve alongside Five Star people and other people from other parties who, on a domestic level I would be arguing a lot with.

But here, the most important thing is anti-establishment. (EFDD MEP M 290119_2)

While the citation supports EFDD critics who regarded it as a purely technical group formed to leverage the EPs' financial and administrative support (see also McDonnell & Werner, 2019), it further illustrates clearly the strategy to maximise seats, regardless of its meaning for political affinity.

Aiming to increase their group size after the 2019 elections, the newly created radical right group ID attempted to convince the British Brexit Party (founded in 2019) to join but was unsuccessful because some national delegations, such as the German AfD, were considered too racist (NI MEP M 220120). Overall, for the ID group, size continuously mattered (see also Layer 4) with hopes that Fidesz was either expelled or left the EPP of their accord:

If they're coming to the ID, that will actually be great. It means that the ID will have over 90 MEPs. Now we are the fourth biggest, and if we are getting more, so we are getting closer to the third biggest group. So, hopefully it's possible to actually, to grow, even bigger. (ID MEP M 130320)

The challenges created by many numbers regarding different national delegations and MEPs were recognised but ignored: 'So to hold it together and, to make it functioning, I think this is really a new thing' (ID MEP M 130320).

Juxtaposed is the second strategy at work in political group formation: conditioning new members to share core policy positions. The most principled were the Green/EFA group, which negotiated with other parties or individual MEPs without dropping their principles on gender equality, LGBTI rights, and sexual and reproductive rights:

Yes, if they're ready to follow the Green line or position (…) for instance on ethical issues, on sexual and reproductive rights, are the main issues at stake. Sometimes when new members want to join they are very much in line with us on all the social, economic and climate issues, but then, sometimes there might be other issues at stake, LGBT rights, gender issues sometimes and so on. (Greens/EFA MEP F 130320)

Greens/EFA see increasing group size as an important matter, too, but considerations about the lack of policy congruence on important values trump the desire to grow (see also Layer 4).

Finally, the third strategy draws on elements from the first two: groups try to maximise seats but are unwilling to achieve that goal at the expense of the group's image. S&D, GUE/NGL and ALDE/Renew are typical representatives. A GUE/NGL staff member explained:

> After the elections it is a race between political groups because each group has as many votes as you have members. So of course, each one of us tries to maximise the impact and influence. It does not mean that we would accept anybody into our group just to have numbers but of course we try to. After the last election, our group opened up to new parties and movements, so in that way it was a historical moment. (GUE-NGL Staff F 150519)

Group size is multidimensional and involves many trade-offs. Power gains made by larger groups often come at the loss of a 'family atmosphere' with CEEC enlargement cited as having been a particular 'culture shock' (ALDE Staff M 050419). However, the formation of Renew Europe as a differently composed liberal political group after the 2019 elections was described as a gathering of 'natural partners', as one interviewee explained: 'we constituted a group very quickly. And it has formed into a very close and natural grouping, I think' (Renew MEP M 131219). Others cautiously revealed that heterogeneity and new dynamics were at play:

> It's four groups now together in one group, which obviously will take time to find what is now exactly the common ground. We have, of course, our principles together because otherwise you couldn't form a group. But you need to go through some legislative files over a period of time to really find where the fault lines are. (Renew Staff M 050320)

Turning the ALDE group into Renew Europe after the 2019 EP elections was not merely a name change but illustrates further the role group size considerations play. The French La Republique en Marche, with its large seat share, outnumbered other national party delegations in the group. However, it is not a member of the ALDE Europarty, the major political group basis. Changing an established name is quite rare and confirms the concessions the previous ALDE group was ready to make

to increase its size, although matching policy positions played a major role, as the quotes above show.

Overall, in the first layer of political group formation, formal criteria such as 'political affinity' created political struggles, while informal norms and values, such as maximising group size, influenced political group decisions to some extent.

Layer 2: Internal Political Group Formation Through Core Functions

In the second layer, political group formation continues as a corollary to decisions on EP and political group leadership positions and the acquisition of EP resources. According to our interviewees, the distribution of both is an important aspect of eliciting loyalty from national delegations. Group size and previous practices impact this layer and reveal interesting power relations and priorities by national delegations within political groups.

The EPRoP stipulate in Rule 15: 'When electing the President, Vice-Presidents and Quaestors, account should be taken of the need to ensure an overall fair representation of political views, as well as gender and geographical balance'. However, no rules are specifying how political groups shall distribute EP and political group leadership positions among their party members, and interestingly, all group statutes also lack provisions. Thus, negotiating leadership positions and resources often relies on informal, although well-established practices allow for political negotiations, informal practices and differences between political groups. EP resources, including the secretariat, budget, personnel, rooms, plenary seating and speaking time, are distributed following political group size; budget can be spent for parliamentary activities but not for national parties. Non-attached MEPs receive limited resources but, for instance, no plenary front rows, making it harder to 'catch-the-eye' of the speaker for interventions in debates.

The informal rules governing this layer of political group formation manifest themselves in two significant ways. First, older political groups such as EPP, S&D, Greens/EFA and, to some extent, ALDE/Renew and ECR, have standardised practices for distributing leadership positions, while new or less politically homogenous groups decide almost on an ad hoc basis how they will proceed. With typical changes to leadership positions after 2.5 years, this layer continues throughout the legislature because national delegations can strategically wait for a second

round to position certain MEPs in the spotlight. Second, group size and representation across member states play a dual role. Some political groups approach it predominantly to distribute power following national majorities, while others weave in specific aspects, such as gender parity (Kantola & Miller, 2022). Moreover, changes to numbers and composition affect staff, rooms, time and which national delegations can rely on these resources.

Political groups commonly distribute leadership following national delegations and their size. S&D leadership is usually reserved for the largest national delegation and, thus, has switched from the German Udo Bullmann to the Spanish Iratxe Garciá Pérez after the 2019 elections. Other leadership positions are distributed to satisfy the power interests of different delegations. ECR recognises the importance of leadership negotiations in political group formation, and nationality is regarded as a major criterion. Negotiations between the delegations are prepared by the Secretary General and the process can be 'difficult' because 'the delegations are responsible for appointing a representative, so it is not even our [the bureau] function' (ECR Staff M 180319).

ALDE statutes stipulate 'fair representation' originating from early internal power struggles between the two Europarties constituting the core of the ALDE group: 'a phrase referring to the constitution of the first ALDE group, in which we had two components: the ALDE Party and the EDP, and none of the two parties wanted to be dominated' (…) (ALDE Staff M 050419). Since both Europarties need to first agree on leadership positions, especially for their national delegations, a staff member explained that the 'rest falls in place slowly, slowly, slowly' and that 'strategic thinking' drives top job selection (ALDE Staff M 050419).

Generally, competition is fierce and by offering EP and group leadership positions, political groups still aim to grow, which can threaten the existence of other groups if they fail to provide similar conditions. Therefore, some political groups deviate from rewarding big national delegations and offer prestige positions even to non-members of the Europarty to secure the membership of small delegations or individual MEPs. An ECR MEP reported that the EPP employed a similar strategy during the 2009 legislature, stating the following:

> One of our previous MEPs even got a position as a vice-chairman of the Parliament, vice-president. So he was rewarded by the group because they started trying to buy people out, buy them away, with a nice job, so that

we would have fewer members, and then we would have fewer nationalities because initially we only had seven nationalities and seven were needed. (ECR MEP M 040320)

Negotiations over EP resources revealed similar patterns. Previous legislatures granted older political groups a comparative advantage, and interviewees from these groups rarely commented on how resources were distributed between delegations, thus taking procedures and processes for granted. New groups such as Renew and ID needed to invest more time and energy to establish their offices and distribute resources, and increasing group size played a decisive role:

We had something like 60 MEPs and now we have over 100. (...) We have new places to fill. And, of course, it gave us a possibility to restructure the party a bit, to open more positions, to strengthen some specific areas, (...) a methodology on how to hire people, how to keep the balances. Of course these are always quite sensitive [issues]. (Renew MEP F 060220)

Basically, there are a lot of people that we took over from the EFDD (...) we have more positions now; there will be lots of new people. But that is up to the bureau to decide and there are discussions about (...). (ID MEP F 110320)

Some interviewees suggested that resource aspects become amplified when groups are formed during the legislature rather than immediately after the elections (Layer 1).

If you make your group right from the beginning of the term, you will be better off in terms of staff (..). There's a gentlemen's agreement (...) to make it a bit balanced. But we were not there as a group at the beginning of the term, so we were not involved in these negotiations. (ENF Staff M 260419)

For smaller groups, balancing (limited) staff numbers with a high number of national delegations is another sensitive issue. Changes to national delegations after EP elections may induce exchanging 'unfitting' languages with 'fitting' ones, which pressures previous staff (Renew Staff F 240320). Allocating resources to ensure a minimum for every national delegation also raised concerns about democratic practices, particularly

from Eurosceptic and populist parties, because, as a Green/EFA MEP stated,

> they cheat on the money and on the expenditure (…) and part of the money is just distributed equally to each party regardless of size or electoral success, and under those rules, it makes sense to split yourself into as many tiny bits as you can because you always get the minimum equal amount. (Greens/EFA MEP M 030320)

Layer 3: Political Group Formation and Consolidation Through Policies

In Layer 3, political group formation progresses to substantial decisions for policy-making during the parliamentary term. This is a delicate process requiring simultaneously satisfying interests of national delegations for policy fields and related positions and—in those groups that strive for group cohesion—committing them to a group line. Political groups mainly focus on negotiating committee and policy field responsibilities, with the size of national delegations and different policy positions coming into play. The EPRoP only stipulate political group proportionality for committee membership and regulate cases where political groups leave seats unoccupied (Rule 209); rules for distributing positions within political groups are absent. However, an analysis of our interview material revealed that MEPs perceive selection procedures for policy field responsibilities as an element of political group formation. Engaging with them reveals internal rules and procedures. While much research exists on the selection of committee (and vice) chairs, coordinators and committee members (Bowler & Farrell, 1995; Daniel & Thierse, 2018; McElroy, 2006; Treib & Schlipphak, 2019), a fine-grained analysis of different group practices is often lacking in these accounts (for exceptions, see Mamadouh & Raunio, 2003; Whitaker, 2011).

Comparable to Layer 2, informal institutions dominate Layer 3. Interviewees across all political groups emphasised the necessity to satisfy national delegations when forming the group with allocations of committee positions, either as (vice) chair, coordinator or committee member. This, however, meant different things for different delegations. The Greens/EFA group and large national delegations, such as the Germans, must coordinate 'in order to not have seven Germans for seven seats in one committee', while smaller delegations 'just say what

they want' (Greens/EFA MEP F 300919). Here, the Secretary General, in her administrative leadership role, distributes people to the committees (Kantola & Miller, 2022). In contrast, one ENF interviewee used more confrontational language, saying that 'there's arguing about committees' and everyone wants the same thing (ENF MEP M 070219). Potential workload also influences who enters which committee, and large national delegations can manage a comparatively higher workload compared to small delegations since they can compensate for it by redistributing within their delegation (Greens/EFA MEP M 030320).

As noted in previous literature on policy congruence (McElroy & Benoit, 2010) and on pragmatic reasons underlying group formation (Bressanelli, 2012), forming common policy positions is important, as group cohesion secures the power to influence EP policies. Furthermore, united positions may help build and maintain political affinity, which, in turn, may increase the likelihood of continuing the political group after the next elections.[7]

Political groups, however, were divided on the question of grounding their formation in common policy positions (see Elomäki et al. in this volume). Interviews with left-leaning political groups illustrated the importance of forming joint policy positions for their group identity, and some specifically described the significance of shared values as the basis for policy positions (GUE-NGL MEP F 160320). Staff also emphasised how it helped them 'to be more effective' and 'to have – you know – rules, so you feel secure and safe as an MEP and as staff' (GUE-NGL Staff F 160320). For S&D, the unity achieved in this way is core. The citation below illustrates how group cohesion on key issues is prioritised for policy-making purposes.

> We are not always united, but this is for us very important. Being united in the big fights, and we are therefore decisive. Being united and able to negotiate with parts of other groups. So we have many, many examples where our group was decisive in law-making. (S&D Staff M 290419)

On the other side of the political spectrum, the ECR ensured the groups' survival by solving policy position-related conflicts early on:

> Political groups are artificial creations in many ways, (...) in fact there's some kind of marriages of convenience that are required. (...) And they will have certain things in common, but will have lots of differences as well.

And you have to try and help the process of them getting over that. You have to try and stop disputes from escalating before they get to the stage where people feel they cannot climb down (...). (ECR Staff M 200219)

The RRP groups ID, ENF and EFDD, in contrast, emphasised the importance of accepting differing national positions and a preference for open-voting, with no incentive to increase policy congruence. In the 8th Parliament, the EFDD interviewees said they were allowed 'a lot more freedom than, maybe, the other ones' and prioritised 'changing this place and fighting structures within it' (EFDD MEP M 290119_2), unlike finding shared policy positions. As illustrated for Layer 1, the UKIP perceived the political group structure as one imposed by EP rules and adopted a distinctly instrumental position (EFDD MEP M 290119_3; see also McDonnell & Werner, 2019). For the new ID group, reaching common policy positions occurred at the level of national delegations, rather than at the political group level:

Decision-making? Hmm, that's... [utters a laugh] That's something that we currently still work on. How we find decisions, which everybody is okay with. So normally we do decisions on the delegation level, so in the German delegation we decide which type of resolution for example we table for the plenary. (...) So, and an MEP would like to do a resolution (...), we go and give it to the head of our delegation, and then they give it back to us after they spoke with the secretary of the group, so that's the normal way of doing things here. (ID Staff M 110320)

For democracy, negotiated, written and commonly understood policy positions are in many ways more democratic than untransparent and informal ones: they are agreed upon by the group, and the group can then be held accountable for those agreements. The RRP groups demonstrated greater flexibility on this and had little compulsion to achieve common policy positions. The political groups called it 'openness', but it also increased the instances of negotiating decisions with only a select few.

Layer 4: Changes to Political Group Composition During the Legislative Term

Layer 4 illustrates the dynamic character of political group formation throughout the legislative period, with individual MEPs or national

delegations switching groups, or conversely, groups expelling MEPs or delegations (McDonnell & Werner, 2019; Whitaker & Lynch, 2014). Historically, external factors like CEEC enlargement rounds changed political group composition and EP power balances (see Bressanelli, 2014), and in the 9th legislature, Brexit constituted a major critical juncture.

M5S in the 8th parliament is illustrative of national delegations re-negotiating their affiliations. M5S had originally joined EFDD despite having considerably fewer policy differences and markedly higher voting accord with ECR, GUE-NGL and Greens/EFA (Bressanelli & De Candia, 2019, p. 36). After winning the Italian elections, M5S negoti-ated in 2017, despite low policy congruence, with ALDE about joining because the EFDD appeared too 'radical' for a 'respectable' government party that wanted to appeal to moderate voters (Bressanelli & De Candia, 2019, pp. 40–42).

M5S's struggle to enter a suitable political group continued in the 9th Parliament, and Greens/EFA was one option. Greens/EFA recognised the need to 'keep the group as big as possible to have the influence'; however, while M5S 'had actually voted similarly to the Greens on so many issues, their reputation around refugees particularly is not aligned with our policies on freedom of movement and welcoming refugees' (Greens/EFA MEP F 250220). Thus, value considerations played a central role (see also Layer 1) and resistance was amplified because of:

> concerns on the funding of the party, the party internal democracy and so on were given that they aren't a party, but some sort of movement that is closely intertwined with business interests, that is, particularly for a transparency a big issue. (Greens/EFA MEP M 030320)

British MEPs leaving after Brexit shifted power balances between political groups and within groups between national party delegations and required reallocating key leadership positions (Layer 2) between remaining MEPs and groups. Notably, political groups traditionally domi-nated by British MEPs lost a significant number after the traditional parties failed badly in the 2019 elections, thereby decreasing UK Conser-vatives in the ECR from 20 to four MEPs. Although the group had already adjusted with view to Brexit, the diminished UK delegation caused a reorientation on issues other than immigration (Layer 3) (ECR MEP M 191219).

Brexit also significantly impacted the Greens/EFA who lost 11 out of 75 MEPs, thereby lifting the ID group as the fourth largest in the EP before them. In Greens/EFA, the German and French delegations became proportionally more powerful, with the potential to shift the politics of the group (Layer 3): 'I think the Germans tend to be more centrist and less radical than, less left-wing than the rest of the group. So, you get slightly different positioning politically, I think as a result' (Greens/EFA MEP F 240220; also Greens/EFA MEP M 030320).

ID becoming larger was considered a significant blow to the Greens/EFA. A number of MEPs lamented that they now had to 'speak after ID which is unpleasant' in committees and plenary (Greens/EFA MEP M 030320), with some finding it 'very bad' and 'traumatising' (Greens/EFA MEP F 100320). This resulted in 'a race to replace people'. Yet the group held to its principles, as an interviewee remarked: 'But the majority of the group basically said no, we're not going to replace, at any rate, it's not about just being fourth group, it's also being coherent between ourselves' (Greens/EFA MEP F 100320). The negotiations with M5S illustrated this point.

The ID group perspective was different and the slow pace of forming the group administratively was explained by Brexit and the hostile attitude from other groups.

> Since we founded a new group, we had a six-month (…) period where you couldn't basically build up. We didn't have the funds yet. Then Brexit of course. So these different positions could not have been allocated to our group yet because the other groups were still sitting on them. They were basically waiting for Brexit because if Brexit didn't happen, they would not have to give up these positions to be reallocated to us. But no, Brexit did happen, so they said, 'Okay fine, we have to relinquish those positions'. (ID MEP F 110320)

Layer 4 illustrates how the lack of formal rules and critical junctures affects political group formation and potentially challenges democratic practices between and within competing political groups. If, due to changes in group composition, powerful EP leadership positions need to be redistributed, they invite inter-group conflicts and may thus undermine input legitimacy.

Conclusion

We showed that political group formation can be better understood and studied as dynamically intertwined four layers. This analytical perspective demands going beyond the studies that focus almost exclusively on political group formation regarding the formal procedures after the EP elections—what we describe as Layer 1. Future analyses should consider our proposed additional layers: political group formation through core functions (Layer 2), formation through shared policy positions and distributing policy field responsibilities (Layer 3) and changes throughout the legislative term (Layer 4). Furthermore, our analysis illustrates that while there are formal institutions such as the EPRoP and political group statutes that may guide these processes much happens at the level of informal institutions: unwritten norms and practices. Some—such as the importance of pleasing national delegations—are strong informal norms and shared among many groups. Others are more hidden, involving hard negotiation and power plays.

Each of these layers can be assessed regarding its democratic practices with more openness, transparency and participation as indicators of democratic functioning within an institution. There are surprisingly few formal institutions to ensure transparency and participation. In Layer 1, EPRoP criteria such as 'political affinity' leave ample room for interpretation and political struggle. Informal norms and values, such as maximising group size, could be argued to act against core democratic norms. In Layers 2 and 3, informal institutions played a significant role vis-a-vis the size of national delegations and guided MEP selection to different key positions in the parliament, committees and political groups. Despite the informality of the norm, it need not necessarily be undemocratic if it were systematically and openly followed. Our interview material provided examples of flexibility towards this norm: both large and small national delegations could be disadvantaged in different ways.

Finally, different practices between political groups were evident. Tensions appear particularly regarding increasing political group size in Layers 1 and 4. In Layer 1, some political groups (EPP; ECR, EFDD; ID) strategically aimed at getting as many seats as possible; others rejected MEPs, or national party delegations, violating their core principles (Greens/EFA), and others still were willing to negotiate a path between these two positions (S&D; ALDE/Renew; GUE/NGL). In contrast, in Layer 2, we showed how political groups such as EPP, S&D,

Greens/EFA and, to some extent, older and more established groups, ALDE/Renew and ECR, had standardised practices for political group formation through distributing core functions, while new (EFDD, ID) or differently composed political groups (confederal GUE/NGL) decided in a quasi-ad hoc manner how to proceed. Here, it was not political ideology that divided groups but, rather, the age of the group or its organisational structure. In Layer 3, we traced distributing policy-related positions as another important step in creating political affinity and group cohesion. Green and left political groups in particular, including the ECR, deemed joint policy positions important, while the RRP groups placed little or no emphasis on this. Thus, holding on to shared principles and policy priorities and formalising political group practices materialised as key questions from the perspective of democratic practices distinguishing political groups in Layers 2 and 3. In Layer 4, we noted again the strongly principled position of the Greens/EFA in responding to sudden changes; in this case, the decreased group size and dropping behind the ID group in size were because of Brexit. The discussion highlights how political group formation—as so many other issues discussed in this book—needs to be understood not only in terms of the EP framework, but also in terms of the political dynamics at the political group level.

Notes

1. Political groups overlap but are not identical with so-called Europarties. The latter are transnational party organisations comprising national parties from European states. For further details, see Ahrens and Rolandsen Agustín (2021) and the introduction by Ahrens, Elomäki and Kantola to this volume.
2. In March 2021, Fidesz left the EPP group in the EP, and the EPP Europarty started an exclusion procedure.
3. For an overview of political groups formed after the 2019 elections and the impact of Brexit please see introduction by Ahrens, Elomäki and Kantola to this volume.
4. The ALDE group changed its name to Renew Europe after the 2019 elections to include the French La Republic en Marche.
5. Until January 2021 named European United Left-Nordic Green Left.

6. McDonnell and Werner (2019) illustrated that next to increasing size, considerations about 'respectability' made ECR wait for the Danish People's Party, and the Finns Party to clean up their public profile before allowing them to join.
7. We are indebted to Anna Elomäki for pointing out this important aspect.

References

Ahrens, P., & Rolandsen Agustín, L. (2021). Party Politics. In G. Abels, A. Krizsan, H. MacRae, & A. van der Vleuten (Eds.), *Routledge handbook on gender and EU politics* (pp. 235–249). Routledge.

Bartolini, S. (2005). *Restructuring Europe: Centre formation, system building and political structuring between the nation state and Europe*. Oxford University Press.

Bowler, S., & Farrell, D. M. (1995). The organizing of the European Parliament: Committees, specialization and co-ordination. *British Journal of Political Science, 25*(2), 219–243.

Bressanelli, E. (2012). National parties and group membership in the European Parliament: Ideology or pragmatism? *Journal of European Public Policy, 19*(5), 737–754.

Bressanelli, E. (2014). Necessary deepening? How political groups in the European Parliament adapt to enlargement. *Journal of European Public Policy, 21*(5), 776–792.

Bressanelli, E., & De Candia, M. (2019). Love, convenience, or respectability? Understanding the alliances of the Five Star Movement in the European Parliament. *Italian Political Science Review/Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica, 49*(1), 25–48.

Chappell, L., & Waylen, G. (2013). Gender and the hidden life of institutions. *Public Administration, 91*(3), 599–615.

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research. Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage.

Daniel, W. T., & Thierse, S. (2018). Individual determinants for the selection of group coordinators in the European Parliament: Determinants of EP group coordinators. *Journal of Common Market Studies, 56*(4), 939–954.

Eriksen, E. O., & Fossum, J. E. (2000). *Democracy in the European Union: Integration through deliberation?* Routledge.

EFDD. (2017). *Statutes of the Europe of freedom and direct democracy group.* Updated on January 17.

EPP. (2013). *Rules of procedure of the group of the European people's party (Christian Democrats) in the European Parliament*. (October 2013). Retrieved

30 January 2021, from: https://www.eppgroup.eu/sites/default/files/download/rules-of-procedure/en.pdf

Gómez-Reino, M. (2018). *Nationalisms in the European arena. Trajectories of transnational party coordination*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Helmke, G., & Levitsky, S. (2004). Informal institutions and comparative politics: A research agenda. *Perspectives on Politics, 2*(4), 725–740.

Hix, S., & Lord, C. (1997). *Political parties in the European Union*. Macmillan.

Hix S., Noury A., Roland G. (2007). *Democratic politics in the European Parliament*. Cambridge University Press.

Innerarity, D. (2018). *Democracy in Europe*. Palgrave.

Kantola, J., & Lombardo, E. (2017). *Gender and political analysis*. Palgrave.

Kantola, J., & Miller, C. (2021). Party politics and radical right populism in the European Parliament: Analysing political groups as democratic actors. *Journal of Common Market Studies, 59*(4), 782–801.

Kantola, J., & Miller, C. (2022). Gendered leadership in the European Parliament's political groups. In H. Müller, & I. Tömmel (Eds.), *Women and leadership in the European Union* (pp. 150–169). Oxford University Press.

Kelemen, D. R. (2020). The European Union's authoritarian equilibrium. *Journal of European Public Policy, 27*(3), 481–499.

Lowndes, V., & Roberts, M. (2013). *Why institutions matter. The new institutionalism in political science*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Mamadouh, V., & Raunio, T. (2003). The committee system: Powers, appointments and report allocation. *Journal of Common Market Studies, 41*(2), 333–351.

McDonnell, D., & Werner, A. (2019). *International populism: The radical right in the European Parliament*. Hurst & Company.

McElroy, G. (2006). Committee representation in the European Parliament. *European Union Politics, 7*(1), 5–29.

McElroy, G., & Benoit, K. (2010). Party policy and group affiliation in the European Parliament. *British Journal of Political Science, 40*(2), 377–398.

Ripoll Servent, A. (2018). *Institutional and policy change in the European Parliament*. Palgrave.

Settembri, P. (2004). When is a group not a political group? The dissolution of the TDI group in the European Parliament. *The Journal of Legislative Studies, 10*(1), 150–174.

Startin, N. (2010). Where to for the radical right in the European Parliament? The Rise and fall of transnational political cooperation. *Perspectives on European Politics and Society, 11*(4), 429–449.

Treib, O., & Schlipphak, B. (2019). Who gets committee leadership positions in the European Parliament? Evidence from the 2014 selection process. *European Union Politics, 20*(2), 219–238.

Waylen, G. (2014). Informal institutions, institutional change and gender equality. *Political Research Quarterly, 67*(1), 212–223.

Whitaker, R. (2011). *The European Parliament's committees: National party influence and legislative empowerment*. Routledge.

Whitaker, R., & Lynch, P. (2014). Understanding the formation and actions of Eurosceptic groups in the European parliament: Pragmatism, principles, and publicity. *Government and Opposition, 49*(2), 232–263.

The Political Groups as Organisations: The Institutionalisation of Transnational Party Politics

Edoardo Bressanelli

Introduction

Political groups in the European Parliament (EP) are formed on the bases of the 'political affinity' of members (MEPs) and national parties. This is enshrined in art. 33 of the EP Rules of Procedure (EPRoP) and, albeit interpreted in a loose sense, it means that ideology is more important than nationality when it comes to group formation (see Ahrens & Kantola in this volume). A theoretically rich and empirically sophisticated stream of research has also demonstrated that political groups mainly compete on the left–right dimension and are highly cohesive. All in all, the EP and its politics are authoritatively described as 'normal' (Hix et al., 2007).

Despite all the recent advances made by research on the EP (cf. Brack & Costa, 2018; Bressanelli & Chelotti, 2019), however, there are

E. Bressanelli (✉)
Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna, Pisa, Italy
e-mail: edoardo.bressanelli@kcl.ac.uk

still some areas which have attracted surprisingly little scholarly attention. Prominent among them is the internal organisation of the groups. In the chapter dedicated to the organisation of the political groups, in her ground-breaking book on the institutionalisation of the EP, Amie Kreppel noted that this topic was 'perhaps the least studied aspect of the European Parliament' (2002, p. 177). Twenty years later, the internal organisational development of the groups remains a largely neglected topic. True, the literature has placed its focus on the capacity (or lack thereof) of the groups to control the internal allocation of positions such as rapporteurs, coordinators or committee chairs (most recently Chiou et al., 2020; Chiru, 2020; Obholzer et al., 2019). However, there is normally little consideration for the groups' internal rules (but see Bressanelli, 2014).

This is an unfortunate situation, as a more thorough understanding of the organisation of the groups has the potential to cast further light on the internal functioning of the EP. Thus, by addressing the following questions, this chapter aims to bring party organisations back into the picture. Have the political groups institutionalised—i.e. become stronger as organisations—in the four decades that have passed since the introduction of direct elections? If so, is their organisational structure an important factor explaining their (high) voting cohesion? To what extent has the transnational leadership of the groups managed to 'free' itself from the control of the national member parties?

Empirically, this chapter focuses on the centre-right Group of the European People's Party (EPP) and the centre-left Group of the Socialists and Democrats (S&D).[1] Together, they have always obtained an absolute majority of parliamentary seats (until 2019; cfr. Bardi, 2020, p. 264) and existed since the creation of the Common Assembly—the forerunner of the EP—in the 1950s. The chapter relies on their 'official stories' (Katz & Mair, 1992); primary sources retrieved from party archives; interviews with senior administrators and secondary sources, like authoritative historical narratives of their organisational development (e.g. Fitzmaurice, 1975; Fontaine, 2009).

The in-depth investigation of the groups' Rules of Procedure, from the period preceding direct elections (1979) to the start of the ninth legislature (2019), integrated by an empirical analysis of the allocation of committee chairs and legislative reports between 2009 and 2019, reveals several important aspects. The structural institutionalisation of the EPP and the S&D has been quite impressive, and their current rules have little resemblance with those in place in the 'old days', when the EP was a

talking-shop with few legislative competences. At the same time, however, the national member parties—or 'national delegations', as they are also known—still play a key role, exerting more control on their MEPs than the group leadership.

Explaining the Institutionalisation of the Political Groups

The political groups in the EP are not the parliamentary arms of powerful extra-parliamentary organisations, as it is normally the case in domestic politics. In the EU, the creation of the transnational groups in the Common Assembly in 1957 pre-dated by a couple of decades the set-up of the extra-parliamentary parties. With the institutionalisation of 'political parties at the EU level' in the Treaty of Maastricht (art. 138) and, later, the provision of EU-funding through Regulation (EC) 2004/2003, the extra-parliamentary parties consolidated their organisation. However, despite the Treaty of Lisbon and its provisions on 'representative democracy' (art. 10), they remain relatively weak compared to the parliamentary groups.

The political groups do not receive detailed policy instructions from the extra-parliamentary parties and are, therefore, rather independent in the pursuit of their policy goals. Moreover, the absence of a clear electoral mandate, given the 'second-order' nature of the EP elections, makes them relatively free to internally decide on their policy objectives. As Richard Rose (2013) put it, the political groups are largely 'introverted' organisations, whose behaviour is largely shaped by rules and considerations internal to the parliamentary institution. Following the legislative empowerment of the EP, the political groups have come to play a key role in organising the law-making process.

They have a similar organisational structure. There is a plenary organ, where all members are represented, and final decisions are taken. More restricted organs are the bureau, where the executive leaders of the group, the leaders of the national delegations, the chairs of the committees and the coordinators may be represented, and the presidency, composed by the chair/president and a number of vice-chairpersons. A secretariat supports the groups' activities.

This chapter studies the *institutionalisation* of political groups. According to influential definitions, (structural) institutionalisation indicates the 'process through which an organisation 'solidifies' (Panebianco,

1988, p. 49) or 'acquires stability' (Randall & Svåsand, 2002). Building on 'discrete' approaches, it is argued here that the key factor for party organisational change, and institutionalisation, is 'external shocks'. The causal chain starts with an external event, impacting upon the party 'primary goal'. The leadership needs then to re-evaluate the capacity of the party to effectively pursue its key goal(s). Finally, an organisational reform is implemented to guarantee the party's performance in the new circumstances (Harmel & Janda, 1994; cf. also Harmel, 2002).

Such a 'discrete' approach has been used to explain changes in the organisation of the political groups. Three main environmental factors have been identified (Bartolini, 2005; Bressanelli, 2014; Kreppel, 2002): (i) the introduction of direct elections in 1979, leading to a large growth in membership and introducing an electoral connection, albeit weak; (ii) the extension of the EP legislative powers, which started with the Single European Act (1987) and continued through successive rounds of treaty revision in the 1990s and 2000s; and (iii) the mega-enlargement of the EU towards Central and Eastern Europe, concluded in two waves between 2004 and 2007.

Such external 'shocks' could be used by the leadership to consolidate the organisational structure of the political groups and enhance their control over the rank-and-file members. Building on the literature on the US Congress, Kreppel (2002) argued that, if the groups could afford defections when voting in the EP was largely un-consequential, this was no longer acceptable as the EP obtained legislative powers through the cooperation and, especially, the codecision procedure. Therefore, she expected the group leadership to make use of the instruments at its disposal—e.g. the allocation of positions in the EP and within the group; the assignment of legislative reports—to boost cohesion, rewarding the loyal members and punishing the rebels.

The expansion of membership has been identified as another important trigger for the institutionalisation of the groups. Samuel Huntington once noted: 'rapid or substantial expansions in the membership of an organisation […] tend to weaken coherence' (1968, p. 21), while Panebianco observed: 'growth in size is correlated with growth in internal division of labour, multiplication of hierarchical levels, and bureaucratic development' (1988, p. 83). As the 'mega-enlargement' represented a huge expansion in membership of the groups, both an increase in their complexity and a shift of decision-making power towards the group leadership were expected (Bressanelli, 2014).

The further empowerment of the EP with the Treaty of Lisbon could be interpreted as another environmental factor triggering organisational reform and the institutionalisation of the groups. With an increased legislative workload, further organisation changes could be implemented to preserve their smooth functioning and the capacity of the EP to perform as a 'mature' legislative chamber in the EU (effectively) bicameral system.

RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to map the organisational development of the political groups, this chapter uses several indicators suggested by the comparative literature on party change and already employed by the existing research (see Table 3.1; cf. Bressanelli, 2014, pp. 64–66).

Complexity is the first element of the structural dimension of institutionalisation. A basic indicator to capture how complex the organisation of the groups has become simply is the counting of the number of rules included in their Rules of Procedure (RoP) (Hix & Lord, 1997, pp. 100–110; Kreppel, 2002, pp. 192–198). Clearly, this measure only provides information on formal changes, and it is therefore of limited validity when much of the group activity is carried out informally. Yet, as complex organisations cannot be entirely based on informal norms, it is a rough measure of the degree of organisational development.

Differentiation is the second aspect relating to changes in the groups' organisation. There are two types of differentiation. *Horizontal* differentiation is about the increased differentiation in the party organs and roles within the same hierarchical level. The related concept of 'specialisation'

Table 3.1 Concepts and indicators of institutionalisation

Concept: change in…	Empirical indicators: change in…
Complexity	Number of rules in the RoP
Differentiation	Party organs and roles within the same hierarchical level (*horizontal*)
	Institutional layers between hierarchical levels (*vertical*)
Autonomy	Decision-making authority shifting upwards (*centralisation*)
	Voting rules: from unanimity to majority
	Representation rules: national representation no longer required in executive organs

may also be employed to capture it. *Vertical* differentiation refers, instead, to the creation of additional institutional layers within the organisation (Harmel, 2002, p. 138).

A third important component of structural institutionalisation is decision-making *autonomy*, which should be understood vis-à-vis the national member parties: more autonomous political groups are thus more European groups (cf. Bardi, 1996). Several indicators can be used to observe (changes on) it. First, *centralisation of power*, with decision-making authority shifting from plenary to apical organs; second, changes in *decision-making rules*, with unanimity replaced by majority voting; third, a change in the *rules of representation*, with national representation no longer required in the executive organs of the groups.

This chapter places its empirical focus on two political groups: the EPP and the S&D. The case selection stems out of the need to make a longitudinal analysis of a process (of institutionalisation). While there were seven political groups at the start of the ninth EP in 2019,[2] the 'core' of the EP party system is based on the EPP and the S&D, which have been the largest and most influential groups throughout the history of the EP. More pragmatically, the choice to focus on the EPP and the S&D allows one to build on previous research on the organisation of the groups and reconsider its findings in the light of the new evidence.

In terms of data, a longitudinal study of the development of the groups—from the period preceding direct elections (1979) to the start of the ninth legislature in 2019—presents some challenges. As there is very little consistent data available, it is often difficult to pin a specific organisational change down on a time. In addition, much of what is happening within the groups takes place informally—albeit, arguably, increasingly less so—thus limiting the value of what can be inferred from the groups' 'official stories' (Katz & Mair, 1992). Thus, while this chapter relies on the groups' RoP, it triangulates them with other official documents (e.g. handbooks), historical accounts of their development and original interviews with senior administrators, conducted in the context of a project on the impact of the Central and Eastern enlargement (cf. Bressanelli, 2014, pp. 65–66, 174).

The in-depth, longitudinal analysis of the organisational development of the groups in the section below is followed by an analysis of the allocation of committee chairs and legislative reports post-Lisbon. To assess if the EPP and the S&D punish the disloyal/assent members and reward the loyal/present MEPs, I have collected information on the members

of the EPP and the S&D groups in the 7th and the 8th EP (2009–2019). Specifically, I have retrieved data on membership of the groups and committee chairs from the official EP website, data on voting loyalty from Votewatch.eu and data on legislative/OLP reports from Reh et al. (2020).

The Organisational Development of the Political Groups

This section identifies three key phases of development of the political groups, which should serve as broad heuristic devices to understand changes often happening in a piecemeal or informal manner. In the first period (1979–2003), following the introduction of direct elections, a (weak) electoral connection was established, and membership of the groups expanded. Through this period, the EP became a legislative actor. In the second phase (2004–2009), the political groups became larger and more diverse organisations as a result of Central and Eastern enlargement. In the third phase, following the implementation of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009, the EP was placed on a par with the Council in what was, effectively, a bicameral legislature.

The Elected Parliament: From Talking-Shop to Co-Legislator

Kreppel (2002) analysed the organisational changes undertaken by the EPP and (back then) the PES in response to significant changes to their institutional environment. Before direct elections, she observed that they were very collegial organisations. In both the EPP and the PES, the most important political organ was the group plenary, which was simply called 'Group' by the PES. According to the RoP of the EPP (1975), the plenary was responsible, among other things, for all nominations to the EP top jobs and in committees, the allocation of committee membership and the election of the group's bureau and presidency. The bureau was primarily the group secretariat and was in charge of preparing the decisions and overseeing their implementation. The presidency—back then known as 'Chairman's office' (*sic*)—was in charge of the group's external representation. The 1977 version of the RoP of the PES describes a similar organisational structure, even if it only listed, among the group organs, the group and the bureau. A scholar of the early transnational groups noted that 'the bureau of the Group is an administrative and

preparatory organ' even if, interestingly, he added: 'it is also for consideration that [its] role should be strengthened so as to place it in a better position to coordinate the political activities of the group' (Fitzmaurice, 1975, p. 89).

The RoP described rather basic organisations. The 1975 version of the RoP of the EPP included 32 rules organised into nine chapters; the 1977 version of the RoP of the PES was made by 21 rules in eight chapters. They did not make specific mention of the decision-making rules either. There were a few exceptions, such as the expulsion of members from the EPP group, requiring a two-thirds majority, but otherwise the groups preferred to decide by consensus. Representation of each and every national delegation was guaranteed by the EPP in both the bureau and the chairman's office, and by the PES in the bureau.

The 1975 version of the rules of the EPP included some instruments to control the activity of its members and 'directly hinder individual action' (Kreppel, 2002, p. 194), such as the duty for MEPs to inform the chairman's office, who had the power to delay action in order to seek consultation with the plenary. Centralisation remained, however, very limited. The rules of the EPP were more detailed than those of the PES, which did not include any specific provision to monitor members, except informing the presidency when members wished to intervene in their own name in the plenary debates.[3] The RoP of the PES even included a 'morality clause', allowing MEPs to vote against the group for 'grave political motives' (Rule 7). This clause was originally meant for individuals, but it became used mainly by the national delegations (Kreppel, 2002, p. 196).[4]

It was the organisational adaptation of the groups to the legislative empowerment of the EP to make the groups more complex organisations. In 1989, the RoP of the EPP listed 34 rules in eight chapters, while in 1986 the RoP of the PES were significantly expanded to 48 articles, organised in eight chapters.[5]

In the EPP, horizontal and vertical differentiation was observed with the official recognition of the group coordinators in committees and of the standing working groups—which, bringing together the MEPs of a number of committees, prepare the group meetings and decide on its political line—'with a view to more effective preparation of the Group's deliberations' (Rule 17, 1989).[6] Moreover, the chairpersons of the standing working groups became members of the bureau (Rule 10, 1989). In 1989, the RoP set at five the number of vice-chairs, a number

that was raised to six in 1994 and eight in 1996 (Rule 12), reflecting the expansion of the group, but breaking away from the principle of national representation, with each and every national delegation represented. Simple majority was also recognised as the standard decision-making rule of the group (Rule 20, 1989).

Although not explicitly mentioned by the Rules, a new function for monitoring the members' participation—the 'chief whip'—was introduced in this period and assigned to a vice-chair. As a former senior member of the EPP, secretariat explained: 'each national delegation had to appoint a whip. This network of whips had to monitor member's attendance, reporting on it to the federal whip, and to collect information, passing this on to the presidency and the heads of delegation' (Fontaine, 2009, p. 273). Incidentally, this also shows that the rules provide a non-complete picture about the organisation of the political groups.[7]

The PES also adapted to the new legislative functions attributed to the EP. Both the horizontal differentiation and the vertical differentiation of the group grew: the new rules spelt out the functions of coordinators in some detail, including their power of 'overseeing the allocation of reports' (Rule 35 in the 1986 version of the RoP), and included 'temporary' or 'permanent' working groups.

There was a centralisation of decision-making power, with some empowerment of the bureau (e.g. appointing replacements in committees) and the recognition of simple majority as the group's standard decision-making rule. Some limited monitoring provisions were added, such as the need for members to transmit written questions to the group. The vice-presidents were attributed specific portfolios—allocated by the bureau—'working closely' with the coordinators, when needed, in the performance of their roles (Rule 17).[8] Albeit absent in the rules, a whip list, ranking votes according to their importance, was also established, and it was mentioned in the PES Guide for Procedure (1995). Yet, all national delegations were still represented in the bureau, with an additional seat awarded to those with at least 11 members, and members were allowed to introduce their own amendments.

The Enlarged Parliament: Legislative Empowerment and More Diversity

With the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997), the legislative empowerment of the EP continued, while the Treaty of Nice (2001) prepared the Union

to its 'mega' enlargement. In two waves, twelve new countries joined the EU, almost doubling its membership. With the exception of Malta and Cyprus, all new members were post-communist countries. Expansion was not only extraordinary in terms of sheer numbers, but also in terms of diversity, as most of the new members had distinct national histories and cultures compared to the 'old', West European countries.

The major political groups were expecting a large expansion. Research on the impact of enlargement has shown that the groups could not remain passive when facing such a potentially disruptive 'shock'. Enlargement was therefore likely to trigger broad organisational change, with the group leadership taking the chance to centralise decision-making power and strengthen its control over the members (Bressanelli, 2014).[9]

For the EPP, the process of expansion beyond the boundaries of the 'old' Christian-Democratic family continued. With membership of the Italian Forza Europa/Forza Italia, and the alliance with the British and the Danish conservatives, the EPP had undergone both a significant expansion in terms of numbers, becoming the largest group in the EP since the 1994 elections, and internal diversity, which was further accentuated by the 2004/7 enlargement.

If the RoP of the EPP had remained untouched for ten years—from 1979 to 1989—through the 1990s they were amended four times. *Prima facie*, changes in complexity appear to be very limited: the RoP had 34 articles in 1989 and 35 in 1999. However, the substantive changes were significant.

First of all, the group became a more autonomous organisation. What used to be known as the 'Chairman's office' (Rule 12, 1996) became the group's 'Presidency' (Rule 13, 1999). This was far more than a nominal change, though. The new rules made clear that the vice-presidents were also responsible to chair the standing working groups and, therefore, of coordinating the political work of the group. As a senior administrator of the EPP recalls: 'before 1999 the presidency was a sort of honorific body […] it was the senior 'politburo'. It was decided in 1999 that we needed to strengthen our presidency' (Interview #5). Interestingly, the new political role of the presidency, consisting of the chairman (*sic*), a maximum of eight vice-chairs and the treasurer, bringing to a centralisation of decision-making power in the group, had to be counter-balanced by a new organ. This was the 'conference of the group presidency and heads of the national delegations', which was expected to meet 'regularly' and 'prepare decisions of major importance for the political strategy

of the group' (Rule 12, 1999). The new rules of the EPP(-ED), adopted in March and amended in July 2004, were longer—being constituted by 37 rather than 34 articles—but also quite similar to the previous version. They changed the composition of the bureau, now including the group coordinator within each standing committee, possibly reflecting the need to coordinate more closely the policy-making process within the group. What was then simply called 'the Group Presidency and Heads of National Delegations' was expected to meet 'at least once a month' to discuss key strategic issues and, it was added, 'questions of special internal relevance' (Rule 13, 2004). There was also an expansion in the number of vice-presidents (as they were finally called in 2004), whose number was set to a maximum of eight in 1999, nine in 2004 and 10 in 2006. Notwithstanding the large expansion in the number of national delegations, therefore, the presidency remained a rather small body.[10]

The PES approved a significant reform of its RoP in 2003. The nature of the changes is not dissimilar from those implemented by the EPP. There was a further, if limited, increase in complexity with 52, rather than 48, rules. Further centralisation was observed with the empowerment of the bureau—note that there is no separate 'presidency' in the PES—which became the 'key strategic player' (Rule 28, 2004). The reformed bureau was made up only by the president, seven vice-presidents and the treasurer. In the former bureau, each national delegation was represented, with an extra-seat for the largest ones (cf. above). The RoP further indicated that the members of the bureau should all be of a different nationality, and that there should be a balance between men and women, the EU macro-regions and the size of the national delegations. Also, the RoP prescribed that the bureau should take decisions by simple majority and a 'vote of no confidence' could be tabled against it by either a national delegation or at least 10 per cent of the group MEPs (Rule 14).

These were radical changes about the powers, the decision-making rules and the composition of the bureau which, taken together, made the group more autonomous from the national delegations. The bureau used to be led by the heads of the national delegations. Yet, with more and more delegations represented in the group, 'that was becoming very large and unwieldly. So, we changed the structure to have a more compact bureau which, you could say, it is also a more supranational structure' (Interview #2). Indeed, a rule was added to impede to a head of a national delegations, unless small (from 1 to 5 MEPs), to also be member of the bureau.

Not only was the reformed PES group more centralised, it also became more differentiated, both horizontally and vertically. Five vice-presidents were assigned specific policy responsibilities, chairing one of the 'horizontal working groups', bringing together the members of different committees in connected policy areas (Rule 31). This structure, which was required to manage the legislative workload in a context of changing and enlarged membership, formalised an intermediate decision-making layer between the committee and the full group. There was the need to 'have a structure to reconcile differences. That is because with the volume of work it is impossible for everything to be taken in the group. The agenda would be too overloaded' (Interview #2). Because of this new structure, 'it probably meant that the group coordinators had a bigger role' (Interview #1), although this is a difference not captured by the RoP (cf. Rule 35, 1994 and Rule 39, 2003).[11]

The Normal Parliament: A Legislative Powerhouse

The Treaty of Lisbon marked a fundamental stepping-stone for the legislative empowerment of the EP. After Lisbon, the Ordinary Legislative Procedure (OLP) was used for the vast majority of legislation concluded by the EU. In other words, the EP was effectively placed on a par with the Council as the lower chamber of an (almost) symmetric bicameral legislature. With the accession of Croatia in 2013, instead, the enlargement fatigue became evident. Further expansions of membership were frozen, while Brexit came to represent the first instance of disintegration in the EU's history.

With the legislative role of the EP growing further, the political groups reformed their organisations to keep up to the new demands. In the RoP of the EPP (2009), the new Rule 6 on 'voting in Plenary and in the Committees' disposes that 'Members commit themselves to support, as a rule, the Group line during votes; however, they have the right to vote according to their conscience and political convictions'. The wording of the article is important, as it explicitly introduces—much in the same vein as the PES's 'morality clause'—an opt-out for members, which are not bound to follow the line of the political group in each and every circumstance. On the other hand, however, specific provisions prescribe that MEPs shall inform the president or the group if they intend not to vote along the group line on important issues, and one of the vice-presidents if they cannot participate in a vote. Rule 6 makes clear that the above rules

apply both to the plenary and to committees. Moreover, another new rule also compels MEPs to inform the presidency and the responsible coordinator about legislative initiatives (Rule 23). If anything, the new rules provide a stark illustration of the tension between (more) centralised control by the group leadership and the freedom of members.

The 2009 version of the RoP, despite being shorter than the previous version—with 32 rather than 36 rules organised in six rather than eight chapters—described in reality a more complex organisation. Among other things, it spelt out in more detail the rules for the meetings of the plenary, the elections of the Presidency (Rules 13 and 19),[12] as well as those on coordinators and standing working groups. On this latter aspect in particular, the new rules introduced further differentiation. The previous version of the RoP simply mentioned that the members of the group in a committee form a working group and appoint a coordinator, and the plenary sets up the standing working groups (Rules 18 and 19, 2006). The new RoP, instead, formally introduced the role of deputy coordinator and specified that the coordinator is the 'responsible spokesperson of the Group with respect to the remit of the Committee Working Group' (Rule 20). In addition, they prescribed that each standing working group is chaired by a vice-president, who acts as the responsible spokesperson, and indicate that it is the working groups proposing the list of MEPs speaking in the plenary on behalf of the group (Rule 21).

Changes in the RoP of the S&D were less prominent. The most recent version of the rules (2014, amended in 2017) included 52 articles in eight chapters plus an annex, exactly as the 2003 version. There was a new preamble on the political values behind the group and much more specific rules on membership, modified in 2011. Members were formally expected to accept the 'individual and collective' values of the group and adhere to them. Moreover, members should not represent interest groups but citizens, should not use their position to obtain economic advantages and should prioritise their job as representatives over any other activity. The power to sanction members violating the rules was granted to the group which, on a proposal from the bureau, may suspend or expel the member. The bureau may also temporarily suspend the member, while waiting for the plenary to convene (Rule 2).

Aside from this limited centralisation, further changes in the RoP (i.e. on differentiation) were rather modest. There were nine vice-presidents (Rules 9 and 28) but the same five horizontal working groups. A new article (Rule 39bis) described the role of a 'special' coordinator for

debates on cases of violations of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, chosen by the bureau and reporting to the vice-president in charge of human rights and foreign affairs.

How the Groups Organise: Coordination Rather Than Sanctions

The internal organisational development of the two major political groups shows that they have adapted their organisation to the functional needs of the EP, particularly its transformation from a talking-shop into a legislative powerhouse. Groups have become more differentiated and centralised organisations. The counting of the number of rules has proven to be a poor indicator of complexity but, reading the different versions of the rules, there can be little doubt that they have become more detailed and specific over time.

One aspect which can be easily overlooked from reading the rules has to do with the sanctions that the group leadership can use to discipline the rebels. This is a very important aspect of party organisation—to the extent that, for Keith Krehbiel (1993), party organisations only matter when they can discipline members. As a matter of fact, the rules do not extensively talk about sanctions and, if anything, are much more explicit at guaranteeing the freedom of the member to vote against the group line (Rule 6, EPP 2013; Rule 36, S&D 2014). Even in the absence of sanctions, however, there can be rewards that the group leadership uses as an incentive for loyal behaviour, such as speaking time, posts within the group and in Parliament, legislative reports. Yet, the official rules do not provide much information on them either.

This section makes a step beyond the groups' 'official stories' to assess what use the group leadership makes of the available sanctions and benefits to punish (respectively, reward) members' behaviour. In theory, the group leaders have several 'benefits' to allocate to the group members: it is for the groups to decide on nominations to the EP top jobs (president and VPs, quaestors) and in the groups (president and VPs), chairs and vice-chairs of committees and sub-committees, legislative and non-legislative reports, and speaking time in the plenary.

The point of departure of this section is, once again, Kreppel's work (2002), when she analysed the distribution of committee chairmanships between 1979 and 1997 and reports between 1989 and 1994 (under

the cooperation procedure) and between 1994 and 1996 (under codecision). Through a comparison of the average loyalty and participation rates in plenary sessions of those members of the EPP and the PES groups who received a disproportionate share of benefits—labelled 'super-rapporteurs' and 'super-chairs'—to the average levels of participation and loyalty of the other members, she demonstrated that there was very little evidence corroborating a 'benefits for behaviour' hypothesis (Kreppel, 2002, p. 200).

Of course, the EP has significantly changed since then. As the previous sections have shown, both the EPP and the S&D implemented major reforms. In parallel, academics have looked at the drivers of 'benefit allocation' in the EP more systematically. Recent research on the allocation of committee chairs has concluded that voting loyalty towards the political group 'does not influence committee chair selection in the EP at all. This is consistent with previous analyses on data from earlier terms' (Chiru, 2020, p. 622). The drivers behind the selection of a particular chair depend on a number of factors, including the need to take into account the size of the national delegations within groups, and the experience and expertise of their individual candidates (Corbett et al., 2011, pp. 147–149).

Other scholarship has focused on the allocation of reports. Responsibility for the nomination, once a report has been allocated to a political group, is in the hands of the coordinator in a specific committee (Ripoll Servent, 2018, pp. 251–253). What are the criteria that guide the coordinators in the selection of a particular member? The literature has come up with several suggestions. For practitioners like Clark and Priestley, it is a balance between 'the size of national delegations, expertise and constituency interests' (2012, p. 243); for Obholzer et al., the coordinators tend to select rapporteurs with preferences closer to those of their national party, proving that national parties 'continue to exert strong influence over policy-making in the EP' (2019, pp. 244–245); for Yoshinaka et al. (2011), mainstream MEPs have more chances to become rapporteurs than more extreme group members. Chiou et al. (2020) argue, instead, that voting loyalty plays a major role.

In order to provide a preliminary test on the validity of a 'benefits for behaviour' hypothesis post-Lisbon, I make use of plenary participation and voting loyalty as indicators of 'appropriate' behaviour that the leadership may want to reward. Comparing the average voting loyalty and participation rates of those members who did receive more than their fair

share of committee chairs and legislative reports to the average share for the other members, the former are expected to have significantly higher scores, should a 'benefits for behaviour' model apply.

Table 3.2 provides some descriptive information on the distribution of benefits. Committee chairs are distributed at the beginning of a legislature and at mid-term. In the 2009–2019 period, there were four rounds of allocation, with a total of 62 committee chairs distributed to either EPP or S&D members. The average length of service in the chair is less than a full legislature. Therefore, any chair who managed to serve for at least a full legislative term is considered to be a 'super-chair'. Over the same period, 665 OLP reports were distributed. The majority of members who managed to become rapporteurs did so only once. Therefore, any member who was chosen as rapporteur at least twice is a 'super-rapporteur'.

The results are reported in Table 3.3, where the participation and loyalty with the political group of super-rapporteurs and super-chairs, and the other members, are compared. There are only a few comparisons where the averages are significantly different: plenary participation is higher for super-rapporteurs, particularly in the EPP, while loyalty with the political group is slightly higher for the EPP super-chairs. Notwithstanding such results, differences are small, and the two categories of members look much more similar than it could have been expected a priori. About twenty years after Kreppel (2002), a replication of her exercise leads to similar conclusions.

However, the non-findings of Table 3.3 are more interesting than they could appear at first sight. The second column shows very high levels of loyalty (or cohesion) across categories and groups. Such high levels of voting agreement may appear surprising, particularly given that a system

Table 3.2 Distribution of benefits (2009–2019)	Committee Chairs[*]	OLP reports
Total available	62	665 (EP7: 378; EP8: 287)
Availability per MEP	<1	<1
Average per recipient	1.7	1.8
Maximum per recipient	4	20 (EP7: 20; EP8: 6)

Table 3.3 Behaviour of super-rapporteurs and super-chairs in the EPP and the S&D

		Participation	Loyalty with the group
EPP	Super-rapporteurs	88.1*	94.7
	Other MEPs	86.4*	95.1
S&D	Super-rapporteurs	88.5	94.4
	Other MEPs	86.9	94.2
EPP	Super-chairs	88.5	95.9**
	Other MEPs	86.7	95**
S&D	Super-chairs	87.6	94.5
	Other MEPs	87.1	94.3
All	Super-rapporteurs	88.2**	94.5
	Other MEPs	86.6**	94.7
All	Super-chairs	88.1	95.3
	Other MEPs	86.9	94.7

Note Scores are averages. Two sample t-test with unequal variance: *p < 0.10; **p < 0.05

of 'sticks' and 'carrots' does not appear to be extensively used by the leadership. However, this puzzle has already been addressed. According to McElroy and Bowler, it has to do with the large number of uncontested votes that take place in the EP. As they put it, 'if all MEPs across all parties are voting together, internal group cohesion has little meaning' (2015, p. 1359). The number of lopsided votes is very high in the EP, as issues are not divisive, or consensus is already achieved before voting in the plenary.

For a different but complementary explanation (cfr. Bressanelli, 2014), voting agreement has to do with the way in which the political groups 'negotiate' cohesion (see also Elomäki et al. in this volume). Both the EPP and the S&D have developed a decision-making structure that, moving from the lower up to the upper lever, seeks to ensure the agreement between their members. In other words, rather than a top-down structure through which the leadership seeks to impose or enforce voting loyalty, the groups have an effective bottom-up organisation designed to maximise internal agreement. Issues are first debated in the working groups at the committee level. If important divergencies remain, the issue is brought up to the 'standing' (EPP) or 'horizontal' (S&D) working group, bringing together a number of policy-connected committees, under the aegis of a vice-president. Should significant divergencies remain, the bureau or the presidency, with the heads of the national delegations,

considers the issue. If tensions remain present, the group plenary is the stage of last resort. Careful preparatory work ahead of the votes smooths effectively out disagreements: in short, there is 'negotiated consensus' within the group (Interview #3).[13]

Moreover, the role of the national delegations should not be forgotten. Kreppel (2002) had insightfully noted that the real decision-making power within the groups was in the hands of the national delegations. Although her conclusions could now be somewhat qualified in the light of the process of centralisation of the political groups, the fact is that the national delegations still play an important and often overlooked role. The national delegations are fully recognised in the RoP of the groups— and this is a key difference compared to the period that Kreppel (2002) analysed—for instance, 'national delegations' are mentioned six times in the most recent version of the RoP of the EPP (2013), and five times in the RoP of the S&D (2014). The handbook of the EPP explicitly acknowledges that 'on important issues, the EPP Group tries to negotiate compromises among its National Delegations before taking a decision in order to ensure its cohesion' (EPP, 2019, p. 16). As we have seen, the EPP even institutionalised the meetings between its presidency and the heads of the national delegations in a specific organ, which is expected to meet at least once per month, but in practice more often.

The national delegations—or, at least, some of them—are often formally organised as 'mini-groups', with specific organs, rules about membership, elections and voting. It is the national delegations that have the power to sanction their members. Clearly, the most important instrument of control is the electoral list, which is managed by the national party rather than by the transnational group. For instance, the delegation of the Italian *Partito Democratico* (PD), one of the largest in the S&D group, lists in its RoP a number of sanctions which are not to be seen in the RoP of the group. The bureau of the delegation, on a proposal from its head, can propose to the plenary the following sanctions: an oral reprimand; a written reprimand; a suspension of the member (up to 10 days); economic sanctions; and, finally, the expulsion from the national delegation *and from the group* in case of ten unjustified absences or a grave violation of the regulations (Rule 7, PD 2015; my emphasis). Moreover, the national delegation also plays a fundamental role to internally select its members when it is allocated a position in the EP or within the group. It seems, therefore, that while the political groups can use some 'carrots',

the real 'sticks' to control members are still in the hands of the national parties.[14]

Conclusions

This chapter has shown, placing its focus on the 'core' of the EP party system, that the EPP and the S&D groups have significantly consolidated their organisations over time. 'External shocks' such as the introduction of direct elections in 1979, the legislative empowerment of the EP and the 'mega' enlargement of the EU in 2004/7 prompted the groups to undertake organisational reforms, making the current EPP and S&D groups strong organisations, pursuing a key role as legislators.

Both groups have become more complex—with more, and more detailed, rules—differentiated—both vertically, formally introducing new institutional layers, such as the horizontal/standing working groups, and horizontally, with specific roles allocated to vice-presidents or coordinators—and autonomous—due to the empowerment of the apical organs (presidency or bureau), simple majority as the main decision-making rule and a break away from the system of national representation. At the same time, tensions between the national member parties and the group transnational leadership are evident, and specific institutional structures have been created *ad hoc* to manage conflict (i.e. the EPP's presidency and heads of the national delegations).

It may appear *prima facie* surprising that the leadership of the groups does not appear to systematically use a system of rewards and sanctions. Yet, both the EPP and the S&D groups operate in a bottom-up rather than a top-down manner. When conflicts arise, voting cohesion is moulded and negotiated within the group, starting at the lowest (committee) level and, if and when necessary, moving up the group hierarchy. Cohesion is not imposed by the group leadership and, from an analysis of the RoP, it is clear that it cannot be imposed: members are free to vote against the group and are only asked to inform the group leadership of their intention to do so.

Members can be sanctioned, instead, by their national party. While the political groups have become more autonomous from the national parties, it is the national delegation that still has the power, controlling the electoral list, to re-select a member. It is, again, the national delegation to have the ultimate word on the selection of its members for EP and group posts.

This chapter has shown that, organisationally, national parties remain crucial for the functioning of the transnational groups. Recent research has also shown that the voting loyalty of the national delegations is lower when the delegation's national elections and the EP elections are approaching (Koop et al., 2018), and that on salient matters national interests may matter more than transnational allegiances to explain voting behaviour in the EP (e.g. Vesan & Corti, 2019). In line with such recent findings, this chapter has further substantiated that national politics still matters in Europe's Parliament, and significantly so.

Notes

1. This chapter labels the groups EPP and S&D, as they are currently (2022) known. Whenever appropriate, however, the chapter also makes also use of the old labels (EPP-ED and PES, respectively).
2. Besides the EPP and the S&D, the newly formed EP in July 2019 included the European Conservative and Reformists Group (ECR), the Renew Europe Group (RENEW), the Confederal Group of the European United Left—Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL), the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA) and Identity and Democracy (ID), plus the non-attached (NI) members.
3. In addition, the RoP required the active participation of Members (Rule 17, 1977).
4. As Kreppel further observes, such a rule was part of the regulations 'as early as 1977 and perhaps earlier' (2002, p. 196). In the 2014 version of the RoP (as amended in 2017), this clause is still present (Rule 36.2).
5. The length of the subsequent versions of the rules (EPP: 1994 and 1996; PES: 1994) remained very similar.
6. At the time, the EPP had four standing working groups: A (political affairs), B (economic affairs), C (budgetary affairs) and D (internal affairs) (Fontaine, 2009, pp. 175, 181, 220).
7. Comparing the 1975 and the 1989 version of the RoP, Kreppel concludes that 'the extent to which the internal organisation of the EPP group has remained the same is quite extraordinary given the dramatic changes it underwent' (2002, p. 194). Possibly, the qualification '*formal*' should be added to the statement, as the RoP did not change significantly between 1975 and 1989, but other important developments characterised the group (cf. Fontaine, 2009).
8. This change in the RoP was still debated at the end of the third legislature, when one of former VP of the group (1989–1993), Lelio Langorio, stated in a letter addressed to the President: 'I am in favour of the idea that the Vice-presidents are assigned specific competences […] I would have been

able to achieve something more for the group than I had been able to do as a simple Vice-president without portfolio' (Langorio, 1994).

9. Bressanelli (2014) also includes the Liberal Group in his analysis.

10. In the bureau, instead, each national delegation was represented, with an additional seat every ten members (Rule 11, 2004). However, the 'key strategic decisions are taken by the presidency and by the presidency with the heads of the national delegations' (Interview #5; also Interview #6).

11. Enlargement has also led to a huge expansion in the number of staff of the two largest groups (cf. Salm, 2019, p. 43).

12. Since 2013, the electoral rules include a gender 'quota' for office holders within the group ('at least one third of members belonging to another sex than the majority of members'; Rule 19.6).

13. While both groups have a whipping system to monitor the members' attendance, attendance lists do not automatically explain who gets the legislative reports. In the EPP, for instance, they seem more important for 'technical' rather than 'political' committees (Interview #7).

14. Not all national delegations—including some of the largest ones—seem to have formalised RoP. In addition, such rules are not normally published. Mapping systematically how the national delegations organise, and differences across groups, is a fascinating endeavour, but clearly beyond the scope of this chapter.

References

Bardi, L. (1996). Transnational trends in European parties and the 1994 elections of the European Parliament. *Party Politics, 2*(1), 99–114.

Bardi, L. (2020). The heart of the core: The EPP Group in the EU institutional and political framework. In L. Bardi, W. Gagatek, C. Germond, K. M. Johansson, W. Kaiser, & S. Sassano (Eds.), *The European ambition. The group of the European People's Party and European integration* (pp. 255–334). Nomos.

Bartolini, S. (2005). *Restructuring Europe: Centre formation, system building and political structuring between the nation state and Europe*. Oxford University Press.

Brack, N., & Costa, O. (Eds.) (2018). The EP through the lens of legislative studies: Recent debates and new perspectives. *The Journal of Legislative Studies, 24*(1), 1–10.

Bressanelli, E. (2014). *Europarties after enlargement. Organisation, ideology and competition*. Palgrave Macmillan

Bressanelli, E., & Chelotti, N. (2019). Power without influence? Explaining the impact of the European Parliament post-Lisbon. *Journal of European Integration, 41*(3), 265–276.

Clark, S., & Priestley J. (2012). *Europe's Parliament: People, places, politics.* John Harper Publishing.

Chiou, F.-Y., Hermansen, S. S. L., & Hoyland, B. (2020). Delegation of committee reports in the European Parliament. *European Union Politics, 21*(2), 233–254.

Chiru, M. (2020). Loyal soldiers or seasoned leaders? The selection of committee chairs in the European Parliament. *Journal of European Public Policy, 27*(4), 612–629.

Corbett, R., Jacobs, F., & Shackleton M. (2011). *The European Parliament.* John Harper Publishing

European People's Party. (2019). *Handbook for members 2019.*

Fitzmaurice, M. (1975). *The party groups in the European Parliament*. Saxon House.

Fontaine, P. (2009). *Voyage au coeur de l'Europe, 1953–2009: Histoire du groupe Democrate-Chretien et du Parti Populaire Europeen au Parlement europeen.* Racine.

Harmel, R. (2002). Party organizational change: Competing explanations? In K. R. Luther & F. Mueller-Rommel (Eds.), *Political parties in the new Europe: Political and analytical challenges* (pp. 119–142). Oxford University Press.

Harmel, R., & Janda K. (1994). An integrated theory of party goals and party change. *Journal of Theoretical Politics, 6*(3), 259–287.

Hix, S., & Lord C. (1997). *Political parties in the European Union*. Macmillan Press.

Hix, S., Noury, A., & Roland, G. (2007). *Democratic politics in the European Parliament*. Cambridge University Press.

Huntington, S. P. (1968). *Political order in changing societies*. Yale University Press.

Katz, R. S., & Mair, P. (1992). *Party organizations: A data handbook on party organizations in Western democracies, 1960–90.* Sage.

Koop, C., Reh, C., & Bressanelli, E. (2018). When politics prevails: Parties, elections and loyalty in the European Parliament. *European Journal of Political Research, 57*(3), 563–568.

Krehbiel, K. (1993). Where's the Party? *British Journal of Political Science, 23*(2), 235–266.

Kreppel, A. (2002). *The European Parliament and supranational party system: A study in institutional development.* Cambridge University Press

Langorio, L. (1994). *Reply to a letter of Jean-Pierre Cot (President of the Group) regarding a proposal to amend the rules of the group.* Historical Archive of the European Union.

McElroy, G., & Bowler, S. (2015). Political group cohesion and 'hurrah' voting in the European Parliament. *Journal of European Public Policy, 13*(1), 150–167.

Obholzer, L., Hurka, S., & Kaeding, M. (2019). Party group coordinators and rapporteurs: Discretion and agency loss along the European Parliament's chains of delegation. *European Union Politics, 20*(2), 239–260.

Panebianco, A. (1988 [1982]). *Political parties: Organisation and power.* Cambridge University Press.

PES. (1995). *Guide for procedure.*

Randall, V., & Svåsand, L. (2002). Party institutionalisation in new democracies. *Party Politics, 8*(1), 5–29.

Reh, C., Bressanelli, E., & Koop, C. (2020). Responsive withdrawal? The politics of EU agenda setting. *Journal of European Public Policy, 27*(3), 419–438.

Ripoll Servent, A. (2018). *The European Parliament.* Palgrave Macmillan.

Rose, R. (2013). *Representing Europeans: A pragmatic approach.* Oxford University Press.

Salm, C. (2019). *Political groups in the European Parliament since 1979. Key facts and figures.* EPRS—European Parliamentary Research Service.

Vesan, P., & Corti, F. (2019). New tensions over social Europe? The European pillar of social rights and the debate within the European Parliament. *Journal of Common Market Studies, 57*(5), 977–994.

Yoshinaka, A., McElroy, G., & Bowler, S. (2011). The appointment of rapporteurs in the European Parliament. *Legislative Studies Quarterly, 35*(4), 457–486.

Interviews

Interview #1. 09/11/2009—Former Deputy Secretary General—*S&D.*

Interview #2. 19/11/2009—Head of Department, Deputy Secretary General—*S&D.*

Interview #3. 27/11/2009—Former Secretary General—*S&D.*

Interview #4. 02/12/2009—Special Counsellor—*EPP* Group.

Interview #5. 01/07/2010—Deputy Secretary General—*EPP Group.*

Interview #6. 01/07/2010—Senior Political Adviser—*EPP Group.*

Interview #7. 02/07/2010—Head of Unit—*EPP Group.*

Democratic Practices and Political Dynamics of Intra-Group Policy Formation in the European Parliament

Anna Elomäki, Barbara Gaweda, and Valentine Berthet

Introduction

The political groups in the European Parliament (EP) play a key role in the European Union (EU) legislative process, as their main goal is to influence and pass legislation. The role of the political groups in making this process democratic has mainly been analysed in terms of party political competition *between* the groups on different policy agendas that matter to EU citizens as well as of how cohesively the groups support

A. Elomäki (✉) · B. Gaweda · V. Berthet
Tampere University, Tampere, Finland
e-mail: anna.elomaki@tuni.fi

B. Gaweda
e-mail: barbara.gaweda@tuni.fi

V. Berthet
e-mail: valentine.berthet@tuni.fi

73

these policies (Hix et al., 2007; Kreppel, 2002). Questions about democracy have not been extended to intra-group policy formation; thus, related democratic practices *within* the political groups remain a black box in the research on the EP.

EP political groups comprise numerous ideologically and culturally diverse national party delegations that are connected to political parties in the member states. Political groups differ from national political parties in terms of policy formation because they 'lack well-defined legislative agendas of their own' (Roger & Winzen, 2015, p. 392). Moreover, political group leadership does not possess 'well-defined, exogenous policy preferences independent of those formulated by their party colleagues' (Ringe, 2010, p. 58). Although scholars have provided various explanations for the high voting cohesion of the groups, only few have tried to solve another part of the puzzle—how the political groups reach policy positions in the first place (see Bressanelli, 2014; Ringe, 2010; Roger & Winzen, 2015). Owing to the internal diversity of the groups, how policy preferences are negotiated and aggregated within the groups is all the more relevant for supranational democracy.

Therefore, we ask how the political groups formulate group lines on policies and what impact this has on democratic decision-making in the EP and intra-group democracy. Building on feminist institutionalism and literature on intra-party democracy, we approach intra-group policy formation from the perspective of democratic practices—that is, formal and informal practices, hierarchies and norms related to inclusion, deliberation and transparency that influence whose voice is heard. Although earlier research has shown that policy formation practices differ between issues and fields, the purpose of this chapter is not to produce empirical data on a specific field or to compare different fields. Instead, we focus on providing an overview of the processes with a specific focus on the differences between the groups. Our analysis is based on an extensive interview data ($n = 135$) with Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and staff from all political groups, on ethnographic fieldwork notes collected in the 8th (2014–2019) and 9th (2019–2024) legislatures and on the internal rules of the groups.

We argue that negotiations between the political groups are the tip of the iceberg of democratic policy-making in the EP. Inter-group political dynamics are preceded by intra-group struggles that in our view are as important for the democratic functioning of the EP as those between the groups. This chapter fills important gaps in the scarce

literature on intra-group policy formation, in particular regarding the differences between the political groups, and it nuances understandings of the political dynamics behind the political groups' varying degrees of cohesiveness.

We begin by reviewing extant research on the internal dynamics and policy formation within the political groups and then outline our theoretical approach on formal and informal democratic practices. The following section outlines our method and research material. The three empirical sections analyse the main aspects of the internal policy formation we identified. The first looks at the importance of a unified group line and the modes of deciding on the group line, the second examines structures and processes of internal policy formation and the third zooms in on power hierarchies and key actors.

The Hidden Politics of Policy Formation in the European Parliament

Most research on EP policy processes has focused on coalition building between the political groups (Finke, 2012; Ripoll Servent, 2015; Roger et al., 2017) or negotiations between the EP and the Council (Bressanelli & Chelotti, 2018; O'Keeffe et al., 2016; Ripoll Servent & Panning, 2019). Less attention has been paid to intra-group dynamics and processes, where the conflicting interests of national party delegations and other different viewpoints are condensed into group positions on legislation and into amendments and voting lists.

Research on the internal dynamics of the political groups has centred on group cohesion, analysed based on publicly available voting records (Hix et al., 2007; Lindberg, 2008; Warasin et al., 2019). EP groups are relatively cohesive, despite the lack of formal party discipline, with increasing cohesion over time at least for the main groups (Hix et al., 2007). Groups with numerous smaller national delegations and those with niche parties having lower propensity to compromise tend to be less cohesive (Whitaker & Lynch, 2014). Conversely, national party delegations have been shown to have strong influence on the voting behaviour of their MEPs (Faas, 2003; Hix, 2002; Kreppel, 2002). Less is known about how the groups negotiate positions between the national party delegations and across other cleavages—a task requiring substantial fieldwork and interview material.

The scarce literature on intra-group negotiations stresses the centrality of committee-level procedures. According to Ringe (2010, p. 58), group positions on topical issues are not imposed from above but are elaborated by group members and staff appointed to the EP committees. When the position of the committee members is translated into a group position for the plenary, MEPs who do not have time or resources to be informed about all aspects of the policy tend to adopt the position of their expert colleagues. They first listen to the colleagues from their own national party delegation, if there are any in the responsible committee, and then to other group members (Ringe, 2010, p. 33). In particular, when the issue is perceived as controversial and intra-group conflict at plenary stage is expected, committee members involve MEPs from other committees in the course of forming the group line (Roger & Winzen, 2015). EP political groups have also created horizontal policy-making structures to enable cross-committee deliberation and manage the growing number of national delegations and the increased legislative workload in the EP (Bressanelli, 2014). The question remains, however, whose voices get heard and what power dynamics or hierarchies are at play.

Whereas Ringe (2010) argued that group lines are not imposed from above, others have suggested that group leaders are actively involved in policy formation. They ensure that voting instructions are acceptable to a majority of the group and enforce party discipline (Lindberg, 2008, pp. 1186–1187). The possibilities of leadership to shape the policy-making process might even have increased (Bressanelli, 2014, p. 789). Other influential 'policy leaders' (Kantola & Miller, 2022) include coordinators, the appointed spokespersons of the groups in committees and rapporteurs, who oversee specific files on behalf of the groups. Coordinators, for instance, are closely involved in formulating the group line and play a role in maximising group cohesion by leading discussions and disseminating information between the committee members and the wider group plenary (Daniel & Thierse, 2018, pp. 941, 958; Ringe, 2010; Roger & Winzen, 2015). However, detailed empirical research on the influence of leadership on the group line and on other power hierarchies that influence policy-making within the groups is missing.

Previous research has established that policy formation practices differ depending on the issue and the policy area. The internal process is more complex for politically controversial and salient issues, such as the strengthening of the EU economic governance after the Eurozone crisis (Roger & Winzen, 2015). Some fields such as gender equality policy have

been shown as particularly divisive within the groups (Berthet, 2021; Elomäki, 2021; Kantola & Rolandsen Agustín, 2016; Warasin et al., 2019). In this chapter, however, we turn our attention to a hitherto neglected topic, namely the differences between the political groups. The internal practices of the groups have been found to differ, with some working in more transparent, horizontal ways and others in more closed, hierarchical ways (Kantola & Miller, 2021; Ahrens and Kantola in this volume).

Formal and Informal Democratic Practices in Policy-Making

We see intra-group policy formation as an essential aspect of the democratic legislative process at the EU level and of the democratic functioning of the EP. Extant literature on political groups and democracy has tended to examine party-political competition between the groups (Hix et al., 2003, 2007) or the links between the political groups and the electorate (Hellström, 2008; Lindberg et al., 2008; Rasmussen, 2008). Accordingly, the democratic functioning of the EP and the democratic legitimacy of EU governance has been connected either to the ideological and redistributive conflicts between the groups (Hix et al., 2007) or to their ability to transmit citizens' interests (Lindberg et al., 2008). Nevertheless, if democracy involves party competition and representation of voters' interests, then in the EP, where political groups comprise the multiple interests of national delegations, intra-group processes are pertinent to the democratic functioning of the EP as well. We suggest that intra-group policy formation is a black box in the democratic legislative process of the EP, obscure yet essential to the process.

Our chapter steers away from the emphasis on party competition and links to voters towards *democratic practices*. We explore intra-group policy formation by focusing on processes, practices, norms and hierarchies. Literature on democratic practices in policy-making—within political parties and in general—has emphasised the role of transparency, participatory practices, inclusion of different voices, public deliberation and the possibility to express opinions and dissenting views (Cross & Katz, 2013; Wolkenstein, 2016). Drawing on feminist institutionalism, as one of the branches of new institutionalism (e.g. Mackay et al., 2010; Waylen, 2017), we suggest that analysing the enactment of democratic practices

within the political groups requires attention to formal and informal rules, practices and processes (cf. Kantola & Miller, 2021).

Institutionalist scholars have pointed to the interplay between formal and informal institutions in shaping organisations and individuals' behaviours (Krook & Mackay, 2011; Waylen, 2017). Formal institutions refer to codified rules and procedures that are communicated and enforced through official channels—in our case, the statutes of political groups, for instance. Informal institutions refer to unwritten conventions and norms that are embedded in everyday practices and often taken for granted—in our case, for instance, power hierarchies that determine who is heard (Chappell & Waylen, 2013, p. 605; Helmke & Levitsky, 2004, p. 727).

Formal and informal institutions are interconnected. Informal norms and practices shape official rules but may also contradict or undermine them, as the resistance to formal gender equality rules has shown (Waylen, 2017). For instance, the formal rule of gender balance within groups is curtailed by informal rules of seniority, leading to an overrepresentation of men (Kantola & Miller, 2022). The interplay between formal and informal institutions is similarly pertinent to analysing democratic practices in relation to intra-group policy formation. Paying attention to informal rules and formal–informal dynamics allows us to study the interplay between key actors, institutional norms and the 'rules of the game' within the political groups. It also allows us to see how informal power hierarchies and practices may subvert formal rules and support or undermine democratic practices.

Material and Method

The research material comprises 135 interviews conducted with MEPs, political group staff and EP administration (collected 2018–2021). Our data also include ethnographic fieldwork notes and political group statutes. We analysed all the groups represented in the 8th and 9th parliamentary terms: the Group of the European People's Party (EPP); the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament (S&D); Renew Europe, formerly the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE); the Group of the Greens /European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA); the European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR); the Left Group in the European Parliament (GUE/NGL); the Identity and Democracy Group (ID), formerly

the Europe of Nations and Freedom Group (ENF); and the Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy Group (EFDD), dissolved after the 2019 elections. We coded the interviews and fieldwork notes with Atlas.Ti in a deliberative team process, in which we developed the codes deductively and inductively. The topic of intra-group policy formation occurred directly in some interviews and fieldwork notes but became mainly visible through a meta-analysis of codes. Therefore, we compared and analysed our code outputs for 'political group internal policy formation', 'democratic practices' (for political groups), 'group meeting', 'national party delegation', 'political group organisation' as well as the 'rapporteur' and 'coordinator' codes.

We take a fine-grained and systematic approach to examine our research data (interviews, fieldwork notes and political group documents) with the aim of contributing to the understanding of policy formation processes in the EP at the political group level. We aim to provide a careful description and analysis that explore the interrelated processes of policy-making in the EP. Our analysis followed three interdependent steps. First, we analysed political group statutes to determine formal practices with regard to policy formation. Second, we conducted a thorough reading of the coded material separately for each political group to analyse informal practices. Our main interest was in how the interviewees described and constructed the processes of internal policy formation, and the fieldwork notes were used as background information. Our analysis was guided by questions about formal and informal processes, practices and norms of policy-making and about hierarchies and power relations shaping decision-making practices and processes. Third, we explored the subtext and context of the interview statements and fieldwork notes and what insights they provided to compare formal and informal policy formation and decision-making practices within the political groups.

The subsequent analysis is divided into three sections. First, we assess how the political groups see the importance of being united, how they tolerate dissent and how they make decisions about the group line. Next, we look in more detail at the processes and arenas of forming the group line. Finally, we turn to the actors and analyse the power relations and hierarchies, in particular the role of group leaders, coordinators and big national delegations in establishing and enforcing the group line.

Unified Group Line and Modes of Decision-Making

Political groups have different understandings of the importance of a unified group line and different methods for deciding on the group line. We suggest that based on their formal and informal practices, the groups can be divided into three categories in terms of the importance of a unified group line. In addition, the groups' modes of decision-making range from emphasising majority voting to achieving consensus through deliberation. In a given case, the importance of the group line and the mode of decision-making may depend on the salience and controversiality of the issue (cf. Roger & Winzen, 2015). Other factors, such as the group leadership or power-seeking by the political groups in the EP, influence these practices too.

The Importance of a Unified Group Line

For the two biggest groups, the centre-left S&D and the centre-right EPP, a unified group line was very important. The EPP statutes stated that '[m]embers commit themselves to support, as a rule, the Group line during votes; however, they have the right to vote according to their conscience and political convictions' (EPP, 2013) (see also Bressanelli in this volume). This clause allows value-conservative MEPs to deviate from the group position on issues such as sexual and reproductive health rights or on LGBTIQ+ issues. The formal rules of the S&D allow dissent from majority decisions only when members can justify 'serious political reasons' (S&D, 2014).

Unity was constructed as important in the interviews too. The S&D interviewees typically described their group as homogeneous; in particular, social issues and equal rights were described to be 'in their DNA' and a 'core value' (Interviews 1; 2; 3). The S&D valued unity also for political reasons, in the search of power over other groups: 'to have a decisive impact, our group acts united. Then we can make a difference. If we allow ourselves to be split in key questions, then we of course have issues and we are less effective' (Interview 1). Although the EPP interviewees described their group as heterogeneous and divided, mentioning the freedom to vote against the group line (Interview 30), they too held unity as important for the influence of their group in the EP. As put by one interviewee: '[g]roup unity is at the forefront of everything we do.

Our group is becoming more divided, we're splitting quite obviously, you can see that in the numbers, but still the ultimate pursuit is group unity' (Interview 19).

For the centre-right liberal Renew Europe (formerly ALDE) and the Greens/EFA,[1] the group line was important. Unlike the two biggest groups, they did not enforce unity through formal rules. The Greens/EFA statutes explicitly allowed '[s]plit votes and separate votes (…) requested by any one member' (Greens/EFA, 2020, p. 10). Nevertheless, the Greens/EFA interviewees particularly stressed the importance of unity. They often reiterated the high cohesion of their group and constructed unity as *sine qua non* for acquiring 'a Green line' (Interviews 4; 5; 6). The Renew interviewees said unity enabled their group to act as 'kingmakers' in the 9th EP (Interview 43), but at the same time the group had to accommodate 'ideological wings' and opposing views on particular policy issues (Interview 23).

In comparison to the groups mentioned above, a unified group line was less important for the left GUE/NGL and for radical right groups. The GUE/NGL does not have formal rules, but the interviewees described 'big big big differences' between delegations (Interview 7). They stressed the confederal nature of the group, whereby members' interests come before those of the group, which gives free hands during votes: '[I]t's basically everybody can do what they want. We are a confederal group' (Interview 9, see also Interview 8). Geopolitical differences were seen as explaining the split positions in the group: 'it can be divisive if you think that the positions of the Nordic left parties compared to the Portuguese Communists can be very different on certain aspects' (Interview 5).

The formal rules of the radical right Eurosceptic groups stated that members can vote 'as they see fit' (EFDD, 2017; ENF, 2015). Similarly, ID (formerly ENF) and EFDD (2014–2019) interviewees described their groups as national delegation–oriented, with no interest in speaking with one voice. In contrast, the formal rules of the 'respectable' radical right group ECR that participates in inter-group negotiations (McDonnell & Werner, 2019; Ripoll-Servent & Panning, 2019) stated the need for common policy positions (ECR, 2017, Art 3). Yet, the ECR interviewees described the ECR as a group where 'everything is about the delegations', which are guaranteed a free vote (Interview 10).

The possibility to express dissent can be seen as an important part of an open and democratic policy formation process. As a formal practice in

most groups, national party delegations or MEPs must notify coordinators and group leadership early on if they disagree with the group line. This way, communication is effective and divergent views can be accommodated. This practice was inscribed in the statutes of the EPP, S&D and ECR. The Renew (ALDE) interviewees referred to such a practice, but it was not institutionalised in their statutes (Interview 43). Formally, then, the political groups tolerated disagreement when it did not come as a surprise. The formal rules of the S&D and the Greens/EFA even provided for allocating parts of the speaking time of the group in the plenary for MEPs representing minority positions within the group to make space for diverging views (Greens/EFA, 2020, p. 10; S&D, 2014, Rule 40).

For the Greens/EFA, unity and values were important, and dissent rarely emerged owing to the homogenous character of the group (see Ahrens and Kantola in this volume). In the radical right groups and GUE/NGL, where pressure for unity was low or non-existent, different views were tolerated in everyday practices. For instance, one ECR interviewee was adamant that no MEP was ever 'punished for stepping out of line' (Interview 42). In contrast, dissenting MEPs were sometimes an issue for the biggest groups striving for unity to gain political influence. Based on our interview material, dissent was sometimes poorly handled in the S&D—for instance, when some delegations voted against the group line on the LGBTI resolution. Whereas some saw that the ensuing discussion turned into 'insulting the members that didn't follow the group line' for national reasons (Interview 33), others felt that on such a 'core issue', there should not have been room for dissent and that the group and the group leader should have enforced the group line (Interview 2).

The biggest groups had different informal practices to side-line dissenting views. In particular, the EPP interviewees indicated there was little room for dissenting voices on key issues, with a general expectation not to 'rock the boat' (Interview 18). In the EPP, disagreements were kept behind closed doors rather than discussed at group meetings, often for strategic reasons. An informal practice of shutting down dissenting voices in relation to gender equality policy—a topic causing significant resistance within the group—included lining up speakers in favour of a proposal to give the impression of wide support (Interview 19). Some informal practices to exclude dissenting voices extended to the plenary. For instance, S&D national delegations with diverging views on economic policy were asked not to vote in the plenary to give the impression of

unity: '[i]t happens that I ask, some Maltese or Cyprus guys or even UK, to go and have a piss when we will have the vote because, to avoid that they vote against the line of the group' (Interview 20). This informal practice undermined the formal rule of the groups about accommodating minority views.

Modes of Decision-Making

Clear differences are also observed between the groups in terms of how group lines are defined. In most groups (EPP, S&D, Renew/ALDE, Greens/EFA and ECR), the formal rule was to decide on the group line through simple majority voting (ALDE, 2009; ECR, 2017; Greens/EFA, 2020; S&D, 2014, Rule 35–38). In the radical right groups, the ENF (Art 4) and EFDD (Art 2), formal rules required complete unanimity between delegations, making group lines possible only if all delegations agreed. The GUE/NGL does not have formal rules, but based on the interviews, it makes decisions based on a 'consensus principle' that similarly requires the agreement of all delegations. Informally, however, different understandings of democratic practices in groups, such as the role of deliberation, the importance of national delegations and the concerns for effectiveness, shaped the formulation of group lines.

The groups that had a formal rule about majority voting significantly differed in terms of how often issues were put on vote and what kind of role was given to deliberation. The delegation-focused ECR strongly underlined the importance of voting so that the view of the majority could determine the outcome (Interviews 10; 42). Some interviewees mentioned, however, that the group discussed issues to convince everyone to vote together. In case of division, 'the spectrum of views (…), from the liberal conservatives to the more social conservatives, and also (…) national concerns' (Interviews 40; 41) would be heard. As merging national interests was never a goal for the ECR, deliberation did not aim to establish a group line but had rather served a communicative purpose.

At the other end of the spectrum, the Greens/EFA interviewees stressed the importance of deliberation. They emphasised 'consensus' and 'discussion' as principal modes of achieving the group line. Although not excluded, voting was rarely used and sometimes perceived as a sign of failure (Interviews 5; 15). As one Greens/EFA MEP reflected, 'we try not to vote too often and base our political line on a majority, but we try to find a consensus and we take a lot of time to do that and that can

be a little tiring from time to time' (Interview 15). In between these two extremes, the EPP, S&D and Renew (ALDE) valued—at least rhetorically—consensus and discussion as modes of internal decision-making, even if issues were often solved by voting (Interviews 16; 17).

Of the groups requiring unanimity among the delegations to establish the group line, the GUE/NGL valued deliberation. One interviewee talked of 'building convergence instead of common positions' (Interview 11). This often led to lengthy discussions and the absence of such positions. Whereas some GUE/NGL interviewees praised the consensus-oriented method as democratic (Interview 11), others considered it time-consuming and ineffective, often leading to the exclusion of the group from EP decision-making (Interviews 12; 13; 14). The ID (and its predecessor ENF) and EFDD bypassed common positions, as each national delegation made decisions individually.

The above differences between the groups imply varying perspectives on what constitutes democratic decision-making in intra-group policy formation (cf. Cross & Katz, 2013). This was also reflected in the interviews. Interviewees from all the political groups described their own policy formation practices as democratic. For instance, the ECR and ID (ENF) interviewees especially said they were 'very democratic' or 'the most democratic in parliament'. Nevertheless, the ECR understood democratic policy-making as the rule of majority, and for the ID (ENF), the freedom of the national party delegations was the prime facet of democracy. In contrast, the interviewees from the Greens/EFA, GUE/NGL, S&D, Renew (ALDE) and EPP considered internal deliberation as a marker of democracy, focusing on voicing and discussing opinions to reach consensus rather than determining it via a vote.

STRUCTURES AND ARENAS OF GROUP LINE FORMATION

Because political groups comprise numerous national party delegations, the ways of reconciling the different views of these delegations into one group line are important. In the 8th and 9th parliamentary terms covered by our research, most groups had a three-tier structure in place (see also Bressanelli, 2014). Policy issues were first discussed by *committee working groups* that brought together MEPs and staff assigned to a given committee, then by *horizontal working groups* bringing together different committees, and finally by *group plenaries* attended by all members debating the policy. This arrangement allowed groups to identify and

solve conflicts early on and to ensure that policy positions adopted by different committees met the general group line. Such three-tier structures did not exist in radical right Eurosceptic groups ID (ENF) and EFDD, which did not aim for a group line. For these groups, the group plenary and the bureau constituted the main decision-making arenas.

According to our interviews, the committee level remained a key arena for deliberation over new issues and for solving intra-group differences (Ringe, 2010). In particular, the S&D interviewees emphasised the importance of a 'bottom-up approach' (Interview 1) and 'subsidiarity' (Interview 21) in terms of giving committee experts the lead. Some explicitly rejected the idea that the group 'tries to tell the [committee] working groups what to do' (Interview 1).

Our research material indicates, however, increasing political group authority in policy-making as opposed to the power of committee experts. The horizontal working groups, often led by the vice-presidents of the group and thus directly linked to group leadership, were portrayed as increasingly important for policy formation. They act as an 'early warning system' for intra-group conflicts, enabling upstream settlement (Interview 43). They are also a place where policy-related decisions are prepared. The EPP, Renew (ALDE) and S&D interviewees described horizontal working groups as the main arena for political debate where most controversial issues were solved and decisions were made (Interviews 20; 22; 23). The ALDE statutes explicitly specified that decisions on amendments, reports and voting lists are to be made in horizontal working groups (ALDE, 2009). In contrast, in the Greens/EFA, ECR and GUE/NGL, horizontal working groups were more recent (see Miller in this volume for the Greens/EFA) and somewhat less significant for policy formation.

Accordingly, the group plenary has become less important for policy formation, in particular for the larger political groups. Although the formal rules of the groups describe group plenary as 'the highest political authority' (S&D, 2014) that 'take[s] decisions on all political matters' (EPP, 2013), in practice, all of the biggest groups limit policy discussions in group plenaries. Oftentimes, a file is sent to group plenaries only if working groups failed to agree or if a fundamental issue was at stake (Interviews 20; 24; 25; 26). The EPP interviewees in particular saw group plenaries as too big to solve conflicts and make decisions efficiently. They described the policy-related discussions in group plenaries as focused on 'irrelevant things' (Interview 27) and the input as 'superficial' (Interview

19). In the consensus-seeking Greens/EFA and in the ECR, the group plenaries played a more important role (Interviews 15; 37).

The declining role of group plenaries sometimes caused conflicts. For instance, one Renew Europe group meeting we observed in 2020 descended into a 30-minute quarrel about whether decisions made in the working group could be opened in the group plenary or not (Fieldwork note 1). The diminishing significance of group plenaries, where all national delegations are present and which many interviewees described as a delegation-focused arena, could be interpreted as a power shift from the national delegations to the supranational level—even if big national delegations continued to dominate policy-making (see next section).

Our data also reveal a shift from a file-by-file approach (Ringe, 2010) towards a more strategic approach to policy formation in the form of position papers adopted at the group level. Particularly in the EPP and S&D, but also in other groups, position papers were seen as an important tool for solving internal differences and providing a backbone for intra- and inter-group negotiations (Interviews 16; 28; 29). Some interviewees saw position papers as a way to better integrate national delegations and individual MEPs in policy formation, which made the process more inclusive and increased acceptance. As explained by one S&D MEP:

> [T]his paper or position paper is […] the result or the product of the whole group's joint work. We have included the ordinary MEPs; we have included particularly the coordinators […]. So it was not just a top-down approach, not at all. […] It's taken four months but in the end it's a product of the whole group. And the positive side of this is that the members, they have, yeah, it's their baby at the same time and they accept it, and they defended it. (Interview 3)

We interpret the increasing significance of horizontal working groups and position papers as the rationalisation and centralisation of policy formation, which makes the groups more efficient and unified in inter-group negotiations across committees. This has both negative and positive consequences for democratic practices. On the one hand, the decision-making power of the group plenaries that in theory allow for everyone's equal and democratic participation has decreased in the bigger groups. As a consequence, transparency is reduced and MEPs must be proactive in finding out when and where relevant issues are discussed in order to have a say. On the other hand, horizontal working groups provide a new

deliberative forum and more opportunities to debate policy-related issues. They may make it easier for (active) MEPs from other committees to participate in the discussions and ensure their views are integrated into the group line. Whether these voices are heard, in particular when they contrast with the majority—or sometimes the loud minority—is another question.

Power Hierarchies and Actors Shaping the Group Line

In addition to the diverging importance of the group line and modes of decision-making and the structures for reconciling different views, our interviews showed the role of different actors in forming the group line, particularly that of the leadership. Whereas previous research found that group leaders can hardly impose a top-down decision-making approach on MEPs (Bressanelli, 2014; Ringe, 2010), our analysis showed that a handful of MEPs take key group decisions. This inner circle of decision-makers is constituted of group leaders (president and vice-presidents) and coordinators representing the interests of the group. Big national delegations and their leaders are decisive actors too. A set of formal and informal group practices contributed to how these actors exerted power. For instance, one EPP interviewee explained how some practices enforced hierarchy by establishing who gets to speak and in which order: 'in a group meeting, it's the chairman who is speaking. Then the vice president. Then the head of delegations. Then the coordinators, and at the end there's room for taking the floor for the normal MEPs. Those who don't have any extra function' (Interview 30).

From a democratic perspective, the power hierarchies matter and so do the mechanisms used to tip the balance when consensus is otherwise difficult to reach. In particular, group leadership—the president and vice-presidents—has the power to make their group *look like* it is united when searching for political power over other groups in the EP. Therefore, whereas the nature of the group (seeking unity or not) determines if the group speaks with one voice, that of its leadership (enforcing unity or not) determines if the group tolerates dissenting voices.

Our research material suggested that the leaders of the S&D and EPP were powerful because, as the two biggest groups in the EP, a clear group line was important to expand the political influence of the groups. Thus,

the leadership sought and enforced unity and sometimes shaped the position of the groups. In contrast, in the Greens/EFA, where consensus was typically sought through deliberation, the role of the leadership was limited to coordinate discussions (Interviews 4; 31). For the radical right groups ID (ENF) and EFDD, where the fair representation of national interests prevailed over group unity, the role of leadership was reduced to a minimum. This was well illustrated in the ENF, where each head of delegation was also a vice-president of the group (Interview 32). Here, the role of leadership was not to find consensus among competing national interests but to simply have those views represented at the top of the hierarchy.

An important way for group leadership to seek unity was to identify dissent and potential conflicts early on. Thus, the role of leadership was not to only solve disagreements but also to avoid their emergence. For instance, the S&D president monitored committee work to anticipate conflicts, solve disagreements and set priorities (Interview 33). Similarly, the S&D vice-presidents chaired horizontal working groups, enabling them to observe and powerfully shape policy-related decision-making across committees and act as conduits between the working groups and the leadership (Interview 21). In that sense, some of our S&D interviewees qualified their leadership as exercising an 'authoritative role' over difficult questions (Interview 34). Similarly, the Renew (ALDE) interviewees explained how group leadership is 'in charge' of defining a united position despite divergent opinions (Interviews 17; 36). Some MEPs experienced this as undemocratic—for instance, when the president would decide on a controversial issue in a group meeting without putting the issue to vote (Interview 34).

In some groups, the need to be perceived as united drove the leadership to act alone with little transparency towards the rest of the group. As one GUE/NGL interviewee explained: in a divided group, 'you need strong leadership (…) to say that now we just go on and do the decisions there' (Interview 35). Oftentimes, the leadership intervened, albeit undemocratically, when the group had to speak with one voice vis-à-vis others in the EP. For instance, although our analysis did not characterise the GUE/NGL as a group considering unity as important, the interviews suggested that when it was important to 'remain in the talks' with other EP groups, the president would take a decision on behalf of the group even if it went against 'the vast majority':

He [co-president] signed up [to the EP Brexit resolution] for the group, and then in the end only four people of the group out of 39 voted for it. […] If you sign on, you're taking it a bit more seriously and you remain in the talks; you want to remain in the talks but… it was not consensual at all and the group's name was used in a way that was contrary to the, the voting behaviour of the vast majority of the rest. (Interview 13)

Coordinators were key actors in making the groups perform as united on policy issues. They shaped policies and streamlined work between committees and the broader group in most groups. Coordinators' opinions on policy issues typically became the group line when no extraordinary controversies arose (Interviews 37; 38). In case of controversies in committees, coordinators were often the ones to decide (Interview 3). Interviewees from the largest groups noted how some coordinators controlled the content of reports through various informal practices and were prepared to 'shoot down' rapporteurs' views in front of the group (Interview 29). Smaller groups, such as the Greens/EFA and GUE/NGL, often left decisions about specific files to rapporteurs. In the radical right groups, which rarely participate in EP legislative policy-making and do not seek a group line, coordinators played a less influential role.

In addition, by selecting rapporteurs, coordinators could exclude dissenting voices and contain disagreements by allocating reports to loyal MEPs only (Interviews 20; 38; 39), which perpetuated a performative idea of group unity and influenced content. From a democratic perspective, coordinators' decision-making was more or less transparent and inclusive. For instance, our S&D interviewees described their coordinators as open to recommendations on employment and social issues (Interview 1) but as 'not very democratic' and deciding alone on economic issues (Interview 20).

National party delegations, represented by the heads of delegations, were also powerful actors in internal policy-making. Previous literature has pointed out that the largest delegations wield the most power (e.g. Kreppel, 2002; Ripoll Servent, 2018), and this was confirmed by our interviewees too (Interviews 33; 34). The EPP interviewees, in particular, described how the biggest delegations (Germans in particular) dominated policy-making.

It is really difficult to push things through without the Germans' support. Sometimes one works really long on a topic and it can happen that the Germans come at the last minute and say that they do not accept and changes have to be made. It is the only delegation that can demand all kinds of things at the last minute and the others agree to this. (Interview 27)

Moreover, during the 2014–2019 legislative term, the four biggest EPP national delegations worked together in a manner that could override all smaller delegations (Interview 18). The S&D interviewees also commented on the power of big delegations. Some felt that behind-the-scenes bargaining on national interests made things 'less transparent' (Interview 33). In the context of strong power players, ordinary MEPs were left with little room to influence and overall felt powerless in shaping the group line.

Conclusions

Based on extensive research material, this chapter has provided new empirical knowledge on how the nationally, culturally and ideologically diverse political groups in the EP formulate group lines on policies that matter to EU citizens. Importantly, it has shed light on the significance of the minutiae of the policy formation processes for democratic policy-making within the political groups.

First, we have shown power hierarchies, both inclusion and exclusion mechanisms, at the political group level as well as the importance of informal institutions, such as everyday practices and unwritten rules, in strengthening or undermining democratic policy-making practices within the groups. Second, we have identified differences between the groups in the degree to which they expect unity or value a single policy position, the modes of decision-making and the treatment of dissenting voices; arenas of decision-making; and the role of leadership and power hierarchies. A key reason for these differences, in addition to group size, was the positioning of the groups in EP decision-making—groups that can influence the position of the EP tend to formulate policies in a more centralised and hierarchical way. The striving for influence within the EP, which is connected to having a unified position, sometimes undermined the principles of inclusion, participation and deliberation also in the smaller groups. Third, our analysis points at an increased rationalisation and centralisation

of intra-group policy formation, which corresponds to the rationalisation of the EP work owing to its increased powers (Brack & Costa, 2018; Ripoll Servent, 2015). This rationalisation may have come at the expense of transparency and increased the powers of the leaders but has also provided new deliberative forums, as in the case of the horizontal working groups.

With emphasis on democratic practices in policy formation, we have suggested that how the political groups formulate policies matters for the democratic functioning of decision-making in the EP and, by extension, for supranational democracy. The nuanced and detailed look at the policy formation processes and political dynamics within the political groups brings a new facet to the discussion of the democratic functioning of the EP and the legislative processes of the EU. Our approach foregrounded the argument that democratic practices, such as transparency, inclusion and deliberation, are a vital component of policy-making at all levels of the legislative system.

Note

1. The Greens/EFA group includes members of Green movements, Pirate and Independent MEPs, as well as MEPs from the European Free Alliance (EFA) representing 'stateless nations, regions and minorities, standing up for the right to self-determination' (Greens/EFA website).

References

ALDE. (2009). *Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe. Rules of procedure.* Adopted at the Group meeting 4 February 2009.

Berthet, V. (2021). Norm under fire: Support and opposition to EU's ratification to the Istanbul Convention in the European Parliament. *International Feminist Journal of Politics.*

Brack, N., & Costa O. (2018). Democracy in parliament vs. democracy through parliament? Defining the rules of the game in the European Parliament. *Journal of Legislative Studies, 24*(1), 51–71.

Bressanelli, E. (2014). Necessary deepening? How political groups in the European Parliament adapt to enlargement. *Journal of European Public Policy, 21*(5), 776–792.

Bressanelli, E., & Chelotti, N. (2018). The European Parliament and economic governance: Explaining a case of limited influence. *The Journal of Legislative Studies, 24*(1), 72–89.

Chappell, L., & Waylen, G. (2013). Gender and the hidden life of institutions. *Public Administration, 91*(3), 1–17.

Cross, W., & Katz, R. (Eds.) (2013). *Challenges of intra-party democracy.* Oxford University Press.

Daniel, W., & Thierse, S. (2018). Individual determinant for the selection of group coordinators in the European Parliament. *Journal of Cutaneous Medicine and Surgery: Incorporating Medical and Surgical Dermatology, 56*(4), 939–954.

ECR. (2017). *ECR constitution of the group.* As amended 25 November 2014 and 4 July 2017.

EFDD. (2017). *Statutes of the Europe of freedom and direct democracy group.* Updated on 17 January 2017.

Elomäki, A. (2021). 'It's a total no-no': Strategic silence about gender in the European Parliament's economic governance debates. *International Political Science Review.* Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1177/019 2512120978329

ENF. (2015, June 15). *Europe of Nations and Freedom political group in the European Parliament statutes.*

EPP. (2013). *Rules of procedure of the group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) in the European Parliament.* October 2013. Retrieved 30 January 2021, from https://www.eppgroup.eu/sites/default/files/dow nload/rules-of-procedure/en.pdf

Faas, T. (2003). To defect or not to defect? National, institutional and party group pressures on MEPs and their consequences for party group cohesion in the EP. *European Journal of Political Research, 42*(5), 841–866.

Finke, D. (2012). Proposal stage coalition-building in the European Parliament. *European Union Politics, 13*(4), 487–512.

Greens/EFA. (2020). *Statutes of the parliamentary group the Greens/European Free Alliance in the European Parliament.* Adopted 8 November 2006, changed 5 October 2016 and 15 July 2020.

Hellström, J. (2008). Who leads, who follows? Re-examining the party–electorate linkages on European integration. *Journal of European Public Policy, 15*(8), 1127–1144.

Helmke, G., & Levitsky, S. (2004). Informal institutions and comparative politics: A research agenda. *Perspectives on Politics, 2*(4), 725–740.

Hix, S. (2002). Constitutional agenda-setting through discretion in rule interpretation: Why the European Parliament won at Amsterdam. *British Journal of Political Science, 32*(2), 259–280.

Hix, S., Kreppel, A., & Noury, A. (2003). The party system in the European Parliament: Collusive or competitive? *Journal of Common Market Studies, 41*(2), 309–331.

Hix, S., Abdul, N., & Roland, G. (2007). *Democratic politics and the European Parliament*. Cambridge University Press.

Kantola, J., & Miller, C. (2021). Party politics and radical right populism in the European Parliament: Analysing political groups as democratic actors. *Journal of Common Market Studies, 59*(4), 782–801.

Kantola, J., & Miller C. (2022). Gendered leadership in the European Parliament's political groups. In H. Müller & I. Tömmel (Eds.), *Women and leadership in the European Union* (pp. 150–169). Oxford University Press.

Kantola, J., & Rolandsen Agustín, L. (2016). Gendering transnational party politics: The case of European Union. *Party Politics, 22*(5), 641–651.

Kreppel, A. (2002). *The European Parliament and supranational party system: A study in institutional development*. Cambridge University Press.

Krook, M. L., & Mackay, F. (2011). Introduction: Gender, politics, and institutions. In M. L. Krook & F. Mackay (Eds.), *Gender, politics and institutions*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Lindberg, B. (2008). Are political parties controlling legislative decisionmaking in the European Parliament? The case of the services directive. *Journal of European Public Policy, 15*(8), 1184–1204.

Lindberg, B., Rasmussen, A., & Warntjen, A. (2008). Party politics as usual? The role of political parties in EU legislative decision-making. *Journal of European Public Policy, 15*(8), 1107–1126.

Mackay, F., Kenny, M., & Chappell, L. (2010). New institutionalism through a gender lens: Towards a feminist institutionalism. *International Political Science Review, 31*(5), 573–558.

McDonnell, D., & Werner A. (2019). *International populism. The radical right in the European Parliament*. Hurst Publishers.

O'Keeffe, M., Salines, M., & Wieczorek, M. (2016). The European Parliament's strategy in EU economic and financial reform. *Journal of European Public Policy, 23*(2), 217–235.

Rasmussen, A. (2008). Party soldiers in a non-partisan community? Party linkage in the European Parliament. *Journal of European Public Policy, 15*(8), 1164–1183.

Ringe, N. (2010). *Who decides, and how. Preferences, uncertainty, and policy choice in the European Parliament*. Oxford University Press

Ripoll Servent, A. (2015). *Institutional and policy change in the European Parliament. Deciding on freedom, security and justice*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Ripoll Servent, A. (2018). *The European Parliament*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Ripoll Servent, A., & Panning, L. (2019). Preparatory bodies as mediators of political conflict in trilogues: The European Parliament's shadows meetings. *Politics and Governance, 7*(3), 303–315.

Roger, L., Otjes, S., & van der Veer, H. (2017). The financial crisis and the European Parliament: An analysis of the Two-Pack legislation. *European Union Politics, 18*(4), 560–580.

Roger, L., & Winzen, T. (2015). Party groups and committee negotiations in the European Parliament: Outside attention and the anticipation of plenary conflict. *Journal of European Public Policy, 22*(3), 391–408.

S&D. (2014). *Group of the progressive alliance of socialists & democrats in the European Parliament rules of procedure*. Adopted on 15 October 2014.

Thierse, S. (2019). Policy entrepreneurship in the European Parliament: Reconsidering the influence of rapporteurs. *Journal of European Public Policy, 26*(2), 267–285.

Warasin, M., Kantola, J., Rolandsen Agustín, L., & Coughlan, C. (2019). Politicisation of gender equality in the European Parliament: Cohesion and inter-group coalitions in plenary and committees. In P. Ahrens & L. Rolandsen Agustin (Eds.), *Gendering the European Parliament: Structures, policies, and practices* (pp. 141–158). ECPR Press/Rowman & Littlefield.

Whitaker, R., & Lynch, P. (2014). Understanding the formation and actions of Eurosceptic groups in the European Parliament: Pragmatism, principles and publicity. *Government and Opposition, 49*(2), 232–263.

Waylen, G. (2017). Analysing gender in informal institutions: An introduction. In G. Waylen (Ed.), *Gender and informal institutions*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Wolkenstein, F. (2016). A deliberative model of intra-party democracy. *The Journal of Political Philosophy, 24*(3), 297–320.

Quoted Interviews

Interview 1: S&D staff 04.03.2020, Brussels.
Interview 2: S&D staff 02.03.2020, Brussels.
Interview 3: S&D MEP 02.03.2020, Brussels.
Interview 4: Greens/EFA staff 04.03.2019, Brussels.
Interview 5: Greens/EFA MEP 13.03.2020, Brussels.
Interview 6: Greens/EFA MEP 29.05.2020, online interview.
Interview 7: GUE/NGL MEP 08.04.2020, online interview.
Interview 8: GUE/NGL staff 15.05.2019, Brussels.
Interview 9: GUE/NGL staff 13.06.2019, Brussels.
Interview 10: ECR staff 20.02.2019, Brussels.
Interview 11: GUE/NGL staff 05.03.2020, Brussels.
Interview 12: GUE/NGL MEP 10.03.2020, Brussels.
Interview 13: GUE/NGL staff 24.02.2020, Brussels.

Interview 14: GUE/NGL staff 16.03.2020, online interview.
Interview 15: Greens/EFA MEP 30.09.2019, Brussels.
Interview 16: EPP MEP 08.04.2020, online interview.
Interview 17: ALDE staff 04.05.2019, Brussels.
Interview 18: EPP MEP 28.11.2019, Brussels.
Interview 19: EPP staff 06.03.2020, Brussels.
Interview 20: S&D MEP 29.01.2019, Brussels.
Interview 21: S&D staff 29.04.2019, Brussels.
Interview 22: EPP MEP 21.03.2020, online interview.
Interview 23: Renew MEP 04.03.2020, Brussels.
Interview 24: ALDE staff 29.01.2019, Brussels.
Interview 25: Renew staff 13.03.2020, Brussels.
Interview 26: ALDE staff 04.02.2020, Brussels.
Interview 27: EPP MEP 10.03.2020, Brussels.
Interview 28: EPP MEP 21.02.2019, Brussels.
Interview 29: EPP MEP 22.03.2019, Brussels.
Interview 30: EPP MEP 08.05.2020, Brussels.
Interview 31: Greens/EFA MEP 10.03.2020, Brussels.
Interview 32: ENF staff 26.04.2019, Brussels.
Interview 33: S&D staff 26.02.2020, Brussels.
Interview 34: S&D MEP 16.10.2018, Brussels.
Interview 35: GUE/NGL staff 07.02.2020, Brussels.
Interview 36: Renew MEP 06.02.2020, Brussels.
Interview 37: ECR MEP 31.01.2019, Brussels.
Interview 38: S&D staff 16.05.2019, Brussels.
Interview 39: S&D MEP 26.02.2019, Brussels.
Interview 40: ECR MEP 19.12.2019, Brussels.
Interview 41: ECR staff 18.03.2019, Brussels.
Interview 42: ECR MEP 05.03.2020, Brussels.
Interview 43: Renew staff 04.03.2020, Brussels.

Eurosceptic Contestation and Legislative Behaviour in the European Parliament

Tanja A. Börzel and Miriam Hartlapp

Introduction

With the elections in 2009, the representation of Eurosceptics in the European Parliament (EP) started to grow. The increasing number of Members of European Parliament (MEPs) strongly opposing European integration has made the contestation of EU policies and institutions within the EP more visible. Scholars have widely studied their programmatic positions. We know much less about the behaviour of Eurosceptic MEPs in the legislative process. To what extent does Eurosceptic contestation influence voting behaviour in the EP? How do Eurosceptics engage in plenary debates? Do they stick to their peers when they vote and debate or do they form an untidy opposition?

T. A. Börzel (✉) · M. Hartlapp
Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin, Germany
e-mail: tanja.boerzel@fu-berlin.de

M. Hartlapp
e-mail: miriam.hartlapp@fu-berlin.de

97

Addressing these questions is important to understand to what extent programmatic contestation translates into policy output through the legislative process in the EP. Existing studies typically focus on a specific policy field, most importantly gender equality policies (Kantola & Lombardo, 2020; Kantola & Rolandsen Agustín, 2019; Warasin et al., 2019) and economic affairs (Cavallaro et al., 2018). Comparative insights across policy fields are scarce (but see Diermeier et al., 2021). While Eurosceptics have been gaining ground in the EP, we argue that their political influence is curbed by their ideological and national diversity. The disruptive effects of Eurosceptic contestation should be therefore confined to policy fields where polarisation between Eurosceptics and Europhile is strong and Eurosceptic MEPs do not break ranks with their political groups. We expect Eurosceptics to be united on issues that polarise along the cultural Green, Alternative, Liberal (GAL) vs. Traditional, Authoritarian, Nationalist (TAN) axis. They should be divided when it comes to policies that are structured along the more traditional right-left axis or that touch upon national interests.

To substantiate our argument, this chapter offers an empirical analysis of polarisation and Eurosceptic cohesion in the 7th and 8th EP (2009–2019). The two legislative terms saw a subsequent rise in Eurosceptic MEPs. Our analysis combines roll-call votes with an exploration of how Eurosceptic MEPs engage in parliamentary committees and plenary debates in three policy fields. We pursue two interests: First, we seek to find out in which policy fields EP votes diverge more strongly between Eurosceptics and Europhiles and where Eurosceptics form an untidy opposition rather than voting as a cohesive bloc. To this aim, we conceptualise and apply two measures. *Eurosceptic polarisation* measures the proportion of votes in which the Eurosceptic plurality dissents from the Europhile plurality. *Eurosceptic cohesion* captures how likely Eurosceptics are to vote with their peers in Eurosceptic political groups. While polarisation is an important indicator, its actual impact on legislative decision-making in the EP may vary depending on the cohesion of the Eurosceptic bloc. Only if Eurosceptics are united in opposing Europhiles, can they obtain policy concessions. In contrast, where Eurosceptics are divided, their 'untidy' opposition will not be able to influence legislative substance.

Second, we want to explore how Eurosceptic contestation materialises in concrete legislative processes. We therefore zoom into six cases in three policy fields where we expect contestation to differ because

conflict is predominantly structured along the new cultural cleavage (anti-discrimination and minority rights), or because left-right ideologies (economic policy), or national interests (foreign policy, structural funds) are important.

Our policy field comparison confirms our expectation that Eurosceptic contestation is polarised and shows less Eurosceptic cohesion where policies are structured along the cultural axis. Our case studies find Eurosceptic cohesion to be lower with regard to votes on policies that appeal to national interests or that are clearly structured on the right-left axis. Analysis of plenary debate suggests that in such a conflict structure the untidy Eurosceptic opposition may form alliances with MEPs from mainstream parties. Interestingly, and depending on the policy at stake, we observe such behavioural affinity not only on the right with conservative forces from southern or eastern Europe, but also on the left, e.g. regarding economic nationalism or welfare chauvinism. Scholars have emphasised the potential of Eurosceptics to undermine the working of the EU (e.g. Ripoll Servent, 2019). Our chapter offers an alternative view on democratic practices in the EU's legislature. We focus on the potential of Eurosceptic contestation to shape rather than oppose EU policy-making contributing to a potentially more responsive and differentiated European integration. The potential, however, is limited to specific policy fields. This leads us to suggest that electoral support for Eurosceptic parties should be analysed systematically as part of a fundamental change in the EP that is no longer characterised by a pro-European oversized mainstream coalition but by flexible and inclusive majority building.

In the next section, we develop our theoretical argument that expects opposition to the EU to be influenced strongly by a cultural cleavage, which, however, is mitigated by ideological and national diversity among Eurosceptics. We then introduce our empirical approach in more detail. A quantitative analysis of roll-call votes presents results on polarisation and Eurosceptic cohesion across policy fields. Case studies zoom into six concrete parliamentary processes to explore how contestation plays out in committee work and plenary debates. We conclude with a discussion of our findings and their implications for future research.

Theorising Eurosceptic Contestation in the EP

Eurosceptic parties and movements have been more and more able to mobilise the electoral support of EU citizens that hold negative attitudes

towards the EU. The rise of Euroscepticism has been fuelled by the political and social consequences of the various crises the EU has been facing since 2008, and globalisation more broadly speaking (Hooghe et al., 2002; Pirro & Taggart, 2018). The growing tide of Euroscepticism has increasingly structured conflict in the EP resulting in the polarisation of European politics (e.g. Grande & Hutter, 2016).

Research has shown that the positions of parties on European integration could not be simply inferred from their stance on left-right issues but reflect a new dimension of European politics (e.g. Hooghe et al., 2002). Euroscepticism is primarily found at the political fringes while centre-right and centre-left parties continue to be pro-integration (Halikiopoulou et al., 2012). Mobilising against the pro-European consensus provides an opportunity to reap votes from mainstream parties and 'shake up the system' (Hooghe et al., 2002, p. 970). Eurosceptic and populist parties seek to restructure political contestation around issues (life style, cultural diversity, immigration, ecology, nationalism) that unite the pro-EU mainstream parties across the left-right cleavage and divide them internally (Braun et al., 2016; Hooghe et al., 2002). The new cultural cleavage has been referred to as Green, Alternative, Liberal (GAL) vs. Traditional, Authoritarian, Nationalist (TAN), as integrationist vs. demarcationist, or as cosmopolitan vs. communitarian (cf. de Wilde et al., 2014; Kriesi et al., 2008; Marks et al., 2002). It is a powerful predictor of Euroscepticism (Hooghe et al., 2002) and the electoral success of Eurosceptic parties in the EP.

At the same time, the traditional right-left dimension still shapes the political space in the EP. So do national interests. The literature has shown that the left-right dimension matters the most when issues of redistribution and regulation are at stake (Cavallaro et al., 2018; Chiru & Stoian, 2019; Hooghe et al., 2002) resulting in a weaker, albeit still visible voting cohesion on economic and market policies, such as industrial policy or labour market policies, which touch upon these issues in multiple ways. In other words, we expect right-left ideology within the Eurosceptic votes to matter more in some policy fields than in others.

In addition to right-left ideology, Eurosceptics on both sides of the political spectrum may be divided across national lines. Studies of roll-call voting and ideological congruence in the EP find that the overall cohesion of transnational party groups is relatively high, particularly with regard to left-right issues (e.g. Hix et al., 2007). This cohesion is mainly achieved through national parties rather than through leadership in the EP national

groups (Hix et al., 2005). This renders dissent among Eurosceptics more likely where national interests prevail. Overall party cohesion notwithstanding, MEPs break ranks with their group when issues of high national salience are at stake (Costello & Thomson, 2016). MEPs feel not only as members of their EP political group, but position themselves as coming from a member state with its own socio-economic interests and cultural cleavages (Whitaker et al., 2017). National interests may differ across groups of countries in the EU: North versus South, large versus small, old versus new member states as well as among a Northern, Southern and Eastern region. A recent study on the policy congruence of radical right parties in the EP found them more divided than other party groups. The deepest divisions run between Eastern and Western European radical right parties on issues related to cooperation with China, opposition to Russia, reforms of the structural funds or the mutualisation of debt (Diermeier et al., 2021).

Finally, we expect Eurosceptic positions to be mediated by the legislative process. Here, two insights from the literature are relevant for our argument. First, most of the legislative work takes place in parliamentary committees. These arenas have been called the 'machine room' of the EP (Häge & Ringe, 2019). Socialisation into a problem-solving mode is more likely in small groups with iterative interactions and expert driven policy-making is likely to prevail (Lewis, 2010). We expect less contestation in committees than in the plenary. Behind closed doors, signals of opposition are of no use to Eurosceptics in their attempts to 'steal votes' from mainstream parties or to mobilise their electoral base (cf. Broniecki & Obholzer, 2020). Second, in plenary debates, opinions voiced by MEPs are used to signal opposition or support to a policy line by highlighting disadvantages that come with a proposal or calling for alternative solutions (Garssen, 2016, p. 32). MEPs breaking ranks with their political group use plenary debates 'to explain their national party's position to other members of their EP political group, and to create a positive record for themselves in the eyes of the national party to serve their own reelection purposes' (Slapin & Proksch, 2010, p. 333). Thus, it is here where we expect Eurosceptic cohesion to be the lowest.

In sum, while Eurosceptic forces have been gaining ground in the EP, we expect their political influence to be curbed by their ideological and national diversity. Accordingly, polarisation and Eurosceptic cohesion in the EP should vary across policy fields. Polarisation should be highest in policy fields that are dominated by the new cultural cleavage

and lowest where traditional left-right issues prevail and national inter-ests are at stake. Left-right ideology and national interests should also undermine the cohesion among Eurosceptic MEPs. The way in which Eurosceptic MEPs engage in committee work and parliamentary debates has important implications for EU policy-making—not least as this also affects alliance formation with Europhile MEPs. In this sense, parliamen-tary behaviour can be indicative of both the potential of Eurosceptic contestation to undermine the working of the EU *and* to form part of democratic practices.

How to Analyse Eurosceptic Contestation in the EP

We empirically analyse Eurosceptic contestations in two parts: We start with a quantitative analysis of Eurosceptic voting behaviour. Polarisation and cohesion scores are a good indicator for contestation but do not tell us what Eurosceptics agree on and disagree with. Based on our find-ings, we identify three policy fields where polarisation is high. Within each of the three policy fields, we select two cases to study parliamentary behaviour of Eurosceptics in more depth.

The first part of the empirical analysis draws on a dataset comprising all roll-call votes in the 7th and 8th legislative terms of the EP (2009–2019). The data was collected from VoteWatch Europe and is based on information provided by the EP. We process the data to measure two concepts: polarisation and Eurosceptic cohesion. For the first concept, we determine whether a vote was polarised on the integration dimension by dividing MEPs into two camps: Europhiles and Eurosceptics. Research on coalition formation in the EP has long emphasised the Europhile bloc of centre-right and centre-left party groups, including the European People's Party (EPP), Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D), Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)[1] and Greens (Greens–European Free Alliance/EFA), which is broadly supportive of European integration. This 'super-majority' is considered to be driving legislation and is often contrasted with Eurosceptic party groups, including the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR), Europe of Freedom and (Direct) Democracy (EFD(D)) and Europe of Nations and Freedom Group (ENF)[2] on the right as well as Confederal Group of the European United Left–Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) on the left, along with the mostly Eurosceptic Non-Inscrits (NI). Instead of

following this logic of a Europhile and Eurosceptic block in the EP ex-ante, we assign MEPs according to the position of their respective national parties as coded by the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Bakker et al., 2015; Polk et al., 2017).[3] This allows to capture changes in the composition of the groups over time.

To measure contestation, we ask whether the Europhiles and Eurosceptics voted differently on a given issue by calculating the plurality vote (relative majority) in each camp and comparing them. If the plurality of both Europhiles and Eurosceptics vote the same way, we consider a vote not polarised on the integration dimension. In contrast, if the two camps vote differently, we consider the vote polarised. The first measure of interest, then, is the proportion of votes in a policy field that are *polarised*. To measure *Eurosceptic cohesion*, we ask whether the Eurosceptic MEPs voted with the Eurosceptic plurality. For our policy field comparison, we aggregate this as the average share of Eurosceptic MEPs voting with the Eurosceptic plurality in a given policy field (values between 0 and 1). For our case studies, the level of observation is the vote in the plenary of the EP. We calculate the percentage of Eurosceptic MEPs who voted with the plurality of the Eurosceptic MEPs in this vote.

We complement our analysis of Eurosceptic contestation in the EP at the aggregate level by zooming in on Eurosceptic behaviour in specific legislative processes. We select six legislative processes from three policy fields that differ regarding our theoretical expectations (Table 5.1). In *anti-discrimination and minority rights policies*, positions are frequently connected to fundamental value choices, polarising along a cultural axis (Kantola & Lombardo, 2019). Conflict should clearly demarcate Eurosceptic and Europhile MEPs (Ahrens & Woodward, 2020, p. 5). In *foreign policy*, in contrast, we expect low polarisation as national interests should prevail where EU legislation touches upon sovereignty and core state powers (cf. Genschel & Jachtenfuchs, 2014). Finally, for *economic policy* we expect medium polarisation. Positions should be structured along the left-right axis and cluster along national groups with similar economic interests and institutionally based varieties of capitalism. Within each policy field, we have decided to explore the largely uncharted terrain of Eurosceptic behaviour in the EP by selecting two cases that score particularly high in polarisation (cf. Annex for more details on the case selection).

The case study analysis is based on primary sources (committee reports, voting records, verbatim of plenary debates) and secondary sources. We

Table 5.1 Overview of cases

Policy field	Theoretical expectation	Selected cases
Anti-discrimination and minority rights	High polarisation of Eurosceptic and Europhile MEPs along the cultural axis	European Parliament resolution of 10 October 2013 on caste-based discrimination (2013/2676(RSP)) European Parliament resolution of 4 February 2014 on the EU Roadmap against homophobia and discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity (2013/2183(INI))
Foreign policy	Low polarisation and prevalence of national interests	European Parliament resolution of 17 December 2015 on the Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World 2014 and the European Union's policy on the matter (2015/2229(INI)) European Parliament resolution of 9 July 2015 on the security challenges in the Middle East and North Africa region and the prospects for political stability (2014/2229(INI))
Economic policy	Medium polarisation and conflict structured along national/regional groups	Amendments adopted by the European Parliament on 15 January 2014 on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the access of third-country goods and services to the Union's internal market in public procurement and procedures supporting negotiations on access of Union goods and services to the public procurement markets of third countries (COM(2012)0124—C7-0084/2012—2012/0060(COD)) European Parliament resolution of 4 October 2018 on the public procurement strategy package (2017/2278(INI))

focus on committee work and plenary debates. Analysis for the early 2000s found that committee work is 'very consensually, regardless of the issue at stake and the procedure applied' (Settembri & Neuhold, 2009, p. 127). Reports are supported by an average of 93–95% of committee votes (Settembri & Neuhold, 2009, pp. 136–138). As consensus is likely to be somewhat smaller today, we consider a split vote in the responsible committee (support for a proposal below 85%) as an indicator of contestation in committee work. We cannot say if the split is driven by Eurosceptic contestation. However, the split can be contrasted with our polarisation and cohesion measures allowing for a better understanding of contestation across different arenas in the legislative process.

Turning to plenary debates, substance and argumentative patterns provide first-hand indicators on MEPs' positions beyond party programmes. Plenary debates are highly structured, with regulated speaking orders, relatively short speaking turns and interruptions limited by rules of procedures (Garssen, 2016, pp. 27 and 37). Speakers usually clearly indicate their support or opposition to the legislative proposal and give reason by highlighting specific aspects that are particularly relevant to them or address a general aim. Sometimes, they directly link their contribution to that of another speaker. Positions are assessed relative to a speaker's political group as well as to her country or region of origin.

In sum, the substance of a speaker's contribution in the plenary allows to better understand on what topics MEPs position themselves and whether the reasoning indicates support or opposition along cultural, right-left or national cleavages. They provide a qualitative indicator of Eurosceptic dissent as well as insights on possible alliances where positions of Eurosceptics align with those of Europhile MEPs.

EUROSCEPTIC POLARISATION AND COHESION ACROSS POLICY FIELDS

The following analysis presents votes by affiliation to committees. Figure 5.1 reveals substantial variation across policy fields. Across the two legislative terms, budget issues as well as constitutional and inter-institutional affairs divide Eurosceptics from Europhiles most clearly. In the 7th EP, culture and education as well as gender equality also scored high as polarised policy field. This is in line with our expectation that culturally loaded policy areas are strongly polarised. The 8th EP saw a rise of polarisation for economic and monetary affairs, international trade
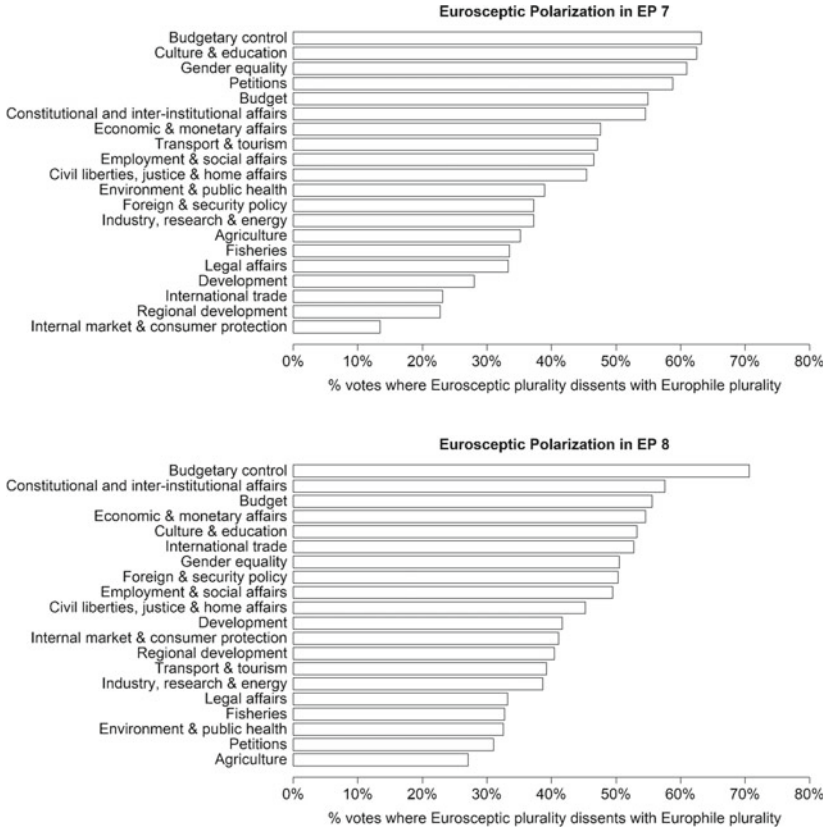
Eurosceptic Polarization in EP 7

x-axis: % votes where Eurosceptic plurality dissents with Europhile plurality

Budgetary control
Culture & education
Gender equality
Petitions
Budget
Constitutional and inter-institutional affairs
Economic & monetary affairs
Transport & tourism
Employment & social affairs
Civil liberties, justice & home affairs
Environment & public health
Foreign & security policy
Industry, research & energy
Agriculture
Fisheries
Legal affairs
Development
International trade
Regional development
Internal market & consumer protection

Eurosceptic Polarization in EP 8

x-axis: % votes where Eurosceptic plurality dissents with Europhile plurality

Budgetary control
Constitutional and inter-institutional affairs
Budget
Economic & monetary affairs
Culture & education
International trade
Gender equality
Foreign & security policy
Employment & social affairs
Civil liberties, justice & home affairs
Development
Internal market & consumer protection
Regional development
Transport & tourism
Industry, research & energy
Legal affairs
Fisheries
Environment & public health
Petitions
Agriculture

Fig. 5.1   Eurosceptic polarisation in the 7th and 8th EP

and foreign and security policy in relative, albeit not in absolute terms. Gender and education and cultural policy, in turn, became somewhat less polarised in absolute terms. Interestingly, trade figured among the least polarised policy areas in the 7th EP, together with regional development and internal market and consumer protection. In the 8th EP, in contrast, fisheries, environment and public health, and agriculture rank among the least polarised policy fields (together with petitions). This suggests that national interests rather than ideological differences structure voting. Overall, there is some support for theorised differences according to the importance of cultural, ideological or national cleavages in a policy field.

Yet, not all policy fields position as expected. Together with the substantial variation between the 7th and 8th EP, these findings suggest that polarisation of a policy field is far from uniform; it varies from one legislative process to another depending on the issues addressed.

Figure 5.2 shows that voting cohesion does not vary as much as polarisation. Across both legislative terms, Eurosceptic cohesion is strongest in budgetary, legislative and inter-institutional matters, as well as in fisheries. The strongest dissent among Eurosceptics can be observed in petitions, social affairs and foreign policy (7th EP) as well as in development,
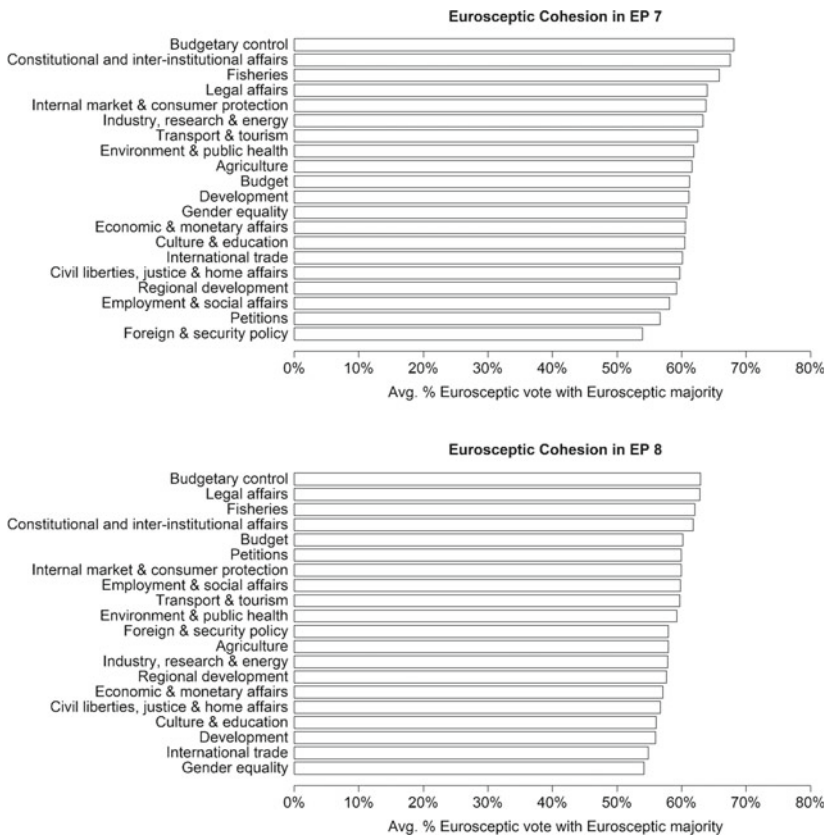
Fig. 5.2   Eurosceptic cohesion in the 7th and 8th EP

trade and gender affairs (8th EP). Overall Eurosceptic voting cohesion is slightly stronger in the 7th EP than in the 8th EP.

Eurosceptic Behaviour in the Legislative Process

In this section, we complement the analysis of voting patterns at the aggregate level with an exploration of Eurosceptic behaviour in six legislative processes. For each proposal, we briefly introduce the policy, discuss the polarisation and Eurosceptic cohesion in the plenary vote and compare it to contestation in the responsible committee before we turn to positions and patterns of Eurosceptic cohesion in the plenary debate.

Anti-discrimination and Minority Rights: Alignment of Euroscepticism and Conservativism

The 'Resolution on caste-based discrimination' calls upon numerous countries across the globe to end untouchability practices and social exclusion that frequently persist regarding access to the legal system and to employment, as well as regarding the achievement of basic human rights. The resolution is an own-initiative report adopted in the plenary on 10 October 2013. Eurosceptics and Europhiles are polarised with scores reaching 0.58 and 0.48 on the two related votes (cf. Fig. 5.1 for comparison). Yet, the score for Eurosceptic cohesion in the plenary vote shows a rather divided Eurosceptic camp with only 42%, and 41%, respectively, of Eurosceptic MEPs voting the same way. The initiative is tabled by the EP Committee on Development (DEVE). Unfortunately, no further information on the committee work is available that would allow to assess contestation in the 'machine room' of the EP.

The final vote meets our theoretical expectations that anti-discrimination and minority rights policies polarise strongly along the GAL–TAN dimension. The plenary debate, in contrast, does not show contestation. The rapporteur from the Greens/EFA receives broad support from the mainstream right and left. The debate is limited to the measures most effective to end caste-based discrimination, such as international measures or bilateral trade clauses agreements. No GAL–TAN divide materialises in the parliamentary debate. Eurosceptic voices remain absent from EP discourse. Two possible explanations are worth mentioning. First, anti-discrimination policies usually fall in the area of expertise of either the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and

Home Affairs (LIBE) or the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM), where ECR, EFDD, ENF typically oppose proposals (Ahrens & Woodward, 2020, p. 5). Yet, this proposal is tabled by the DEVE Committee. Development Policy is less clear-cut polarised along a cultural axis. Bergmann et al. (2021) show that populist radical right parties might be sceptical about a development policy that invests into multilateral cooperation and provides funding to the global South. Yet, they push policies that promote development 'as a tool to curb migration and refugee flows' (Bergmann et al., 2021, p. 2). Secondly, and closely related, Eurosceptic MEPs and political groups might abstain from opposition as cast-based discrimination is an issue in third countries, on which it is more difficult to mobilise electoral support than on issues that touch upon discrimination within EU member states. Eurosceptic MEPs therefore are more likely to abstain from debates, and less likely to pro-actively table alternative policies or initiate proposals themselves.

Our second case, the 'Resolution on the Roadmap against homophobia and discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity', calls upon the Commission to draw up a pan-European strategy to better protect fundamental rights of gay, lesbian, transsexual and bisexual people. The roadmap is one of the two core reports on gender equality in the legislature 2009–2014 (Ahrens & Woodward, 2020, p. 7). Most importantly it demands mainstreaming the fundamental rights of LBGTI people, encourages the collection of comparable data on and raises awareness for the situation of LGBTI people. It also puts forward concrete objectives to be addressed in areas of employment, education and health.

The Roadmap is an own-initiative report of the EP voted on 4 February 2013. The responsible LIBE committee is supportive but the vote (40 For, 2 Against, 6 Abstentions), indicates higher contestation than average committee votes (Settembri & Neuhold, 2009, pp. 136–138). When the report reaches the plenary, the EFD tables an alternative motion for a resolution that receives some support—yet, not enough to elude rejection. The report is adopted with 394 votes in favour and 176 against. Polarisation scores resemble those of the first case with 0.48 and 0.49 in the two votes, respectively. Eurosceptic cohesion in the plenary vote is even lower than for the first anti-discrimination case, with only 35 and 36% of Eurosceptic MEPs voting in the same way.

At the level of debates, the report is broadly supported by EPP, S&D, ALDE, Green/EFA as well as the soft Eurosceptic GUE/NGL groups. EFD is the only Eurosceptic political group taking issue with the proposal.

Its MEPs from Italy, Slovakia and Greece criticise in particular two issues: (positive) discrimination and intrusion into national prerogatives—a strategy frequently used in Eurosceptic political groups (Kantola & Lombardo, 2020). They ask 'why we should guarantee to gays, lesbians or transgender people […] specific right' and stress that 'nature determines the leaf and the consequent biological and genetic directions of humans'. They continue on the closely related issue of sovereignty, calling on the EU to avoid 'a blatant forcing of national prerogatives' and accuse the Commission of planning 'mutual recognition of same-sex marriages'. MEPs from other Eurosceptic groups are virtually absent from debate. A number of EPP members (from Eastern Europe), however, take side with the claims of right wing Eurosceptics. This is a general pattern on gender equality and anti-discrimination issues (Warasin et al., 2019, p. 150). In addition, French conservatives voted against the report by highlighting 'the rights of the family, to be respected' and rejecting 'the promotion of sex education of any kind in the youth programmes of the European Commission' (UMP/UDI, AE, 2014b).

In sum, both cases show substantial Eurosceptic polarisation but limited Eurosceptic cohesion in the plenary vote. In the second case, this pattern materialises vividly in the committees and parliamentary debate. The plenary debate highlights contestation by only one Eurosceptic political group (EFD), which shows argumentative positions that are close to that of conservative EPP MEPs from eastern Europe and from France. These alignments point at the potential of Eurosceptic MEPs and political groups to join forces with TAN-oriented conservative MEPs to push the existing line of EU anti-discrimination policies into a more restrictive direction.

Foreign Policy: Selective Alignment

The 'Resolution on the Annual report on human rights and democracy in the world in 2015 and the European Union policy on the matter' is a broad non-legislative initiative. It is an annual exercise that has particular relevance in 2015—the year of the EU refugee crisis. Building on specific resolutions adopted during the year e.g. on single countries, it highlights two issues in particular: migration and discrimination. To this aim, the report calls upon EU actors and member states to fight against all forms of discrimination and the rights of women, disabled persons, children, elderly, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons,

indigenous people and of persons belonging to minorities as well as persons affected by cast-based discrimination. It challenges member states to respect human rights standards in their migration policies and to assure that bilateral cooperation with third countries does not benefit, directly or indirectly, security, police and justice systems involved in human rights violations.

The plenary vote on 14 December 2016 shows strong contestation. MEPs propose a single amendment text, bundling opposition to Europe. About 1/3 of the parliament does not support the report in the final vote (463 For, 115 Against, 113 Abstentions). This finding is underlined by high scores for polarisation (0.93, cf. Fig. 5.1 for comparison) and strong Eurosceptic cohesion in the vote (91%). Similarly, contestation materialises at the level of the responsible Committee for Foreign Affairs which shows comparatively low support for the instrument (75%, 42 For, 5 Against, 9 Abstention).

The plenary debate allows to distinguish discursive differences. For the EPP, religious freedom is particularly important, ALDE focuses on freedom of civil society and media as well as on LGBTI rights. Eurosceptic contestation is most loudly and frequently voiced where the report addresses culturally loaded aspects of foreign policy as national sovereignty, the call for religious freedom and reproductive rights. On these three issues, Eurosceptics seem rather united. Across the spectrum of right Eurosceptics (ECR, EFDD and ENF), MEPs oppose a European foreign policy by highlighting the loss of national sovereignty in legal, budgetary, territorial and monetary terms (ENF) and rejecting the liberal value canon (EFDD). The arguments voiced align opposition along a cultural axis with more classical conservative concerns about the (independent) power of member states. Eurosceptic MEPs form a cohesive block when it comes to migration, too. Religious freedom and protection of religious minorities is instrumental to express opposition to 'surviving djihadists' (ENF, France) and 'Muslim radicals' brought to Europe by 'Open Doors Germany' (ECR, The Netherlands). They are accused of 'physical injuries and immoral behaviour towards women' (ECR, The Netherlands) as well as 'massacring religious minorities' (ENF, France). The link to Christianity is particularly important for ECR MEPs from Poland, Croatia, Slovakia and the UK, ENF MEPs from Italy and Austria as well as EFDD MEPs from UK who outplay Christians against sexual minorities, contest abortion rights and same sex marriage. Conflict on these two issues, religious freedom and reproductive rights, is clearly

structured along the cultural axis. Interestingly, on these issues, Eurosceptics at times align with EPP MEPs stressing Christian values. Thus, Eurosceptics unite in the rejection of an EU foreign policy promoting and protecting human rights and democracy. Yet, they are visibly divided when it comes to the role and alliance with external powers. One group of Eurosceptics on the right vividly goes up against Russia (ECR). Another group of right and left Eurosceptics align in their critique of NATO and alliances partners—either for ignoring fundamental rights (USA, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, GUE/NGL) or by favouring the Turkish-Russian Alliance in Syria (ENF). A second issue on which Eurosceptics of the right (ECR) and left (GUE/NGL) concur is that the EU itself is causing human rights violations through its austerity measures and should therefore not claim to advocate human rights in its foreign policy. Yet, this issue has little overall visibility and seems important exclusively to southern European MEPs.

The second foreign affairs case is a Resolution on the 'Security challenges in the MENA region and prospects for political stability'. In contrast to the above initiative, this resolution addresses a limited set of countries (Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya). It advances a wide understanding of security challenges that include economic, political, social and democratic implications. Consequently, the resolution calls for strategic and multifaceted policies to support stability.

The Resolution is adopted on 9 July 2015. But only after the adoption of the amendments from opposing MEPs[4] and intervention by the rapporteur. The split running through the house is still visible in the final vote (400 For, 98 Against, 86 Abstentions). The vote is strongly polarised (0.92) and shows substantial Eurosceptic cohesion with 88% of Eurosceptic MEPs voting the same way. Regarding committee work, contestation is substantial. Clearly below average support for the report indicates polarisation in the responsible Foreign Affairs committee (45 For, 10 Against, 4 Abstentions).

Debate in the plenary is controversial with sizable groups of MEPs proposing further amendments. The debate highlights a number of contested issues that resemble the above case. Eurosceptics are united in their rejection of an EU foreign policy based on liberal values. They form a cohesive block when it comes to migration. Far right MEPs argue that under the cover of refugees, terrorists come to Europe (ECR and ENF) 'flooding the European continent' in a huge wave (ECR, Bulgaria). This position is shared by MEPs from the EPP. A similar alignment of

Eurosceptics on the right, supported by MEPs from conservative mainstream parties, can be observed for minority protection in the Muslim world. While EPP members critically highlight persecution, ECR MEPs from Poland and Slovakia link minority protection to a 'growing threat' of the Muslim world.

Differences within the Eurosceptic right prevail in terms of geopolitical alliances. The ECR accuses Turkish authorities of cooperation with the jihadists and human trafficking and praises Israeli military presence. Diametrically opposed, an EFDD MEP from Italy demands a stronger role of Turkey, while an ENF MEP from France and an EFDD MEP from UK call for cooperation with Russia and blame US interests as the main cause for instability in the region. The later issues find support in the Eurosceptic left, where an MEP from Spain stresses that economic liberalisation created chaos in the region for which the western security approach with its 'euphemisms, of "responsibility to protect" is to be blamed' (GUE/NGL). Mainstream parties distance themselves from this untidy opposition and reject the simplifying claims that western intervention rather than underlying economic, social and political factors are at the source of the destabilisation of the region.

In sum, both foreign policy cases indicate strong polarisation and Eurosceptic cohesion in the plenary vote that is matched by equally strong contestation in committee work. The plenary debate is more differentiated. Depending on the concrete issue raised, Eurosceptics can align a broad front against Europe that also potentially includes conservative mainstream allies (general stances and culturally loaded foreign policy issues), or they break ranks forming an untidy opposition (geopolitical issues).

Economic Regulation: Undermining Eurosceptic Cohesion

The 'International Procurement Initiative' was proposed by the Commission in 2012 under the ordinary legislative procedure. The initiative seeks to restrict access to the EU public procurement market for third countries not offering reciprocal access to their markets. Third country procurement markets remain frequently closed de facto or de jure, while the EU procurement market is open to foreign bidders. Restricting access to and competition on the EU procurement market, the proposal can be regarded as the EU's 'own version of a "Buy national" proposal' (Dawara, 2016, p. 845).

Not surprisingly, the Council met the legislative proposal with reserve. While part of the member states supported the proposal (most vociferously Greece), others are at best lukewarm (prominently Germany) or openly oppose (Spain) (AE, 2014c). They highlight the protectionist nature of the proposal and fear retaliation measures by powerful trading partners, most importantly by China. In the EP, the proposal is adopted in the plenary in January 2014. Similar to the Council, diverging views and splits result in a strongly polarised vote (scoring 0.79 and 0.8, cf. Fig. 5.1 for comparison) and medium Eurosceptic cohesion with 76% of Eurosceptic MEPs voting in line with the plurality in their camp. Committee work in the responsible Committee on International Trade underlines the contested nature of the proposal with an unusually strong split in the vote (63%, 19 For, 10 Against, 1 Abstention).

The plenary debate shows protectionism versus free trade as the most important dividing line. Mainstream parties (EPP and S&D) are largely in favour. But they face a wide range of opposing political groups that criticise the proposal. For Eurosceptics, the proposal is 'dangerous legislation' (ECR from UK) because it protects markets and attempts to transfer further powers to Brussels. It is similarly dangerous for Italian EFD members, however for different reasons, as 'it is always and only large companies in Northern Europe that benefit from greater openness'. A NI MEP supports this line and highlights the benefits of protectionisms 'to protect their jobs and their businesses'. Along this line, a Fidesz MEP stresses the need for 'socially sustainable public procurement' rather than a further liberalisation in European markets.

The own-initiative report on a 'Public Procurement Strategy Package' pursues a streamlining and digitalisation of the public procurement process. It is of seemingly technical nature, but the initiative is directly linked to broader changes in procurement politics: a strengthening of the principle of the most economically advantageous tender that favours social and green criteria in public procurement in contrast to the dominant practice of awarding public contracts based on the lowest price. This way the initiative aims at encouraging e.g. the employment of disabled or the use of non-toxic material. Also, a joint EU liability system requiring successful bidders to declare subcontracting was much debated (AE, 2014a).

The plenary adopts the text on 4 October 2018. During the vote in the plenary, no amendments are tabled and the whole text is adopted in a single vote. Unsurprisingly, polarisation in the vote is rather low (0.37), but Eurosceptic still vote relatively coherent with 59% of Eurosceptics

MEPs voting the same way. Work in the responsible lead committee on Internal Market and Consumer Protection seems to have run smoothly and the report is adopted with a strong majority in favour (28 For, 2 Against, 0 Abstention).

The plenary debate reflects strong support from the mainstream political groups (EPP and S&D) as well as the ECR. The Greens/EFA are generally supportive, but advocate exclusions of food from public procurement. Eurosceptic MEPs on the extreme right reject the proposal vehemently. The EFDD and ENF link economically left positions to cultural arguments about 'them' versus 'us'. In the context of public procurement, 'us' are national or local tenderers while European and international competitors are 'them'. Economic closure and economic left positions align when a British EFDD MEP calls for 'a new way to look at procurement to make sure taxpayers' money stays within the local area, creating jobs and ensuring local investment'. Along the same line, but replacing local with national interests, a French ENF MEP qualifies opening public procurement markets as a real problem for 'sovereignty and independence' while Eurosceptics 'intend to protect their country'. Yet, not all Eurosceptics are in favour of strengthening the state at the national level a Polish NI MEP explains when advocating to 'withdraw the state from anything that is not absolutely necessary'.

The two economic policy cases on public procurement differ in the level of contestation. For the International Procurement Initiative Eurosceptic contestation is loud and visible in the plenary. This seems to resonate with committee work as well. Anti-EU opposition strategically links the alleged Brussels power grasp in areas of national economic policy with socio-economically left positions. Yet, not all Eurosceptic political groups join the criticism of a market-liberal EU. This limits the cohesion of Eurosceptics and situates some of them close to the Europhile left with regard to green and social procurement criteria. Contestation of the Public Procurement Strategy Package is less visible but follows similar lines. MEPs criticise and oppose market-liberal Europe in the plenary debate on grounds of nationalist and local interests—again aligning the cultural cleavage with economically left positions.

The six cases from three diverse policy fields vary with regard to Eurosceptic contestation. The cultural cleavage that drives polarisation in the EP is mitigated by ideological and national diversity among Eurosceptics. This expectation was most clearly met in the field of economic policy. In contrast, foreign policy showed stronger Eurosceptic cohesion and

anti-discrimination policy lower Eurosceptic cohesion in votes than we would have expected for initiatives situated on the cultural axis. For anti-discrimination the lower than expected cohesion might be influenced by selecting policy processes that address minority rights in third countries rather than gender ideology within the EU. In foreign policy, in turn, substantial Eurosceptic cohesion in the vote comes along with rather split positions among members of Eurosceptics political groups in legislative debates. This indicates that studying votes might hide important differences within the Eurosceptic camp and overestimate Eurosceptic cohesion within the EP.

Our analysis of parliamentary behaviour only partly corroborates scholarly work based on election manifestos, official party programmes and other policy documents (Falkner & Plattner, 2019, pp. 729–730). Studying plenary debates, we find evidence for weak Eurosceptic cohesion in EU foreign policy regarding geopolitics. Yet, we also see Eurosceptics closing ranks in opposing foreign policies that touch upon issues of national sovereignty, migration or religion leading to cohesive Eurosceptic voting. In anti-discrimination policy, as suggested by the programmatic analysis (Falkner & Plattner, 2019, pp. 731–732), Eurosceptics frequently dissent when voting and debating in the plenary. Yet and unlike the literature suggests, the level of polarisation is rather low. Market regulation has so far received little attention in debates about Eurosceptic contestation. Unrightfully so, since our cases on public procurement reveal polarisation and medium Eurosceptic cohesion carrying the potential for alliance formation on the right as well as on the left of the classical political axis.

Conclusion

This chapter investigated how Eurosceptic contestation translates into voting behaviour in the EP and how the members of Eurosceptic parties engage in plenary debates. It argues that Eurosceptic contestation varies across policy fields. Our quantitative roll-call vote analysis (2009–2019) corroborates our expectation that the cultural cleavage driving polarisation in the EP is mitigated by the ideological and national diversity among Eurosceptics leading to different levels of polarisation and, to a lesser extent, undermining Eurosceptic cohesion. We complement this analysis with six case studies from three diverse policy fields that add to our understanding what contestation means for policy output and EU integration. Contestation is the loudest and Eurosceptic cohesion the strongest

regarding foreign policy issues, particularly where they touch on migration or religion and are thus clearly situated on the GAL/TAN axis. Yet, in other areas and on other issues, Eurosceptics are far from united when opposing the Europhile majority. Dissent among Eurosceptics occurs frequently, particularly where the cultural cleavage is less dominant or where it is diluted by ideological and national diversity (as is the case for public procurement policies, but also for our anti-discrimination cases).

The findings of this chapter contribute to a better understanding of Eurosceptic contestation in the EP in at least two ways. First, our cases show substantial contestation in the EP committees, but also variation across committees in different policy fields. Less than average support points at strong polarisation in at least four of the six cases (in one case we lack sufficient information). Only for economic policy did we find that expert negotiation behind closed doors showed less indication for contestation than behaviour in the plenary. This goes against the image of committees as arenas shielding parliamentary work from polemic controversies and signalling to voters. Even though we selected strongly contested cases, our findings cast some doubts on the domestication of Eurosceptics through procedures and deliberative practices in democratic institutions.

Second, not everything is lost amid the rise of Euroscepticism. Scholarship expecting Eurosceptics to undermine the working of the EP might be well-advised to expand their analysis from party programmes to legislative behaviour and to consider policy field differences more systematically. Democratic practices highlight substantial Eurosceptic dissent, but also flexible alliance formation. Interestingly, and depending on the policy at stake, we observe such behavioural affinity not only on the right with conservative forces from southern or eastern Europe, but also on the left, e.g. regarding economic nationalism or welfare chauvinism. We therefore suggest that electoral support for Eurosceptic parties should be analysed as part of a fundamental change in the EP that is no longer characterised by a pro-European oversized mainstream coalition but by flexible and inclusive majority building. Rather than simply undermining European integration, such democratic practices might allow Eurosceptic contestation to support responsiveness and contribute to a more differentiated European integration.

ANNEX

Case selection takes into account scores for Eurosceptic polarisation. For our three policy fields we proceeded in the following way:

- For anti-discrimination and minority rights, we searched all roll-call votes with 'discrim' in the title (total of seven in the 7th and 8th EP8), excluded cases that did not concern anti-discrimination and minority rights and selected the two topics with the highest level of Eurosceptic polarisation.
- For foreign policy, we selected all roll-call votes in foreign affairs that score at the highest level of Eurosceptic polarisation (27 cases with polarisation >90% in the 7th and 8th EP) and selected two processes on the basis of substance (one with a broad approach and one a specific topic).
- For economic policy, we searched all roll-call votes with 'utilities' or 'public services' or 'public procurement' in the title (total of 10 in the 7th and 8th EP), excluded cases related to public health and selected the two processes with the highest level of polarisation.

Note that one case might consist of multiple votes, most importantly where opposing MEPs tabled alternative proposals.

NOTES

1. Renamed as 'Renew Europe' (RE) in 2019.
2. Renamed as 'Identity and Democracy' in 2019.
3. We draw on the variable 'EU position', classifying national parties with scores under 4 as Eurosceptics, and those over 4 as Europhiles.
4. Amendments were tabled by individual MEPs not by political groups indicating that political groups were split internally.

References

AE. (2014a, January 15). *(EU) PUBLIC PROCUREMENT: EP Backs agreement on new legislation*. Agence Europe.

AE. (2014b, February 4). *(EU) JHA: EP gets its message across on LGTBI rights*. Agence Europe.

AE. (2014c, November 22). *(EU) TRADE: Council split over trade defence instruments and reciprocity*. Agence Europe.

Ahrens, P., & Woodward, A. (2020). Adjusting venues and voices: Populist and right-wing parties, the European Parliament and civil society equality organizations 2014–2019. *European Politics and Society*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2020.1801181

Bakker, R., Marks, G., Edwards, E., Polk, J., Hooghe, L., Rovny, J., Vachudova, M., & Steenbergen, M. (2015). Measuring party positions in Europe: The Chapel Hill Expert Survey Trend File, 1999–2010. *Party Politics, 21*(1), 143–152. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068812462931

Bergmann, J., Hackenesch, C., & Stockemer, D. (2021). Populist radical right parties in Europe: What impact do they have on development policy? *Journal of Common Market Studies, 59*(1), 37–52. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13143

Braun, D., Hutter, S., & Kerscher, A. (2016). What type of Europe? The salience of polity and policy issues in European Parliament elections. *European Union Politics, 17*(4), 570–592. https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116516660387

Broniecki, P., & Obholzer, L. (2020). *Substantive representation of Euroscepticism: Contesting European integration within the European Parliament*. Paper presented at the SCRIPTS workshop on Eurosceptic Contestations in EU Legislative Politics.

Cavallaro, M., Flacher, D., & Zanetti, M. A. (2018). Radical right parties and European economic integration: Evidence from the seventh European Parliament. *European Union Politics, 19*(2), 321–343. https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116518760241

Chiru, M., & Stoian, V. (2019). Liberty: Security dilemmas and party cohesion in the European Parliament. *Journal of Common Market Studies, 57*(5), 921938. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12852

Costello, R., & Thomson, R. (2016). Bicameralism, nationality and party cohesion in the European Parliament. *Party Politics, 22*(6), 773–783. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068814563972

Dawara, K. (2016). The 2016 EU international procurement instrument's amendments to the 2012 buy European proposal: A retrospective assessment of its prospects. *Journal of World Trade, 50*(5), 845–865.

de Wilde, P., Koopmans, R., & Zürn, M. (2014). *The political sociology of cosmopolitanism and communitarianism: Representative claims analysis*. Discussion Papers, Research Unit: Global Governance SP IV 2014-102, WZB

Berlin Social Science Center. https://ideas.repec.org/p/zbw/wzbtci/spiv20 14102.html

Diermeier, M., Frohwein, H., & Nau, A. (2021). *Assessing one for one and none for all—The radical right in the European Parliament*. LEQS – LSE 'Europe in Question' Discussion Paper Series 167. European Institute, LSE.

Falkner, G., & Plattner, G. (2019). EU Policies and populist radical right parties' programmatic claims: Foreign policy, anti-discrimination, and the single market. *Journal of Common Market Studies, 58*(3), 723–739. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12963

Genschel, P., & Jachtenfuchs, M. (Eds.). (2014). *Beyond the regulatory polity. The European integration of core state powers*. Oxford University Press.

Garssen, B. (2016). Problem-solving argumentative patterns in plenary debates of the European Parliament. *Argumentation, 30*(1), 25–43. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10503-015-9378-y

Grande, E., & Hutter, S. (2016). Introduction: European integration and the challenge of politicisation. In S. Hutter, E. Grande, & H. Kriesi (Eds.), *Politicising Europe* (pp. 3–31). Cambridge University Press.

Häge, F. M., & Ringe, N. (2019). Rapporteur-shadow rapporteur networks in the European Parliament: The strength of small numbers. *European Journal of Political Research, 58*(1), 209–235. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12277

Halikiopoulou, D., Nanou, K., & Vasilopoulou, S. (2012). The paradox of nationalism: The common denominator of radical right and radical left euroscepticism. *European Journal of Political Research, 51*(4), 504–539. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2011.02050.x

Hix, S., Noury, A., & Roland, G. (2005). Power to the parties: Cohesion and competition in the European Parliament, 1979–2001. *British Journal of Political Science, 35*(2), 209–234.

Hix, S., Noury, A., & Roland, G. (Eds.) (2007). *Democratic politics in the European Parliament*. Cambridge University Press.

Hooghe, L., Marks, G., & Wilson, C. J. (2002). Does left/right structure party positions on European integration? *Comparative Political Studies, 35*(8), 965–989. https://doi.org/10.1177/001041402236310

Kantola, J., & Lombardo, E. (2019). Populism and feminist politics: The cases of Finland and Spain. *European Journal of Political Research, 58*(4), 1108–1128. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12333

Kantola, J., & Lombardo, E. (2020). Strategies of right populists in opposing gender equality in a polarized European Parliament. *International Political Science Review*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512120963953

Kantola, J., & Rolandsen Agustín, L. (2019). Gendering the representative work of the European Parliament: A political analysis of women MEP's perceptions

of gender equality in party groups. *Journal of Common Market Studies, 57*(4), 768–786. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12885

Kriesi, H., Grande, E., Lachat, R., Dolezal, M., Bornschier, S., & Frey, T. (2008). *West European politics in the age of globalization*. Cambridge University Press.

Lewis, J. (2010). How institutional environments facilitate co-operative negotiation styles in EU decision-making. *Journal of European Public Policy, 17*(5), 648–664. https://doi.org/10.1080/13501761003748591

Marks, G., Wilson, C. J., & Ray, L. (2002). National political parties and European integration. *American Journal of Political Science, 46*(3), 585594. https://doi.org/10.2307/3088401

Pirro, A. L. P., & Taggart, P. (2018). The populist politics of Euroscepticism in times of crisis: A framework for analysis. *Politics, 38*(3), 253–262. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263395718770579

Polk, J., Rovny, J., Bakker, R., Edwards, E., Hooghe, L., Jolly, S., Koedam, J., Kostelka, F., Marks, G., Schumacher, G., Steenbergen, M., Vachudova, M., & Zilovic, M. (2017). Explaining the salience of anti-elitism and reducing political corruption for political parties in Europe with the 2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey data. *Research & Politics, 4*(1), 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1177/2053168016686915

Ripoll Servent, A. (2019). The European Parliament after the 2019 elections: Testing the boundaries of the 'cordon sanitaire'. *Journal of Contemporary European Research, 15*(4), 331–342. https://doi.org/10.30950/jcer.v15i4.1121

Settembri, P., & Neuhold, C. (2009). Achieving consensus through committees: Does the European Parliament manage? *Journal of Common Market Studies, 47*(1), 127–151. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2008.01835.x

Slapin, J. B., & Proksch, S.-O. (2010). Look who's talking: Parliamentary debate in the European Union. *European Union Politics, 11*(3), 333–357. https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116510369266

Warasin, M., Agustin, L., Kantola, J., & Coughlan, C. (2019). Politicisation of gender equality in the European Parliament. Cohesion and inter-group coalitions on plenary and committees. In P. Ahrens & L. Rolandsen Agustín (Eds.), *Gendering the European Parliament. Structures, policies, and practices* (pp. 141–158). ECPR Press/Rowman & Littlefield.

Whitaker, R., Hix, S., & Zapryanova, G. (2017). Understanding members of the European Parliament: Four waves of the European Parliament Research Group MEP survey. *European Union Politics, 18*(3), 491–506. https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116516687399

When Words Do Not Follow Deeds: An Analysis of Party Competition Between Centre-Right and Eurosceptic Radical-Right Parties in the European Parliament

Ariadna Ripoll Servent

Introduction

The rise in Eurosceptic and populist challenger parties has transformed domestic party systems and put more pressure on mainstream centre-right parties to keep hold of their voters. With more polarisation and a shift away from traditional left-right cleavages (Hooghe & Marks, 2018), centre-right parties in the European Union are increasingly struggling to stay in power and face difficult decisions about how to deal with radical-right challengers. While including challenger parties in coalitions might lead to securing office, it risks radicalising the policies of centre-right parties, legitimising the messages of radical right parties and,

A. Ripoll Servent (✉)
University of Salzburg, Salzburg, Austria
e-mail: ariadna.ripoll@plus.ac.at

thereby, reinforcing these challengers even further in electoral contests (Arzheimer & Carter, 2006; Bale, 2003; Down & Han, 2020).

In the European Parliament (EP), the centre-right faces similar trade-offs, although the choices between office, policy and votes are different to those of national political systems. The EP has witnessed increasing polarisation and politicisation during the last legislative terms, which has led to more ideological diversity, more pressure from the extremes of the political spectrum and more difficulties to form coalitions. Particularly on issues directly connected with social values, the European People's Party (EPP) often faces this dilemma: should it form a coalition with radical-right groups that are closer to its traditional values or should it sacrifice its ideology and vote together with other mainstream groups like the Socialist and Democrats (S&D), liberals (Renew, formerly ALDE) and Greens, which tend to hold more liberal values? This struggle is compounded by the growing divisions within the EPP group—with some of its national delegations becoming ideologically closer to radical-right challenger parties than to its mainstream Christian-democratic core (Kelemen, 2020). Therefore, it is important to understand to what extent the historical efforts to separate mainstream and radical right groups with a 'cordon sanitaire' are also visible in the EPP's behaviour as well as the content of its positions.

The chapter argues that the extremist reputation of the radical-right challengers largely explains why the EPP avoids engaging with them in legislative work; at the same time, it shows that the group actively co-opts the ideas of the radical right, especially in particularly politicised policy areas like migration. With a content analysis of legislative amendments from two files negotiated during the 2014–2019 legislature—the Eurodac Regulation (2016/0132/COD) and the Qualifications Regulation (2016/0223/COD)—the chapter examines whether and under which conditions the positions of the EPP can be clearly delimited from those of radical-right challengers. These two files allow us to compare dynamics of cooperation and competition in a highly politicised policy area prone to political capture by the radical right. The second section of the chapter examines the strategies of centre-right parties towards radical-right challengers and is followed by the third section, which applies these strategies to the context of the European Parliament and the EPP in particular. The fourth section explains the data and methods used for the two case studies analysed in section five.

Inclusion and Exclusion of Radical Right Challengers: Understanding the Strategies of the Centre-Right

Party systems in European democracies have transformed significantly in the last two decades. From the catchall party systems dominated by a conservative/Christian-democrat and a social-democrat camp, it has become more complex, both in the number of issues and parties. On the one hand, the traditional left-right economic divide has been expanded to cover other ideological cleavages, notably what Hooghe and Marks (2018) call the Green-Alternative-Libertarian vs Traditional-Authoritarian-Nationalist (GAL/TAN) divide. Parties outside of the mainstream have captured this new emerging cleavage; on the TAN side, radical-right parties have revitalised the anti-immigration, anti-modernisation and, often, anti-EU message (Rooduijn & van Kessel, 2019).

As a result, centre-right parties often face a choice between excluding and including radical-right challengers. First, they can opt to exclude them—what has also been defined as disengagement—in order to portray the challenger as a pariah and, thereby, stigmatise it as too extremist in the eyes of voters (Akkerman & Rooduijn, 2015; Downs, 2001; Meguid, 2005; van Spanje, 2018). Generally, this strategy has taken the form of a 'cordon sanitaire', whereby mainstream parties systematically refuse to collaborate with radical-right challengers. However, Akkerman and Rooduijn (2015) show that the success of the 'cordon sanitaire' is mixed, since its use is often linked to historical legacies and to inherited 'extremist reputations': newer parties that have not yet won an extremist reputation are often welcomed as coalition partners, even if they share similar radical ideologies to older parties that fall victim to the cordon sanitaire.

The second option is to include (or engage with) radical-right challengers with the hope that accommodating their ideas and including them in government might lead to more moderate policies and behaviour (Akkerman & Rooduijn, 2015; Downs, 2001; Meguid, 2005; van Spanje, 2018). This strategy does not come without risks: Comparative research has shown that the attempt to steal the ownership of issues traditionally captured by radical-right challengers—especially anti-immigration and anti-EU discourses—often leads to a process of 'contagion' that helps legitimise and mainstream these positions in the political debate (Abou-Chadi & Krause, 2020; Bale, 2003; Dahlström & Sundell, 2012;

Downes & Loveless, 2018; Meijers & Williams, 2020; Minkenberg, 2013). This often forces centre-right parties to become more radical, which increases the bipolarisation of the party system and often backlashes by providing an even wider electoral support to radical-right challengers (Arzheimer & Carter, 2006; de Lange, 2012).

In sum, the literature sees both radical-right challengers and centre-right mainstream parties playing a balancing act between office-, vote- and policy-seeking strategies. Their choices change the mutual opportunity structures and are mediated by informal factors like reputations and perceptions about voters' preferences (Akkerman et al., 2016).

Strategies of the EPP in the European Parliament

The strand of research discussed in the previous section focuses on domestic party systems and is only partially applicable to the dynamics of decision-making in the European Parliament. First, given that the EP elections do not lead to the formation of a government, political groups in Parliament are not structured around a government/opposition cleavage. Instead, coalitions are generally based on policy issues and highly instable (Ripoll Servent, 2019a). Added to this, mainstream groups continue to uphold the tradition of applying a cordon sanitaire against those parties that have an extremist reputation. This means that the hard Eurosceptic/radical-right groups[1] are systematically excluded from offices like vice-presidencies, committee chairpersonships, rapporteurships as well as legislative work (Ripoll Servent, 2019a; Ripoll Servent & Panning, 2019). In contrast, the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group was perceived as more engaged and respectable than the ENF (McDonnell & Werner, 2018) and was regularly included in legislative work (Ripoll Servent & Panning, 2019). Therefore, it is expected that the EPP will join forces with them rather than with the ENF (office-seeking expectation).

Second, compared to national party systems, political groups in the EP cannot as easily speculate about the electoral consequences of their choices. The second-order nature of EP elections and the weaker link between members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and their voters is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, a coalition between centre-right and radical-right parties might be less visible and hence less likely to be punished by those constituents who do not wish to see these pacts come into being; on the other hand, efforts to engage with the radical

right might go unnoticed and not have the desired effects of warding off competition (cf. Reif & Schmitt, 1980). Despite these limitations, previous research has shown that the EPP is not immune to a 'parroting' strategy, in which it imitates the messages of the radical right in highly politicised issues (Ripoll Servent & Panning, 2021). Therefore, it is expected that, in areas prone to radical-right capture, the EPP will co-opt these issues but that it will do so with its own style (or flavouring) in order to make their messages more credible and avoid a backlash in subsequent European elections (cf. Treib, 2020) (vote-seeking expectation).

Third, compared to national political parties, EP political groups are much less unitary. Certainly, there are many flavours to centre-right domestic parties, which often struggle with ideological cohesion (Gidron & Ziblatt, 2019). However, these tensions are all the more noticeable in a group composed (during the 2014–2019 eighth legislative term) of 51 political parties coming from all 28 member states. The EPP has often prioritised size before ideology, which has raised tensions between its core Christian-democratic origins and other forms of conservatism imported by parties in each round of enlargement (Bardi et al., 2020). These tensions have become particularly noticeable in the eighth legislative term, especially when it comes to issues of rule of law and democratic backsliding (Kelemen, 2020). Indeed, the wide ideological range within the EPP and the presence of Eurosceptic and populist parties like Hungarian Fidesz offered both new challenges but also new opportunities for collaborating with the radical right. Therefore, it is expected that the EPP will attempt to collaborate with radical-right challengers in areas closer to the TAN side of the political spectrum (e.g. immigration, welfare state, values related to family and tradition, etc.), where they share similar ideologies (policy-seeking expectation).

Data and Methods

The chapter focuses on two legislative files within one legislative package (aiming to reform the Common European Asylum System) that vary in the scope they offer for politicising migration and collaborating with the radical-right. Since migration is a particularly salient issue for radical-right parties (cf. Bale, 2008), the two case studies (Qualifications and Eurodac Regulations) allow us to assess whether issue-ownership (migration) had an impact on the EPP's strategies of inclusion and exclusion vis-à-vis radical-right challengers.

In order to better understand how the EPP engages with other TAN parties, the chapter uses a content analysis of the amendments submitted by the EPP, the ECR and the ENF to the Commission's legislative proposals (see Ripoll Servent & Panning, 2021 for an analysis of engagement and disengagement beyond TAN groups). Committee members enjoy an informational advantage when submitting amendments, which means that they are more likely to influence the EP mandate; however, committees do not enjoy exclusive rights when amendments are submitted to the plenary and cannot protect those previously agreed in committee (Yordanova, 2013 see also Rule 180 and 181 in the EP'S Rules of Procedure). A content analysis of amendments allows us to examine both collaborations between the EPP and radical-right challengers (for instance in the form of co-sponsorships) as well as overlaps in the content of policy proposals (Baller, 2017). Co-sponsorships of amendments are not rare in the EP; Baller (2017) estimated that around one quarter of amendments are written by more than one MEP and that their main purpose is to signal pre-voting coalitions to plenary, the party group and/or constituents.

In order to examine the interaction between the EPP and radical-right groups, the empirical analysis offers first a descriptive quantitative overview detailing the number of amendments as well as their survival rate—both at the committee stage (i.e. integration into the EP's report) and in inter-institutional negotiations with the Council and the Commission (trilogues). The reform of the EU's asylum system has been deadlocked since June 2018, therefore, the assessment of survival in trilogues is based on the latest version (18 June 2018 for Qualifications and 21 June 2018; 21 January 2019 for Eurodac) of the four-column documents used to trace agreements in negotiations. To calculate the survival rate, two scales were adopted: for the intra-institutional negotiations, the amendments were counted as 1 when included in the EP report or as 0 when voted down. Given the absence of a formal vote in trilogues and the broader scope for negotiations, a scale is used to assess to what extent an EP amendment has been incorporated into the final agreement; an amendment receives 0.25 if only a small detail has been incorporated; 0.75 if almost everything has been incorporated and 1 if it has been incorporated in its entirety. It is important to note that the survival rate does not necessarily reflect the success of the EP in inter-institutional negotiations, given that the EP cannot propose amendments on any new text added during trilogue negotiations (cf. Yordanova, 2013).

The second step analyses the content of the amendments made to the recitals of the legislative proposal. Recitals are essential to understand the legal and normative justifications underpinning the Commission's legislative proposal. The content analysis of recitals has been done inductively and analyses amendments as a whole and not as separate keywords or phrases. The aim is to identify co-sponsored amendments as well as any overlaps in the positions of the groups when amendments on the same recital have been submitted separately. In order to better contextualise the behaviour of the groups, the content analysis is complemented with elite interviews done with EP actors who participated in legislative negotiations (see the list at the end of the chapter).

Strategies in the Asylum Reform Package

The Qualifications and Eurodac Regulations are part of a broader legislative package aiming to reform the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). The Commission's initiative came as a response to the 2015 'refugee crisis' and aimed to address the gaps left by the failure to introduce relocation quotas (Zaun, 2018). The package was formed of eight directives and regulations that aimed to consolidate existing legislative framework and add new provisions on the resettlement of asylum-seekers from outside the EU. Although the EP managed to formulate a negotiation mandate for all the files, the package was so politicised in the European Council, that negotiations were largely blocked after June 2018 (Ripoll Servent, 2019b). Some files had already been discussed extensively in trilogues, where a partial political agreement had been concluded; however, the EP insisted in maintaining a 'package approach', which meant that files should not be passed separately. By early 2019, trilogues petered out and no solution could be found by the end of the eighth legislative term (Interviews 4, 7, 8).

Qualifications Regulation (2016/0223/COD)

The Qualifications Directive aims to establish common rules on who should receive asylum or other forms of international protection. The main goal of the Commission was to transform the directive into a regulation in order to strengthen the harmonisation of decisions at the national level—which tend to diverge largely and lead to an 'asylum lottery' (Asylum Information Database, 2015). Since the definition provided by

the text determines largely how many people might potentially qualify for international protection, the text has tended to oppose GAL groups—which aim to expand the scope—and TAN groups—which tend to limit the definition and hence the number of people allowed to stay in the EU. Therefore, the issue of qualification is open to radical-right capture, since it touches upon core notions of in- and out-group and who deserves to stay in the EU.

Tanja Fajon (Slovenia, S&D), an active member of the civil liberties (LIBE) committee[2] since 2009, acted as rapporteur for the file. For the EPP, Alessandra Mussolini (Forza Italia, Italy) acted as shadow rapporteur, while the ECR was represented by Jussi Halla-aho (The Finns Party, Finland) and the EFDD by Fabio Massimo Castaldo, member of the Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S), which has to be considered a special case and cannot be equated with the positions held by other parties in the group (cf. Ripoll Servent & Panning, 2019). The ENF did not appoint a shadow rapporteur.

Table 6.1 shows how, despite being a controversial proposal, Fajon formed a strong coalition supported by most mainstream groups, although the EPP was heavily divided. The radical-right challengers all voted against or abstained. Therefore, the rapporteur oriented herself towards the GAL groups, with the EPP accepting this, probably due to their internal divisions (Interview 2). This bias can also be seen in the survival rate of amendments (Table 6.2) and explains why the rapporteur struggled to keep the EP's amendments—seen as too liberal by most member states—in the final political agreement (cf. Ripoll Servent & Panning, 2021).

Table 6.2 shows that the EPP was much less active than left-wing GAL groups like the Greens and the GUE/NGL and its amendments fared

Table 6.1 Votes in the LIBE Committee on the Qualifications Regulation Report (15/06/2017)

	EPP	S&D	ALDE	Greens/EFA	GUE/NGL	ECR	M5S	EFDD	ENF	Total
Yes	11	15	5	4	3	0	2	0	0	40
No	5	0	0	0	0	2	0	3	3	13
Abst	1	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	4

Source European Parliament; in bold, the group of the rapporteur; in italics cells, votes of TAN groups

Table 6.2 Survival of amendments for the qualifications regulation

EPP	S&D	ALDE	Greens/EFA	GUE/NGL	ECR	M5S	EFDD	ENF	EPP*ECR	GUE/NGL* Greens/EFA	EFDD*ENF	Total
Total EP amendments												
67	**112**	56	157	149	*99*	*42*	*56*	*15*	*37*	7	*1*	798
8.4%	**14.04%**	*7.02%*	*19.67%*	18.67%	*12.41%*	*5.26%*	*7.02%*	*1.88%*	*4.51%*	*0.88%*	*0.13%*	100%
Amendments incorporated in EP report												
14	**93**	33	57	68	*4*	24	0	0	*8*	1	0	302
4.64%	**30.79%**	*10.93%*	18.87%	22.52%	*1.32%*	*7.95%*	*0*	*0*	*2.65%*	*0.33%*	*0*	100%
Amendments incorporated into four-column document												
6	**37.75**	11	16.25	21.75	*1*	6	0	0	*3.75*	0	0	103.5
5.8%	**36.47%**	*10.63%*	15.7%	21.01%	*0.97%*	*5.8%*	*0*	*0*	*3.62%*	*0*	*0*	100%

Source European Parliament; in bold, the group of the rapporteur; in italics cells, amendments of TAN groups

worse than ALDE, which shows over twice a rate of success in the EP report. This is probably indicative that the EPP made a conscious choice to focus its efforts elsewhere, where it could have more influence (as the second case shows), and minimise the splits within the group. Also for the ECR, there is a considerable gap between the number of amendments proposed and those accepted in the report (12.41% compared to 1.32%). What is also interesting to observe is the systematic use of a cordon sanitaire against the ENF and the EFDD members—other than the MEPs belonging to M5S, which is closer to GAL groups.

The table also shows an active collaboration between the EPP and ECR co-sponsoring amendments. This confirms the office-seeking expectation, which foresaw an alliance between the EPP and the more moderate soft Eurosceptic radical-right, although the inter-group cooperation affected only a sub-set of MEPs, namely Artis Pabriks (EPP, Partija 'VIENOTĪBA', Latvia), Traian Ungureanu (EPP, Partidul Naţional Liberal, Romania), Tomáš Zdechovský (EPP, Křesťanská a demokratická unie—Československá strana lidová, Czech Republic), Kinga Gál (EPP, Fidesz, Hungary), Pál Csáky (EPP, Strana maďarskej komunity-Magyar Közösség Pártja, Slovakia) and Monica Macovei (ECR, Independent, Romania). The latter had been a member of the EPP until October 2015, when she switched parties and moved to the ECR. The content analysis shows that the co-sponsored amendments had a clear Eurosceptic and anti-immigrant tone. Most tried to water down harmonisation and any shared (financial) responsibility among member states. It also tried to undo any new elements in the new Commission proposal that would enhance the rights of migrants, such as enlarging the criteria of protection to cover specific social groups (e.g. members of the LGBTI community) (Am. 195/196). The co-sponsored amendments were even more anti-migrant than those proposed by the ECR shadow rapporteur (member of the radical-right party the Finns Party), who at least acknowledged the concept of a social group (Am. 197). This EPP–ECR coalition was also more radical than other EPP members: for instance, on the issue of internal protection, which determines that international protection can be denied if a part of the country of origin is deemed safe (as is often the case now with Afghanistan), the EPP–ECR group wanted to shift the burden of proof away from member states—so that it would fall on asylum-seekers to prove that the country is unsafe in its entirety (Am. 187). In contrast, another group of EPP members (Alessandra Mussolini, Italy, shadow rapporteur; Elissavet Vozemberg-Vrionidi, Greece; Frank Engel,

Luxembourg; Barbara Matera, Italy; Salvatore Domenico Pogliese, Italy and Carlos Coelho, Portugal) accepted that the burden falls on member states but added: 'However, the applicant should collaborate with the determining authority in order to establish whether the conditions for internal protection are satisfied in a part of his/her country of origin' (Am. 186), which is a much lighter requirement on asylum-seekers and was supplemented by a requirement to take the best interest of children into account (Am. 189). As a comparison, ECR's Halla-aho proposed as amendment that '[t]he burden of demonstrating the unavailability of internal protection should fall on the applicant' (Am. 188).

The content analysis of the recitals also shows that TAN groups put more emphasis on the issue of 'secondary movements' (going from one member state to another) and grounds for exclusion linked to terrorism and national security. Indeed, these three excerpts show a significant overlap between the amendments produced by the EPP, ECR and ENF:

> [...] Such a policy [asylum] should be governed by the *principle of affordability*, taking into account the *absorption capacities* of the receiving societies as well as maximal *self-reliance of the beneficiaries* of international protection. (Amendment 109, Jussi Halla-aho, ECR, shadow rapporteur, emphasis added)

> For a well-functioning CEAS, including of the Dublin system, substantial progress should be made towards a *radical change of the entire immigration policy*; to that end, return policies should be strengthened to ensure that protection is *only granted to those who are entitled to it*. (Amendment 122, Lorenzo Fontana, ENF, emphasis added)

> Clarifying the criteria for identifying persons *genuinely in need of international protection* should also enable persons who are not entitled to such protection to be *deported more efficiently* and systematically. (Amendment 132, Nadine Morano, EPP, emphasis added)

In all three cases, there is a clear reference to restricting the right to seek international protection to 'deserving' applicants, which is a typical nativist position linked to radical-right parties.

The GAL-TAN divide was also very visible on the issue of terrorism as a ground for withholding international protection (Interviews 1, 5). As an illustration, amendments to recital 31 (Table 6.3) were submitted by both the EPP and EFDD.

Table 6.3 Comparison of Amendments to Recital 31 (Qualifications Regulation)

Text proposed by the commission	Amendment
Committing a political crime is not in principle a ground justifying exclusion from refugee status. However, in accordance with relevant case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union, particularly cruel actions, where the act in question is disproportionate to the alleged political objective, and terrorist acts which are characterised by their violence towards civilian populations, even if committed with a purportedly political objective, should be regarded as non-political crimes and therefore can give rise to exclusion from refugee status	Committing a political crime *could be grounds for* justifying exclusion from refugee status. (Am. 205, Beatrix von Storch, EFDD, Alternative für Deutschland, Germany) Committing a political crime is not in principle a ground justifying exclusion from refugee status. However, in accordance with relevant case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union, particularly cruel actions, where the act in question is disproportionate to the alleged political objective, and terrorist acts which are characterised by their violence towards civilian populations, even if committed with a purportedly political objective, should be regarded as non-political crimes and therefore *should* give rise to exclusion from refugee status. (Am. 206, Jeroen Lenaers, EPP, Christen Democratisch Appèl, The Netherlands) *(31 a) The Court of Justice of the European Union clearly stated in its Judgement Commissaire général aux réfugiés et aux apatrides /Mostafa Lounani that supporting a terrorist group or the conduct of a terror act is sufficient reason to exclude an applicant for international protection from the status of a refugee or from granting subsidiary protection.* (Am. 207, Monika Hohlmeier, EPP; Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern, Germany)

The last amendment (207) referred to rather controversial case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union (Kosińska, 2017), which helped the EPP substantiate its calls for an inclusion of terrorism as a ground for exclusion. Therefore, although none of the amendments proposed by right-wing groups were included directly into the EP report, the issue of terrorism was intensively debated and, in the end, a mention of terrorism and being part of a terrorist organisation as grounds for

exclusion was maintained in the EP report (Am. 26, 27, 41 in A8-0245/2017). The EPP group saw this as a major victory (Interview 5), which indicates their conscious effort to 'parrot' and capture a security-oriented position usually promoted by radical-right challengers.

In sum, the content analysis of amendments shows a large overlap among TAN groups, a clear sign of polarisation on the GAL/TAN cleavage. This confirms the policy-seeking expectation: the intense collaboration between the more radical wings of the EPP (made up mostly of parties from Central and Eastern Europe) and the more moderate members of the ECR (Macovei) sought to push a common TAN agenda. However, in line with the vote-seeking expectation, although the goals and rhetoric were very similar, the EPP often tried to add its own 'flavour' by appealing to some fundamental rights provisions (notably on the protection and best interests of children) and using case law to justify their choices.

Eurodac Regulation (2016/0132/COD)

Eurodac is a technical support to help member states in implementing the Dublin system, which determines the member state responsible for an application for international protection. Eurodac stores the fingerprints of applicants in a database and allows member states to check whether someone has already requested protection in another country. The main issue in the new proposal was the extension of Eurodac to cover other forms of biometric data as well as other purposes other than international protection, notably irregular immigration and return procedures. Therefore, the measure was particularly liked by member states and more attractive for TAN groups, since it resonated with their security-led positions and raised few concerns on the pro-anti-EU dimension.

The Eurodac Regulation was led by Monica Macovei (Romania, Independent, ECR), also a member of the LIBE committee since 2009, who shifted from the EPP to the ECR in October 2015. Jeroen Lenaers (Christen Democratisch Appèl, The Netherlands) was shadow rapporteur for the EPP and, as in the previous case, Fabio Massimo Castaldo (M5S) was shadow for the EFDD—and hence not representative of the radical-right wing of the group. In this case, the ENF did not appoint a shadow rapporteur either.

As Table 6.4 shows, the report also gathered wide support, mostly coming from TAN groups, this time splitting the S&D almost in half.

Table 6.4 Votes in the LIBE Committee on the Eurodac Regulation Report (30/05/2017)

	EPP	S&D	ALDE	Greens	GUE/NGL	ECR	M5S	EFDD	ENF	Total
Yes	*15*	8	4	0	0	*6*	0	*1*	*0*	34
No	*0*	1	0	4	4	*0*	0	*0*	1	10
Abst	*0*	6	1	0	0	*0*	1	*0*	*0*	8

Source European Parliament; in bold, the group of the rapporteur; in italics cells, votes of TAN groups

Therefore, while Qualifications had a clear GAL bias, Eurodac showed the opposite trend.

Indeed, as Table 6.5 shows, the EP report reflected mostly the positions of the EPP and the ECR. ALDE had the highest survival rate when it came to the EP report, but it should be noted that the majority were changes aiming to incorporate provisions on resettlement and, therefore, proposed exactly the same modifications in several articles. In comparison, the Greens, which had proposed the most amendments (over 25%) were largely disregarded in the report (8.6% survival rate). As in the previous case, the very few ENF amendments were systematically disregarded and the non-M5S members of the EFDD did not even submit amendments.

The TAN coalition is translated into easier inter-institutional negotiations—since the report largely reflected the positions of member states. It is, indeed, interesting to compare the mandates of the EP and the Council, since the texts largely overlap. This means that rapporteur and Council had already been in contact before political trilogues started and that, either the rapporteur incorporated amendments proposed by the Council or the Council incorporated the amendments of the rapporteur into their mandate for negotiations (for a very clear example, see Amendment 58 introducing a new article on the Operational Management of DubliNet). In some cases, amendments that had not been accepted in the LIBE committee reappeared in the final inter-institutional agreement (e.g. Am. 33, 54)—which shows how close the rapporteur was to the Council. It is also interesting to see that over 56% of the amendments proposed by the EP were integrated into the final text (which is an unusually high rate) and that most of those coming from GAL groups were disregarded.

When it comes to the content of the amendments made to the recitals, there is a clear GAL/TAN divide. Left-wing GAL groups stressed

Table 6.5 Amendment Survival for the Eurodac Regulation

EPP	S&D	ALDE	Greens/EFA	GUE/NGL	ECR	M5S	EFDD	ENF	EPP*S&D*ALDE	EPP*ALDE	Total
Total EP amendments											
89	46	99	115	34	**60**	5	0	3	3	1	455
19.56%	10.11%	21.76%	25.27%	7.47%	**13.19%**	1.10%	0	0.66%	0.66%	0.22%	100%
Amendments incorporated in EP report											
42	24	61	16	2	**40**	1	0	0	0	0	186
22.58%	12.90%	32.80%	8.60%	1.08%	**21.51%**	0.54%	0	0	0	0	100%
Amendments incorporated in four-column document											
26.5	4	37.5	5.5	0	**31.5**	0	0	0	0	0	105
25.24%	3.81%	35.71%	5.24%	0	**30%**	0	0	0	0	0	100%

Source European Parliament; in bold, the group of the rapporteur; in italics cells, amendments of TAN groups

the need to integrate the jurisprudence of the European courts and tried to tone down the anti-immigration tone of some recitals that mentioned secondary movements and returns. The support of ALDE shifted depending on the MEP and the topic: while the more GAL-leaning parties within the group aligned themselves with the left-wing groups on issues of data protection and fundamental rights, the more TAN-leaning ones supported the positions of the ECR and the EPP on improving the interoperability of databases. Other radical-right groups (ENF and the right-wing of the EFDD) did not submit any amendments to the recitals.

The ECR rapporteur was in charge of writing the draft report, which meant that there was no possibility to co-sponsor amendments (since the latter come as a reaction to the rapporteur's position). However, the EPP amendments generally parroted—often word by word—the content proposed by the rapporteur. For instance, the rapporteur insisted on the interoperability of different databases to fight crime and the necessity to give access to Europol (Am. 7 and 9)—a position shared and even more strongly emphasised by the EPP (Am. 89, 92, 93, 102). In some amendments, we see how close the wording was:

> It is acknowledged that law enforcement authorities and Europol do not always have the biometric data of the perpetrator or victim whose case they are investigating, which may hamper their ability to check biometric matching databases such as Eurodac. In order to contribute further to investigations of those authorities and Europol, search based on alphanumeric data should be allowed in Eurodac in such cases, in particular where those authorities and Europol may possess evidence of the criminal suspect or victim's personal details or identity documents. (Am. 9. Monica Macovei, ECR, rapporteur)

> Although comparisons based on fingerprint and facial image data result in search results of greater accuracy, *it is acknowledged that law enforcement authorities and Europol do not always* possess the fingerprint and facial image data of suspects or victims *whose case they are investigating, which* could *hamper their ability to* match fingerprints and facial images in *databases such as Eurodac. In order to contribute further to the investigations of those authorities and Europol, searches based on alphanumeric data should be allowed in Eurodac in such cases, in particular where those authorities and Europol possess evidence of the criminal suspect or victim's personal details or*

identity documents. (Am.102, Jeroen Lenaers, EPP, shadow rapporteur, emphasis added)

In addition, both ECR and EPP replaced fingerprints with biometric and alphanumeric data throughout the recitals and included stateless persons, which clearly broadened the scope of the Regulation. The EPP went even further than the ECR and introduced amendments that would allow member states to use Eurodac data for the prosecution of serious crimes like terrorism (Amendments 98 and 101). They expanded the Commission's definition by adding that '[t]he information contained in Eurodac is necessary for the purposes of the prevention, detection, investigation *or prosecution* of terrorist offences as referred to in *Directive (EU) 2017/... of the European Parliament and of the Council [combating terrorism and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/475/JHA and amending Council Decision 2005/671/JHA]*' (Am. 98, Monika Hohlmeier, Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern, Germany; Heinz K. Becker, Österreichische Volkspartei, Austria; Jeroen Lenaers, Christen Democratisch Appèl, The Netherlands; Rachida Dati, Les Républicains, France; Brice Hortefeux, Les Républicains, France; Mariya Gabriel, Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria; Artis Pabriks, Partija 'VIENOTĪBA', Latvia; all EPP). Their justification was that this provision had already been integrated into the new directive on combating terrorism, which was accepted by the rapporteur and included in the final EP report (Am. 16 and 50 in A8-0212/2017)—but not in the compromise reached in trilogues.

While the ECR rapporteur often kept to more technical details, EPP MEPs introduced amendments with clear ideological lines (Table 6.6). These amendments show the effort of the EPP to broaden the remit of Eurodac by lengthening the right to keep personal data up to ten years on the justification that it would be necessary to fight irregular immigration. These efforts to enlarge the scope went even too far for the rapporteur and the EP report settled on the Commission's proposal of five years as a limit to store data.

This case study shows that, as expected by the office-seeking logic, when the person representing the soft-Eurosceptics is seen as more moderate, she has good chances to engage and collaborate with mainstream groups. The fact that Macovei was formerly an EPP member (and that she often co-sponsored amendments with EPP MEPs in files like the Qualifications Regulation) stressed the commonalities between the

Table 6.6   Comparison of amendments to Recital 32 and 33 (Eurodac Regulation)

Text proposed by the commission	Amendment
Third-country nationals or stateless persons who have requested international protection in one Member State may try to request international protection in another Member State for many years to come. Therefore, the maximum period during which fingerprint and facial image data should be kept by the Central System should be of considerable length	*In order to effectively assist in the control of illegal immigration and with the identification of illegally staying third-county nationals or stateless persons*, the maximum period during which fingerprint and facial image data should be kept by the Central System should be of considerable length *in order to deter third-country nationals or stateless persons who have requested international protection in one Member State from trying to request international protection in another Member State*. (Am. 123, Jeroen Lenaers, EPP, shadow rapporteur)
a period of *five* years should be considered a necessary period for the storage of *fingerprint and facial* data	a period of *ten* years should be considered a necessary period for the storage of *biometric and alphanumeric* data. (Am. 130, Brice Hortefeux, Les Républicains, France; Heinz K. Becker, Österreichische Volkspartei, Austria; Rachida Dati, Les Républicains, France; Mariya Gabriel, Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria; Artis Pabriks, EPP, Partija 'VIENOTĪBA', Latvia; all EPP) a period of *ten* years should be considered a necessary period for the storage of fingerprint and facial data. (Am. 131, Jeroen Lenaers, EPP, shadow rapporteur)

two groups and made it easier for the EPP to engage in a coalition. In addition, following a policy-seeking logic, the clear GAL/TAN cleavage pushed the EPP closer to the ECR and led it to parrot many of the security-led ideas of radical-right parties. Many of the justifications went beyond purely legal grounds (e.g. incorporating new directives, as in the case of terrorism) and were also based on ideological arguments (fight irregular migration).

If we compare the two cases, we see that, on issues of migration, the EPP was dominated by a more radical (TAN) wing than on other less

politicised issues, with many MEPs coming from political parties with strong radical-right challengers back home or where migration is highly politicised (like Viségrad 4 members). This is an impression shared by insiders, who noted how a key dynamic in the CEAS reform package was the position and engagement of the EPP in negotiations (Interview 3). With a highly divided group, some national delegations (especially the Hungarian and Czech) defected from the party line (Interview 6), which made the internal opposition to reforming the CEAS (or to having a common asylum system at all) publicly visible (Interview 3). While in the S&D, which was also divided on some issues, the political leadership over-rode some of the defectors and imposed a group line, the radicals within the EPP were bolstered by the divisions within the European Council and used it to shift the position of the group towards more anti-migrant, pro-security positions (Interview 3). Indeed, some staff from the EPP was quite defensive when discussing their position:

> The left had on many issues […] a position, which seemed to us unrealistic at times or not easy to implement. On the other hand, we think we are a little bit more of a realist or pragmatist in this story, but you might hear that the others can see us as the ones that have certain obsessions with regards to security and terrorism. Which we do. But I don't call them obsessions, but I call them the reality of the situation. (Interview 5)

The GAL groups tended to cluster radical-right and EPP together and accused them of 'fear[ing] some type of uncontrollable pull-factor' (Interview 1).

The engagement between EPP and ECR was also a matter of discussion among other groups. Some acknowledged that the ECR was sometimes strategically extreme—knowing that their amendments would not be successful but would manage to make a political statement (Interview 2). Others pointed out that the ECR was purely dominated by national positions (especially Polish and British) but they remarked that some shadow rapporteurs (such as the Finns Party's Halla-aho) used these critical remarks and extreme positions to motivate the EPP to go along with them (Interview 3), which shows that the EPP was open to more radical positions. Indeed, a member of the EPP group noted that in some positions they felt more comfortable aligning themselves with the ECR group or seeking their support (Interview 5). Despite these affinities, the EPP

maintained the cordon sanitaire and refused to build coalitions with the EFDD and ENF, which confirms the office-seeking expectation.

Conclusion

These two case studies show how, in an area prone to capture by the radical right, there was an intense practical and/or ideological engagement with radical-right challengers by the EPP. Actual alliances like co-sponsored amendments occurred more frequently when MEPs were ideologically close, namely between the less radical wing of the ECR and the more radical wing of the EPP. In comparison, the EPP continued to apply the cordon sanitaire and did not collaborate with those considered too radical and too Eurosceptic (cf. Ripoll Servent & Panning, 2019). Therefore, as posed by the office-seeking expectation, it seems that the reputation (or respectability) of the political groups—and even the national party delegation within a group—matters when it comes to active collaborations (cf. McDonnell & Werner, 2018). However, when it came to engaging ideologically with the ideas of the radical-right, the use of a cordon sanitaire was meaningless, since the EPP used the same anti-immigrant and pro-security language than the radical-right groups.

Indeed, as proposed by the policy-seeking expectation, polarisation on migration policies within the EP made working across the aisle more difficult. This ideological cleavage justified either the disengagement of the EPP and the radical-right challengers—when they knew that GAL groups had a majority as in the Qualifications Regulation—or an active search from the side of the EPP for a right-wing coalition that could push for more TAN policies—especially in issues like Eurodac, where their positions were close to those of member states and offered them higher chances of success. Finally, the vote-seeking expectation considered the possibility that the EPP would add its own flavour to the amendments so as not to further legitimise the issues owned by the radical right. This expectation has proved more difficult to identify. While in some instances, we see how some EPP members tried to package some of its messages with a fundamental rights' flavour, others used a TAN ideology more openly than ECR MEPs. Indeed, many EPP amendments aimed to regain the security and law enforcement issue from the radical right, especially those proposed by MEPs coming from domestic parties where the issue of migration is highly politicised (e.g. Viségrad 4) or where they face strong radical-right challengers.

These findings are particularly relevant to understand dynamics of engagement and disengagement of radical-right parties within the European Union, whose political system is becoming increasingly polarised and politicised. It also opens a new research agenda in investigating cooperation and competition within the European Parliament, where research has tended to examine mainstream and non-mainstream political groups as two separate categories. These cases show us the limitations of the cordon sanitaire and the difficulties in keeping radical-right ideologies out of the mainstream. It is, therefore, a starting point for studying coalition dynamics in the ninth European Parliament (2019–2024), where the mainstream groups are more squeezed by the fringes and radical-right groups have become even more extreme. Of particular attention is the ECR group, which with Brexit and new developments in national party systems, has left most of its more moderate members behind and become a more radical-right group. This might force the EPP to face a more difficult trade-off between engagement and disengagement with 'respectable' radicals.

Notes

1. In the 2014–2019 legislature, two groups were considered as hard Eurosceptic/radical-right: the Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF), since 2019 transformed into the Identity and Democracy (ID) group, and the Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD), with the exclusion of its Italian component, the Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S). Therefore, the EFDD is treated as two separate entities in the analysis (cf. Ripoll Servent & Panning, 2019).
2. For more information about the specific character of the LIBE committee, see Ripoll Servent (2015).

References

Abou-Chadi, T., & Krause, W. (2020). The causal effect of radical right success on mainstream parties' policy positions: A regression discontinuity approach. *British Journal of Political Science, 50*(3), 829–847.

Akkerman, T., de Lange, S. L., & Rooduijn, M. (2016). *Radical right-wing populist parties in western Europe: Into the mainstream?* Routledge.

Akkerman, T., & Rooduijn, M. (2015). Pariahs or partners? Inclusion and exclusion of radical right parties and the effects on their policy positions. *Political Studies, 63*(5), 1140–1157.

Arzheimer, K., & Carter, E. (2006). Political opportunity structures and right-wing extremist party success. *European Journal of Political Research, 45*(3), 419–443.

Asylum Information Database. (2015). *Not there yet. An NGO perspective on challenges to a fair and effective common European asylum system*. Retrieved January 31, 2020, from http://www.asylumineurope.org/annual-report-201 22013

Bale, T. (2003). Cinderella and her ugly sisters: The mainstream and extreme right in Europe's bipolarising party systems. *West European Politics, 26*(3), 67–90.

Bale, T. (2008). Turning round the telescope. Centre-right parties and immigration and integration policy in Europe. *Journal of European Public Policy, 15*(3), 315–330.

Baller, I. (2017). Specialists, party members, or national representatives: Patterns in co-sponsorship of amendments in the European Parliament. *European Union Politics, 18*(3), 49–90.

Bardi, L., Gagatek, W., Germond, C., Johansson, K. M., Kaiser, W., & Sassano, S. (2020). *The European ambition: The group of the European People's Party and European integration*. Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft.

Dahlström, C., & Sundell, A. (2012). A losing gamble. How mainstream parties facilitate anti-immigrant party success. *Electoral Studies, 31*(2), 353–363.

de Lange, S. L. (2012). New alliances: Why mainstream parties govern with radical right-wing populist parties. *Political Studies, 60*(4), 899–918.

Down, I., & Han, K. J. (2020). Marginalisation or legitimation? Mainstream party positioning on immigration and support for radical right parties. *West European Politics, 43*(7), 1388–1414.

Downes, J. F., & Loveless, M. (2018). Centre right and radical right party competition in Europe: Strategic emphasis on immigration, anti-incumbency, and economic crisis. *Electoral Studies, 54*, 148–158.

Downs, W. M. (2001). Pariahs in their midst: Belgian and Norwegian parties react to extremist threats. *West European Politics, 24*(3), 23–42.

Gidron, N., & Ziblatt, D. (2019). Center-right political parties in advanced democracies. *Annual Review of Political Science, 22*(1), 17–35.

Hooghe, L., & Marks, G. (2018). Cleavage theory meets Europe's crises: Lipset, Rokkan, and the transnational cleavage. *Journal of European Public Policy, 25*(1), 109–135.

Kelemen, R. D. (2020). The European Union's authoritarian equilibrium. *Journal of European Public Policy, 27*(3), 481–499.

Kosińska, A. M. (2017). The problem of exclusion from refugee status on the grounds of being guilty of terrorist acts in the CJEU case-law: Commentary on the Lounani case. *European Journal of Migration and Law, 19*(4), 425–446.

McDonnell, D., & Werner, A. (2018). Respectable radicals: Why some radical right parties in the European Parliament forsake policy congruence. *Journal of European Public Policy, 25*(5), 747–763.

Meguid, B. M. (2005). Competition between unequals: The role of mainstream party strategy in niche party success. *American Political Science Review, 99*(3), 347–359.

Meijers, M. J., & Williams, C. J. (2020). When shifting backfires: The electoral consequences of responding to niche party EU positions. *Journal of European Public Policy, 27*(10), 1506–1525. https://doi.org/10.1080/135 01763.2019.1668044

Minkenberg, M. (2013). From pariah to policy-maker? The radical right in Europe, West and East: Between margin and mainstream. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies, 21*(1), 5–24.

Reif, K., & Schmitt, H. (1980). Nine second-order national elections—A conceptual framework for the analysis of European election result. *European Journal of Political Research, 8*(1), 3–44.

Ripoll Servent, A. (2015). *Institutional and policy change in the European Parliament: Deciding on freedom, security and justice*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Ripoll Servent, A. (2019a). The European Parliament after the 2019 elections: Testing the boundaries of the 'cordon sanitair'. *Journal of Contemporary European Research, 15*(4), 331–342.

Ripoll Servent, A. (2019b). Failing under the 'shadow of hierarch': Explaining the role of the European Parliament in the EU's 'asylum crisis'. *Journal of European Integration, 41*(3), 293–310.

Ripoll Servent, A., & Panning, L. (2019). Eurosceptics in trilogue settings: Interest formation and contestation in the European Parliament. *West European Politics, 42*(4), 755–775.

Ripoll Servent, A., & Panning, L. (2021). Engaging the disengaged? Explaining the participation of eurosceptic MEPs in trilogue negotiations. *Journal of European Public Policy, 28*(1), 72–92. https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763. 2020.1859596

Rooduijn, M., & van Kessel, S. (2019). Populism and euroskepticism in the European Union. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. Retrieved January 13 2021, from https://oxfordre.com/politics/view/10.1093/acrefore/978 0190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-1045

van Spanje, J. (2018). *Controlling the electoral marketplace: How established parties ward off competition*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Treib, O. (2020). Exploring mainstream Euroscepticism: Similarities and differences between Eurosceptic claims of centre-right and radical right parties. *Research & Politics, 7*(3). https://doi.org/10.1177/2053168020953301

Yordanova, N. (2013). *Organising the European Parliament: The role of committees and their legislative influence*. ECPR Press.

Zaun, N. (2018). States as gatekeepers in EU asylum politics: Explaining the non-adoption of a refugee quota system. *Journal of Common Market Studies, 56*(1), 44–62.

LIST OF INTERVIEWS

Interview 1 (GUE/NGL MEP assistant, 2018).
Interview 2 (Greens, political advisor, 2018).
Interview 3 (ALDE, political advisor, 2018).
Interview 4 (ALDE, political advisor, 2019).
Interview 5 (EP staff A, 2018).
Interview 6 (EP staff B, 2018).
Interview 7 (EP staff, 2019).
Interview 8 (Greens, political advisor, 2019).

How Do Eurosceptics Wage Opposition in the European Parliament? Patterns of Behaviour in the 8th Legislature

Nathalie Brack and Anne-Sophie Behm

Introduction

While Euroscepticism was first considered as 'hard but hardly relevant' (Deschouwer & Van Assche, 2008, p. 75), it is clear now that it is here to stay. Euroscepticism can no longer be seen as a marginal or unusual phenomenon but rather as a persistent and mainstreamed component of European politics. Election after election since the 1990s, Eurosceptic parties have comforted their position in the European Parliament (EP) and have had some success at the national level as well. The various crises of the past decade further provided fertile ground for the galvanisation

N. Brack (✉)
Université libre de Bruxelles, Brussels, Belgium
e-mail: Nathalie.Brack@ulb.be

A.-S. Behm
Université libre de Bruxelles, Brussels, Belgium
e-mail: anne-sophie.behm@ulb.be

of opposition to the EU, and the 2014 EP elections saw a notable rise in the number of Eurosceptic parties represented in the European Parliament. Indeed, both the economic crisis (and its austerity measures) and the so-called migration crisis have increased the visibility of EU affairs within national political arenas and have produced a new wave of resistance, leading to the unprecedented success of Eurosceptic parties during the last EP elections (Brack et al., 2022; Hobolt, 2015).

The persistence and increasing salience of Euroscepticism has generated an extensive scholarly literature to grasp the complex and diverse nature of opposition to Europe. The bulk of these studies has treated Euroscepticism as a dependent variable, seeking to conceptualise the various positions on Europe and explain them (Vasilopoulou, 2013). More recently, research has been conducted on the (direct and indirect) impact of Eurosceptic actors on other parties, on the party system and on policy-making (a.o. Meijers, 2017; Down & Han, 2021). A burgeoning literature has also emerged on the strategies of Eurosceptics, mostly in national parliaments. But as noted by Carlotti (2021, p. 3), apart from some exceptions, studies on Euroscepticism at the supranational level are still rare.

This chapter aims at contributing to this emerging literature on the strategies of Eurosceptic actors within EU institutions by focusing on the EP. As noted by scholars, Eurosceptics are caught in a dilemma: they have to operate within an institution and a polity they oppose and if representation in the EP provides these actors with resources, it also poses awkward questions about the extent to which they should engage in parliamentary activities (Brack, 2018; Broniecki & Obholzer, 2020; Lynch et al., 2012). Therefore, this study ambitions to tackle two key questions: (1) to what extent do Eurosceptic MEPs behave differently than their non-Eurosceptic colleagues? (2) Are there significant behavioural differences among Eurosceptics and how can we explain them?

While it is often said that the EU has missed the third great milestones in the development of democratic institutions, namely political opposition (Dahl, 1966; Mair, 2007), there is little empirical studies on how opposition actors behave in the only representative institution of the EU. As noted recently by Salvati (2021), it is essential to understand if and how these parties can influence the working of the EP, adopting or not a cooperative approach, and what patterns of opposition Eurosceptics follow.

This chapter will therefore compare the parliamentary activities of opposing voices during the 8th term (2014–2019). More specifically, based on their EP group affiliation, we categorised opposition MEPs into three categories: members of the non-Eurosceptic opposition (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe [ALDE] and Greens/European Free Alliance [Greens/EFA]), soft Eurosceptic MEPs (European Conservatives and Reformists [ECR], and the Left in the European Parliament [GUE/NGL]) and hard Eurosceptic MEPs (Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy [EFDD], Europe of Nations and Freedom [ENF] as well as non-attached MEPs).[1] Parliamentary activities have also been grouped into three categories: legislative, scrutiny and publicity activities. We expect to find diverging patterns of parliamentary behaviour among the three categories of MEPs. More precisely, we expect Eurosceptics to focus less on legislative activities and to be more engaged in voicing their opposition and communicating to the outside, through scrutiny and publicity activities. Furthermore, we also expect to see a difference between soft and hard Eurosceptics: while the former are better integrated in the EP, the latter focus even more on individual activities. In other words, the combination of the effect of the *cordon sanitaire* and the belonging to a specific Eurosceptic group should impact the type and degree of involvement in the EP.

The first section provides an overview of the relevant literature on Euroscepticism and the patterns of oppositional behaviour. The second section explains the main hypotheses of the article and the third section describes the data and the method. The following fourth section is devoted to the analysis of the parliamentary behaviour: after a descriptive overview of the different patterns of parliamentary behaviour among the Eurosceptic and non-Eurosceptic opposition, we test our hypotheses with a negative binominal regression analysis. We find that Eurosceptic MEPs clearly differ from non-Eurosceptic MEPs in their parliamentary behaviour but also that there are significant differences among them. The chapter concludes by discussing our findings and their implications.

Opposition to Europe and Parliamentary Behaviour

The study of Euroscepticism has gradually become an established sub-discipline of European studies (Mudde, 2011). The majority of studies on party-based Euroscepticism seeks to understand the nature, causes

and evolution of the phenomenon. Numerous debates exist on the best way to define and classify the various forms of opposition to the EU (Hooghe & Marks, 2007; Kopecky & Mudde, 2002; Taggart, 1998). As far as the explanatory factors are concerned, some scholars tend to emphasise strategic factors while others stress the ideological nature of a party's position towards the EU (Conti & Memoli, 2012; Mudde, 2011; Szczerbiak & Taggart, 2008) whereas others yet try to go beyond that debate and examine institutional factors, national history or the inter-play between parties and public opinion (De Vries & Edwards, 2009; Emanuele et al., 2016). The recent crises and the renewed success of Eurosceptic and radical actors triggered new studies, most notably on the relation between the crisis and the (nature and type of) Euroscep-ticism (Pirro & Taggart, 2018). But as noted by Ripoll Servent and Panning (2019, p. 760), although these discussions on the definition of Euroscepticism are crucial, they fail to explain Eurosceptics' attitudes and behaviour once elected.

Another and more recent strand of literature looks at radical and Eurosceptic actors from another perspective, seeking to understand their impact on mainstream parties, on the party system or on policies. While the jury is still out on the effect of Eurosceptic actors, it led to inter-esting studies on the contagion to other parties (Meijers, 2017), on the tools radical and populist parties use to influence the debates and the policy-making while in government (Akkerman, 2012; De Lange, 2012) and on their impact on specific policies such as immigration or law and order (Briard et al., 2019). However, most of this research focuses on the national level.

With the growing electoral success of Eurosceptic parties, a burgeoning literature has emerged on the behaviour of these actors in parliament. At the national level, scholars have analysed which tools these challenger parties tend to use and have assessed whether Eurosceptics could be a solution to the so-called 'opposition deficit' in EU politics (Rauh & De Wilde, 2018). Senninger (2017), for instance, shows that Eurosceptic parties in Denmark tend to use parliamentary questions in a different way than mainstream parties and focus more on polity-aspects rather than on policies. Similarly, Hoerner (2017) finds that Eurosceptics tend to make more general and politicised statements but fail to impact EU politics. Persson et al. (2019) on the other hand found out that in the case of Sweden and Denmark, the presence and behaviour of hard Eurosceptic MPs account for more polity opposition but also for more alternative

proposals on EU policies. Focusing on the Dutch case, Otjes and Louwerse (2015–2018) focused on populists, rather than Eurosceptics. They compared the strategies of populist and radical parties on the one hand and mainstream opposition parties on the other hand as well as between left-wing and right-wing radicals. They show that populist actors engage continuously in an outspoken scrutiny of the government to challenge the status quo, rather than participate in legislative activities. But they also demonstrate that there is different voting behaviour between right-wing and left-wing populists, except on EU issues.

At the EU level, a few studies examined the dynamics behind transnational cooperation of Eurosceptic actors. These show how difficult it is for right-wing Eurosceptics to forge lasting alliances but also that their strategy to form a group follows different motives than it is the case for other political families (Startin, 2010; Whitaker & Lynch, 2014). A recent research illustrates that radical right parties do not act cohesively and have no common voting strategy in the EP, regardless of the issue or its salience (Cavalloro et al., 2018). This is confirmed by the study of McDonnell and Werner (2019) which examines the cooperation of radical right parties but also shows that Eurosceptic groups have different patterns in the EP, the soft Eurosceptics being more engaged, the others being more instrumental.

Other scholars concentrate on the attitudes and behaviour of Eurosceptic MEPs as well as their (lack of) impact on the EP's legislative activities (Mamadouh & Raunio, 2003). Kantola and Miller (2021) focus on inter-group and intra-group activities among radical right groups to highlight the key role of informal institutions and the potential effect of radical right groups on the EP. Carlotti (2021) analyses the attitudes of Eurosceptics towards EU policies, the EU institutions, the EU regime and the EU as a community to show the diversity among Eurosceptics. Others concentrate on specific behaviour, such as parliamentary questions. They show that anti-EU MEPs tend to ask more questions but these questions serve another purpose than those from mainstream parties: scholars have indeed highlighted that Eurosceptics are less concerned with legislating or scrutiny but rather with obstruction (Proksch & Slapin, 2010) but some are also interested in constructing a strong anti-gender equality agenda (Kantola & Lombardo, 2021). Brack (2015, 2018) also demonstrates that Eurosceptic MEPs develop different strategies and that the variation among them can be explained by institutional constraints (the

cordon sanitaire) as well as by the degree of the MEPs' Euroscepticism. A recent study on the involvement of Eurosceptics in the trilogues (Ripoll Servent & Panning, 2019) also evidences that the *cordon sanitaire* in the EP works to exclude the most radical actors and that while hard Eurosceptics are outcasts, soft Eurosceptics are somewhat integrated in the parliamentary work. Our own previous research on the evolution of Eurosceptic and non-Eurosceptic behaviour in the EP confirms these findings (Behm & Brack, 2019). In an exploratory analysis of the parliamentary activities over three legislatures, we found that the strategies of Eurosceptics shifted over time, towards a form of normalisation, but that significant differences among the Eurosceptic groups remain, which require further investigation. Along the same line, Broniecki and Obholzer (2020) evidence that Eurosceptics vote differently according to the setting, and more particularly, they respond differently to the variation in media and publicity that the plenary and committee decision-making process attract.

Objectives and Hypotheses

Concentrating on the 8th legislature, we want to determine to what extent and how parliamentary behaviour of Eurosceptic MEPs differs from their non-Eurosceptic colleagues in the opposition, whether there is variation among Eurosceptic MEPs themselves and how it can be explained.

To do so, we concentrate on three categories of MEPs, based on their political affiliation: the non-Eurosceptic opposition (ALDE + Greens/EFA); the soft Eurosceptic opposition (GUE/NGL + ECR); and the hard Eurosceptic opposition (EFDD, ENF as well as non-attached MEPs). We draw on Szczerbiak and Taggart's (2008, pp. 247–248) distinction between hard and soft Euroscepticism. Hard Euroscepticism involves principled opposition to the project of European integration as embodied in the EU while soft Euroscepticism refers not to a principled objection to the European integration project of transferring powers to a supranational body such as the EU, but opposition to the EU's current or future planned trajectory based on the further extension of competencies that the EU is planning to make. Populist and radical right MEPs generally fall within hard Euroscepticism whereas the radical left and the self-proclaimed 'Eurorealists' from the ECR are considered as soft Eurosceptics.

Of course, in the EP, unlike at the national level, one cannot speak of government and opposition in the traditional sense. The way the EP works is characterised by a tendency to reach a compromise, requiring large coalitions across the left–right cleavage. The consensual nature of the chamber—some scholars even talk of an 'institutionalised consensus' (Benedetto, 2008)—is derived from the internal decision-making mode, especially the proportional representation according to the D'Hondt method. However, even though coalitions may vary according to the issue under consideration, the EP tended to be dominated by a Grand Coalition composed of the EPP and the S&D, both at the plenary and at the committee level (Settembri & Neuhold, 2009). This cooperation has increased over time, notably due to the higher political fragmentation of the EU (Brack et al., 2022). Therefore, we consider that the other groups, which are not part of this Grand Coalition, are in opposition and they will be at the heart of our study. However, given the specific context of the EP, the opposition status of the Liberals and the Greens is particular. Technically, before 2019,[2] the two largest groups, EPP and S&D had a majority and did not need the support of the Liberals and the Greens. On the contrary, these two groups tended to propose alternatives to the S&D/EPP-coalition and sometimes managed to break that centrist coalition. For instance, during the 8th legislature, 10% of the votes were won by an EPP/ALDE-coalition and 10% of them by an S&D/ALDE-coalition. A similar trend can be found for the Greens/EFA, but they pursue rather an issue-by-issue strategy and are even more willing to demonstrate their opposition to the Grand Coalition than the Liberals (probably also because they were not represented within the Commission [Brack et al., 2022]). Hence, we classified them as opposition actors within the specific context of the EP and the specific time frame under study.

We expect that Eurosceptic MEPs tend to focus on different parliamentary tools than non-Eurosceptics. Indeed, although the Greens/EFA and ALDE are in opposition in the EP, they can still be part of specific issue-related coalitions. On the contrary, Eurosceptics can be considered as the 'new' opposition (Mair, 2011), i.e. actors without responsibility, being usually in the opposition in the EP and having a populist rhetoric without being per se anti-system. As noted by Mair (2011), a distinction can be made between responsible and responsive politics. Whereas the traditional understanding of representative democracies assumes that

parties play both a representative role and a governing role, the two functions have gradually grown apart. Mainstream parties have downplayed (or been forced to downplay) their representative role and enhanced their governing role, new challengers—often populist parties—have claimed to fill in the representative gap that has emerged (see Mair, 2011). So, while mainstream parties, in government or in opposition tend to engage in policy-making, Eurosceptic and populists actors focus on representing the interest of their voters without taking responsibility (see also Otjes & Louwerse, 2018).

Another explanatory factor for the different patterns of behaviour between non-Eurosceptic and Eurosceptic actors refers to the cordon sanitaire in the EP. The main groups do not want or need the support of small and marginal groups and can therefore avoid any compromise with Eurosceptics. As noted a few years ago by the then leader of the EPP group, 'it is crucial this stability is safeguarded. We want to make sure that the role of radical and extremist MEPs is limited and that they cannot influence major EU decisions' (M. Weber in EU Observer, 24 November 2016). With the majority of the chamber being hostile to their presence, hard Eurosceptic MEPs tend to be excluded from parliamentary activities, especially those implying taking over responsibilities (Ripoll Servent & Panning, 2019; Startin, 2010).

Because of these constraints and the way the EP works, we expect non-Eurosceptic opposition MEPs to be more engaged in the legislative process while Eurosceptics concentrate on voicing their opposition, and challenging the status quo. They will be more likely to focus less on activities that involve taking over responsibility for EU politics but more on those voicing their opposition and communicating to the outside, following the course of a sort of extra-parliamentary opposition.

H1: Eurosceptic opposition MEPs are less involved in legislative activities compared to non-Eurosceptic opposition MEPs.

H2: All opposition MEPs, Eurosceptic or not, will devote time and resources to scrutiny activities.

H3: Eurosceptic MEPs are much more involved in activities designed to voice their opposition and increase their visibility at home, namely publicity activities.

At the same time, studies have shown that because of the *cordon sanitaire* and related to the MEPs' type of Euroscepticism, Eurosceptics do

not all follow the same patterns of behaviour (Brack, 2015; Kantola & Miller, 2021; Ripoll Servent & Panning, 2019) and some of them are increasingly involved in 'normal parliamentary life' (Behm & Brack, 2019). Moreover, as noted by Settembri (2006), the mode of deliberation within the EU, combined with the lack of electoral connection at the European level tends to provide MEPs with incentives to join the camp of compromise, or at least to be involved in legislative activities rather than remain in permanent opposition. At the national level, opposition parties can be rewarded by voters for systematic opposition. In the EP, on the contrary, Eurosceptic MEPs cannot hope to replace the governing coalition formed by the main groups and do not have blackmailing power, whereas an involvement, even limited, could be synonymous of influence. As not all Eurosceptic political groups oppose the EU and its politics to the same extent (Carlotti, 2021), we assume that these differences also lead to diverging approaches towards parliamentary activities. Therefore, we expect that

H4: Soft Eurosceptics are better integrated in the EP and therefore engage more in legislative activities while hard Eurosceptics focus on scrutiny and publicity activities only.

Data and Method

There are many parliamentary activities that MEPs can engage in. Therefore, we grouped them into three categories of activities, based on the distinction between responsible and responsive politics mentioned above but also the varying degrees of engagement and integration in parliamentary life required by the different activities. Moreover, these activities reflect the different democratic functions of opposition in the EP:

1. *Legislative activities*—implying a high degree of integration in the EP, the motivation to take over responsibility for policies and the will to propose concrete alternatives to the status quo: *reports* and *opinions and shadow reports and opinions.*
2. *Scrutiny activities*—characterised by a more modest required degree of integration but still the will to cooperate with other MEPs to scrutinise EU institutions as well as to raise concerns: *oral and written questions, motions for resolution* (individual and in group).

3. *Publicity activities*—which MEPs can carry out alone and at low institutional costs, often associated with responsiveness purposes and designed to voice opposition through communication towards outside the EP: *speeches* in plenary, *explanations of vote*.

These three categories of activity are not mutually exclusive. A MEP can be authoring an opinion and at the same time scrutinise the Commission and send a message to her voters via an explanation of vote, all on the same issue. However, we hypothesise that Eurosceptics in general are less involved in legislative work and focus stronger on other forms of activities (H1 & H2 & H3). Indeed, participating in the decision-making process with mainstream parties would legitimise the establishment and the current state and policies of the EU which is precisely what Eurosceptic parties usually object to. Yet, we expect to find differences between soft and hard Eurosceptic MEPs with the former being better integrated and therefore more active in legislative and scrutiny activities whereas hard Eurosceptics focus stronger on publicity activities (H4).

As our dependent variables, the engagement in different forms of activities (*legislative activities, scrutiny activities, publicity activities*), are count variables which are highly over-dispersed, we perform a negative binominal regression analysis in order to test our hypotheses. We calculate two models for each activity category—one including all opposition actors to test H1, H2 and H3, one comparing only soft and hard Eurosceptic MEPs (H4). Besides our main independent variable, the MEPs' affiliation to one of our actor categories, our models contain several control variables. The data used for these control variables is based on Daniel and Obholzer (2020) and has been completed by data from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey 2014[3] (Polk et al., 2017) as well as our own data collection.

- First of all, the *MEPs' position in the European Parliament* might influence their behaviour. We therefore include variables for *Committee* and *EP leadership*—dummy variables stating whether a MEP has held a Chair or Vice-Chair position in a Committee or any internal EP Leadership position (e.g. President, Vice-President, Quaestor) during the 8th legislature—as well as *seniority,* calculated as the number of terms a MEP has already served in the EP.

- The *ideological position of the national party* represents another set of control variables in our analysis. This concerns the MEPs' national party's position on the *left–right* and *GAL–TAN*[4] scale or rather their 'extremeness' in this regard. Indeed, a party's actual left- or right-orientation is not really meaningful in the context of our analysis. Its distance from what would be a neutral position, however, can tell us more about their approach to work in the EP. This is why we rely on Obholzer and Daniel's measurement of party extremeness, based on the data of the Chapel Hill Expert Survey data (Obholzer & Daniel, 2016, p. 398): 'Each variable measures the national party's squared distance from the midpoint of the scales, with higher values signifying more extreme party positions on the relevant aforementioned category'.[5]
- *Electoral system and governmental participation* can also have an impact on how MEPs see their mandate and their work in the EP. We therefore include dummy variables stating whether the MEPs' national party has been part of the national *government* during the 8th legislature and whether the MEP has been elected in a system of *preferential vote*.
- Finally, we control for the MEPs' *age* (centred around the mean), *gender* and *nationality*.

Our dataset includes all opposition MEPs who have seated at one moment or another in the EP in the 8th legislature. MEPs who have held their mandate for less than one entire year were excluded from the analysis. Beyond that, the length of the MEPs' mandate in months has been integrated in the analysis as an exposure variable. Finally, due to missing data on the ideological positions of the national party, 14 MEPs had to be excluded from the analysis which leaves a dataset of 376 MEPs from all opposition groups (Models 1) and 244 (soft and hard) Eurosceptic MEPs (Models 2).

Analysing the Difference Between Opposition Actors Within the EP

In order to test whether MEPs from the Eurosceptic and non-Eurosceptic opposition behave differently in the EP and whether there are significant differences among Eurosceptics, we analyse their behaviour in the

8th legislature, first through descriptive statistics then through regression models.

Descriptive Results

Table 7.1 shows a first overview on the activity categories. It becomes obvious that the different categories of activities have very different patterns of use—while the median number of reports, opinions and shadow reports and opinions authored by MEPs in the 8th legislature is 26, it is 162 for publicity activities. Scrutiny activities are situated in between the two other categories. As such, this is not surprising and corresponds to our assumptions about the use of the different activities in parliament. Reports and opinions, but also their shadow counterparts, are rather rare but cost-intensive activities, used by MEPs able and willing to take over important responsibility tasks, and integrated enough in their group to be given this opportunity by their group coordinators. Publicity activities are the exact opposite: they can be carried out by everyone at a rather low cost and mostly have the objective to send a message home (Behm & Brack, 2019). Scrutiny activities, then, are a typical 'opposition tool' aiming to raise awareness for problems or obtain information of the executive. As publicity activities, some of them have only few institutional constraints (especially written parliamentary questions), but others, such as oral questions and motions for resolution, require some more engagement and the cooperation of several MEPs.

Beyond these general differences in the patterns of activities, this chapter hypothesises that there are systematic differences in the way different groups of opposition actors use these activities in parliament.

Table 7.1 Overview of activity categories

Dependent variables	Mean	SD	Median	Min	Max	Total (activities)	N (MEPs)
Legislative activities	35.16	38.01	26	0	298	13,222	376
Scrutiny activities	160.66	176.70	91	1	1183	60,409	376
Publicity activities	457.11	606.57	162	0	2942	171,873	376

This seems to be confirmed by the descriptive analysis (Fig. 7.1): there are indeed different patterns of activity engagement among the three groups of MEPs. Regarding legislative activities, we can see that the number of hard Eurosceptic MEPs who never authored a (shadow) report or opinion during the 8th term is very high. This is certainly partly due to the *cordon sanitaire* preventing hard Eurosceptics from taking over responsibility positions in the parliamentary work, even if this does not hinder the MEPs to author shadow reports and opinions within their group. Soft Eurosceptic MEPs and MEPs from the non-Eurosceptic opposition have rather similar curves, but the latter seem still more active in legislative activities. For scrutiny activities, the observation is different: non-Eurosceptic and soft Eurosceptic MEPs once again have similar curves but it seems that there are many of them who engage
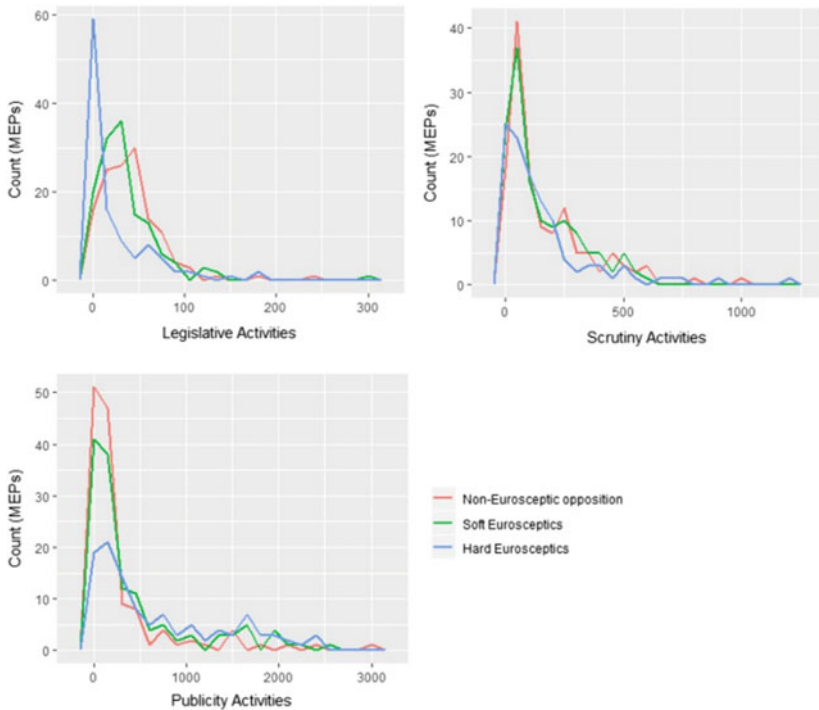
Fig. 7.1 Distribution of activity level by actor category

only in few scrutiny activities and then again others who submit many questions and motions. Most hard Eurosceptic MEPs are situated in the middle, between 50 and 250 activities per MEP. For publicity activities, a clear difference can be observed between all three groups of actors: hard Eurosceptics clearly favour these kinds of activities and engage much more in them than the other MEPs. Then follow soft Eurosceptics and finally MEPs from the non-Eurosceptic opposition who are least active in speeches and explanations of vote—even if the MEP with the maximum number of publicity activities ($N = 2942$) is from the ALDE group. Generally, there are many MEPs from all groups highly engaged in the 'low-cost' publicity activities while for scrutiny and particularly legislative activities, most of them can be found at lower activity levels with some outliers at the higher end.

In order to test whether these observed patterns of activities are also statistically significant, we carry out negative binominal regression analyses for each of the three dependent variables (*legislative activities, scrutiny activities, publicity activities*). For each variable, we calculate two models: the first one including all opposition actors and the second one focusing only on Eurosceptic MEPs in order to determine their different opposition strategies in the EP.

Regression Results

Starting with the interpretation of the results for legislative activities (Table 7.2), we see that there is no significant difference between MEPs from the non-Eurosceptic opposition and the soft Eurosceptic groups. Hard Eurosceptics, on the other hand, author much less (shadow) reports and opinions than MEPs from the non-Eurosceptic opposition and this effect is significant and rather big: MEPs from hard Eurosceptic groups have a 71% lower chance to engage in legislative activities than those from ALDE and Greens/EFA. These observations confirm our expectation that hard Eurosceptics engage less in activities requiring to take over responsibilities—either because they are prevented to do so by 'mainstream' MEPs through the *cordon sanitaire* or because they do not want to. The same can however not be said for soft Eurosceptics: their engagement in legislative activities is comparable to the non-Eurosceptic opposition, an indicator that they are much better integrated than hard Eurosceptics and participate also in tasks requiring taking responsibility. It could indicate their willingness to provide a 'constructive opposition'

Table 7.2 Results of negative of binominal regression analysis

	Models with all opposition actors			Models soft vs. hard Eurosceptics		
	Legislative_1	Scrutiny_1	Publicity_1	Legislative_2	Scrutiny_2	Publicity_2
Soft Eurosceptics	1.11 (0.17)	0.76 (0.14)*	1.39 (0.15)*			
Hard Eurosceptics	0.29 (0.25)***	0.61 (0.19)**	2.62 (0.22)***	0.31 (0.24)***	0.93 (0.17)	1.57 (0.19)*
Committee lead_yes	0.9 (0.15)	1.01 (0.12)	0.82 (0.13)	0.76 (0.23)	1.21 (0.16)	1.03 (0.18)
Ep lead_yes	0.96 (0.24)	1.6 (0.19)*	1.8 (0.21)**	1.34 (0.37)	1.56 (0.26)	1.18 (0.29)
Seniority	0.96 (0.07)	1.01 (0.06)	0.85 (0.06)**	0.89 (0.1)	0.96 (0.07)	0.81 (0.08)**
LRGEN_extreme	1.01 (0.02)	1.03 (0.02)*	1.01 (0.02)	1.01 (0.02)	1.03 (0.02)*	0.98 (0.02)
GAL-TAN_extreme	0.99 (0.02)	1.01 (0.01)	1.03 (0.02)*	0.95 (0.02)***	1 (0.02)	1.06 (0.02)***
Government_yes	1.42 (0.15)*	1.34 (0.12)*	1.24 (0.13)	3.15 (0.25)***	1.9 (0.17)***	0.82 (0.19)
Preferential vote_yes	0.74 (0.78)	3.94 (0.58)*	5.91 (0.66)**	1.69 (0.88)	5.68 (0.57)**	5.34 (0.64)**
Age_centered	1 (0.01)	0.99 (0.01)**	1 (0.01)	1 (0.01)	1 (0.01)	1 (0.01)
Sex_female	1.17 (0.12)	1.21 (0.09)*	0.99 (0.11)	1.26 (0.17)	1.14 (0.12)	1 (0.13)
Nationality_Austria	2.19 (0.88)	0.2 (0.66)*	0.34 (0.75)	0.56 (1.14)	0.12 (0.77)**	1.07 (0.86)
Nationality_Belgium	1.3 (0.85)	0.48 (0.64)	0.8 (0.72)	0.64 (1.04)	0.21 (0.7)*	0.3 (0.78)
Nationality_Bulgaria	2.26 (0.9)	0.44 (0.68)	0.29 (0.78)	0.43 (1.27)	0.12 (0.87)*	0.26 (0.97)
Nationality_Croatia	1.47 (0.94)	1.46 (0.72)	1.8 (0.81)	0.86 (1.42)	0.78 (0.98)	1.81 (1.1)
Nationality_Cyprus	0.62 (0.99)	0.65 (0.75)	0.63 (0.85)	0.19 (1.11)	0.44 (0.75)	0.78 (0.84)
Nationality_Czechia	1.15 (0.86)	0.33 (0.64)	0.61 (0.73)	0.35 (1.01)	0.12 (0.68)**	0.52 (0.76)
Nationality_Denmark	0.92 (0.86)	0.17 (0.65)**	0.08 (0.74)***	0.58 (1.05)	0.16 (0.71)**	0.05 (0.79)***
Nationality_Estonia	0.96 (0.99)	0.48 (0.76)	1.1 (0.86)			
Nationality_Finland	1.5 (0.86)	0.32 (0.65)	0.18 (0.74)*	0.33 (1.13)	0.32 (0.76)	0.07 (0.86)**
Nationality_France	1.31 (0.24)	1.59 (0.19)*	2.71 (0.22)***	1.28 (0.35)	1.68 (0.25)*	3.83 (0.28)***
Nationality_Greece	0.69 (0.86)	0.9 (0.64)	0.42 (0.73)	0.24 (0.99)	0.52 (0.65)	0.56 (0.73)
Nationality_Hungary	1.37 (0.92)	0.18 (0.7)*	0.15 (0.79)*	0.02 (1.52)**	0.05 (0.77)***	0.2 (0.86)
Nationality_Ireland	1.33 (0.94)	0.58 (0.72)	1.28 (0.82)	0.33 (1.07)	0.41 (0.72)	1.52 (0.81)

(continued)

Table 7.2 (continued)

	Models with all opposition actors			Models soft vs. hard Eurosceptics		
	Legislative_1	Scrutiny_1	Publicity_1	Legislative_2	Scrutiny_2	Publicity_2
Nationality_Italy	3.13 (0.84)	0.8 (0.63)	0.22 (0.72)*	0.62 (1)	0.4 (0.66)	0.31 (0.74)
Nationality_Latvia	0.81 (0.96)	0.04 (0.74)***	0.07 (0.83)***	0.2 (1.46)	0.04 (1.02)**	0.09 (1.14)*
Nationality_Lithuania	1.1 (0.91)	0.67 (0.69)	0.69 (0.78)	0.58 (1.26)	0.34 (0.85)	0.37 (0.96)
Nationality_Luxembourg	0.84 (1.02)	0.14 (0.78)**	0.1 (0.88)**			
Nationality_Netherlands	1.06 (0.84)	0.26 (0.63)*	0.12 (0.71)**	0.35 (0.99)	0.15 (0.66)**	0.13 (0.74)**
Nationality_Poland	0.56 (0.84)	0.2 (0.63)**	0.13 (0.72)**	0.15 (0.99)*	0.1 (0.65)***	0.17 (0.73)*
Nationality_Portugal	1 (0.47)	2.49 (0.37)*	9.64 (0.42)***	0.77 (0.6)	2.57 (0.43)*	15.03 (0.48)***
Nationality_Romania	0.71 (0.5)	1.75 (0.39)	2.78 (0.45)*	0.81 (0.73)	2.23 (0.51)	1.91 (0.58)
Nationality_Slovakia	0.63 (0.99)	0.61 (0.76)	0.91 (0.86)	0.22 (1.12)	0.4 (0.76)	0.84 (0.85)
Nationality_Slovenia	0.28 (1.32)	1.07 (1.01)	2.39 (1.15)			
Nationality_Spain	0.73 (0.26)	4.57 (0.21)***	5.12 (0.24)***	0.57 (0.46)	4.83 (0.32)***	5.89 (0.36)****
Nationality_Sweden	0.88 (0.86)	0.27 (0.64)*	0.19 (0.73)*	0.23 (1.12)	0.16 (0.76)*	0.16 (0.85)*
Nationality_United Kingdom	0.32 (0.25)***	0.57 (0.19)**	1.12 (0.22)	0.11 (0.36)***	0.41 (0.25)***	1.25 (0.28)
Intercept	0.99 (0.24)	1.48 (0.19)*	2.15 (0.21)***	1.89 (0.36)	1.24 (0.26)	3.65 (0.29)***
N	376	376	376	244	244	244
2 × Log likelihood	−3241.2010	−4288.813	−4984.3270	−1959.1460	−2739.339	−3337.176
AIC	3319.2	4366.8	5062.3	2029.1	2809.3	3407.2

Signif. codes: 0 '****' 0.001 '***' 0.01 '**' 0.05 '*' 0.1 ' ' 1

within the EP, i.e. providing a concrete alternative to the S&D/EPP-coalition and trying to shape EU legislation. H1 can therefore only be confirmed for hard Eurosceptics. Regarding our control variables, only participation in government of the national political party shows a significant effect: those MEPs author more (shadow) reports and opinions than their colleagues from national parties in the opposition. For all activity categories, we can observe some statistically significant effects of the MEPs' nationality, which can probably be led back to what is generally called the 'national political culture'. Differences in detail are however not relevant for our analysis here.

Cell entries are Incidence Rate Ratios with Standard Errors in parentheses; reference category are MEPs from the Non-Eurosceptic opposition in Models 1 and soft Eurosceptic MEPs in Models 2.

Regarding scrutiny activities, Eurosceptic MEPs, both hard and soft, are less active than their non-Eurosceptic counterparts. More concretely, soft Eurosceptics have a 24% and hard Eurosceptics a 39% lower chance to author parliamentary questions and motions for resolution than MEPs from the non-Eurosceptic opposition. Our second hypothesis can therefore not be confirmed entirely. While all opposition actors engage in scrutiny activities to some extent, the non-Eurosceptic opposition clearly uses this traditional opposition tool to scrutinise the Commission the most. Doing so is less popular among Eurosceptic MEPs, both hard and soft. A possible reason for this might be that, even if in the opposition, MEPs from ALDE and the Greens/EFA aim to participate actively in policy-making, which is confirmed by their higher engagement in legislative activities. In order to do so, they further try to obtain concrete information from the Commission and to raise awareness to particular policy problems to lift them on the agenda.

Some of our control variables have significant influence on the submission of parliamentary questions and motions for resolution as well: As already observed for legislative activities, MEPs from government parties in their home country are more active in scrutinising the Commission than those from national opposition parties. These MEPs might be strongly engaged in such activities for similar reasons as MEPs from the non-Eurosceptic opposition: they aim to obtain concrete results rather than simply voice their opposition—even if in this case, they might try to influence the agenda on behalf of their national government party. Apart from that, MEPs with internal EP leadership positions also engage more in scrutiny activities and women focus more on them than men. The

strongest effect can however be observed for MEPs elected in preferential voting systems (201 MEPs in our dataset): their probability to submit questions and motions is three times higher than for MEPs elected on closed lists. While the MEPs' age and our measure for the party's extremeness on the left–right scale also show significant results, the effect size is very small. Both variables therefore do not influence the MEPs' behaviour regarding scrutiny activities to an important degree.

Looking at the last activity category, publicity activities, we clearly see our hypothesis confirmed that Eurosceptic MEPs, once again hard and soft, put more efforts into these activities than non-Eurosceptic MEPs (H3). Soft Eurosceptic MEPs author 40% more speeches and explanations of vote, hard Eurosceptic MEPs even 260% more than MEPs of the non-Eurosceptic opposition. Voicing their opposition publicly and making statements about their own opinion is therefore clearly an important aspect of the Eurosceptic MEPs' approach to their mandate. Once again, we further see the very strong effect of MEPs being elected in a preferential voting system, even stronger than for scrutiny activities: they engage much more in publicity activities than other MEPs, which correspond to similar findings in the literature on the influence of electoral systems on legislators' behaviour. Indeed, in order to develop a personal connection with voters and increase their chances of being re-elected, they need to be visible. Publicity activities, and to a lesser extent scrutiny activities, are their main opportunities to send a message home and show to voters that they act as their representatives in Brussels. Apart from that, we can note that MEPs with internal leadership positions engage more in publicity activities, which is certainly due to the fact that they hold many speeches in their official positions. Being part of the EP for a long time already reduces the engagement in publicity activities. It can be assumed that these MEPs experience less incentives to send messages home as they can build on their already existing reputation and experience for the upcoming elections. Finally, the extremeness on the GAL–TAN scale has a significant effect as well, but as for the LRGEN-scale in scrutiny activities, the effect size is minimal. The national political party's ideological position in terms of distance to a neutral point does not seem to influence the parliamentary behaviour very much.

Finally, comparing only MEPs from the soft and hard Eurosceptic political groups (Models 2), we see our expectation H4 confirmed as well: hard Eurosceptics engage much less in legislative but much more in publicity activities than their soft Eurosceptic counterparts. There is

no significant effect for scrutiny activities and the effects of the control variables remain stable throughout the three activity categories. It can therefore be stated that soft Eurosceptics indeed aim to or are already better integrated in the EP's parliamentary work. This is reflected in their high engagement in 'pure' legislative activities such as authoring reports and opinions. Hard Eurosceptic MEPs, on the contrary, continue to focus on less constructive activities in terms of policy-making but are highly active in voicing their opposition. Scrutiny activities remain a tool stronger used by MEPs of the non-Eurosceptic opposition.

All in all, we can say that our hypotheses have been partially confirmed: hard Eurosceptic MEPs engage less in legislative activities than non-Eurosceptic MEPs (H1) and all Eurosceptic MEPs have a stronger focus on activities with a potential publicity effect (H3). However, non-Eurosceptic opposition actors are more involved in scrutiny activities than their Eurosceptic colleagues, contrary to what we expected (H2). Further, there are clearly different patterns of behaviour between soft and hard Eurosceptic MEPs (H4) with the former being more integrated and more willing to take over responsibility tasks while the latter concentrate on activities that can be carried out individually and are less cost-intensive. The analysis has further underlined the important effect of the voting system under which MEPs are elected: those being elected in a preferential voting system are much more active in scrutiny and publicity activities than their counterparts from closed systems. They clearly aim to raise the awareness of the voters at home. This is even more confirmed as no such effect can be observed for the less visible legislative activities and once again raises the discussion whether a uniform electoral system for MEPs in all EU Member States should be introduced.

Conclusion

Since Eurosceptic MEPs are here to stay, it is crucial to understand how they act in Parliament (Treib, 2021). This contribution aimed therefore at determining not only how much but also what kind of oppositional behaviour they engage in and explain the variation among them. More precisely, its aim was to investigate first to what extent Eurosceptic MEPs actually still behave differently from their non-Eurosceptic counterparts and then, whether there are differences among Eurosceptics and how they can be explained. The analysis of parliamentary behaviour of opposing voices in the 8th legislature confirms most of our expectations.

Eurosceptic MEPs in general engage less often in legislative activities and scrutiny activities than non-Eurosceptic MEPs. At the same time, they show much more interest in publicity activities than non-Eurosceptic MEPs. And finally, and maybe most importantly, there are significant differences in the behaviour of MEPs belonging to the soft and the hard Eurosceptic opposition: the former is clearly more integrated and author at least some reports and opinions while the latter really focuses on publicity activities alone. At the same time, other variables often put forward in the literature such as (radical) ideology and governmental participation vs. opposition do not seem to play a significant role when looking at the patterns of behaviour of these actors.

While previous research demonstrated a shift in the 8th term with an increasing involvement of Eurosceptic MEPs, our analysis further shows that we cannot speak of 'Eurosceptics' indistinctively. These MEPs are scattered across various political groups and this has a tremendous impact on their behaviour. Indeed, although we decided not to use the Euroscepticism variable in the analysis as it measures the same element as our actor categories, we also tested separately the impact of 'Euroscepticism' (the position of MEPs on the EU based on the Chapel Hill Expert Survey—results upon request) and surprisingly it had no statistically significant effect on the behaviour of MEPs, which seems to indicate that it is not the degree of Euroscepticism of national parties that matters but rather how the EP group situates itself within the EP. In other words, ideology does not help explaining Eurosceptic MEPs' patterns of behaviour once elected and one has to consider the group they belong to and the strategic considerations of Eurosceptic parties to understand how they operate in parliament. Indeed, research shows that although ideology and policy congruence are the main drivers for joining EP groups, these elements are less important for Eurosceptic parties. Eurosceptics are more concerned by the resources offered by group membership as well as national calculations (McDonnell & Werner, 2018; Whitaker & Lynch, 2014). And once in Parliament, it is likely that the group is acting as a socialising platform for Eurosceptic MEPs in terms of behaviour and expectations.

Overall, what our results indicate is that although the EP has always been governed by a 'cartel' of mainstream parties, this does not per se lead to the elimination of opposition or to a structural deficit of opposition. The 'non-governing' actors are not deprived of the possibility to exercise opposition and this chapter shows that there is a variation in the

way they do so. More precisely, if we distinguish between a 'loyal' opposition (the non-Eurosceptics), a critical opposition (the soft Eurosceptics) and an anti-system opposition (the hard Eurosceptics), each type seems to favour one function of opposition in democracy. While non-Eurosceptic actors aim first and foremost at providing an alternative to the Grand Coalition, at shaping European policies and seem rather 'policy-oriented', soft Eurosceptics tend to focus on scrutiny and act as a sort of watchdogs of EU institutions. Hard Eurosceptics then seem rather vote-seeking through their behaviour and act as the channel between intra- and extra-parliamentary opposition. By doing this, even this anti-system opposition could improve the function of political representation as they channel the claims of dissatisfied citizens within the EP and the EU. Whereas the large groups in the EP have tended to focus on responsibility and on inter-institutional dynamics, opposition actors (both Eurosceptic and non-Eurosceptic) put more focus on responsiveness.

There has been a long-standing trade-off between legislative efficiency on the one hand and the representative function of the EP on the other hand (Brack & Costa, 2018). With the long domination of the Grand Coalition, the EP decision-making has the tendency of being highly consensual in order to appear united in the inter-institutional relations in the EU. This need and this focus on inter-institutional struggles have been strengthened over the last decade as the various crises have put in discussion the role of the EP in a more intergovernmental union (Fabbrini & Puetter, 2016). As a result, any potential conflict in the EP is curbed (Marié, 2019) and the representative function of the EP is reduced. Opposition actors play a key role here to channel conflicts within parliament, either through opposition to specific policies, or to EU institutions, or even to the whole system. In a nutshell, a better understanding of oppositions in the EP allows for a more nuanced view of their input and function for the institution and the EU as a whole.

Notes

1. Based on the literature finding important behavioural differences between majority and opposition MPs in different parliamentary contexts, we excluded MEPs from the Grand Coalition (European People's Party [EPP] and Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats [S&D]) from our analysis.

2. Since the 2019 elections, these two groups lost their majority for the first time in the history of the EP, and need therefore more than before to rely on the support of smaller pro-EU groups such as Renew (successor of ALDE) and the Greens/EFA. See Brack et al. (2022).

3. We decided to rely on the CHES wave of 2014 for our analyses as the focus of our chapter is the 8th EP legislature, starting in 2014. In cases of missing data, though, it has been verified whether the national party was included in the Chapel Hill Expert FLASH survey of 2017 or the Chapel Hill Expert Survey of 2019 (Bakker et al., 2020). This was the case for 21 MEPs, for whom more recent data has then be used.

4. Green-Alternative-Libertarian/Traditional-Authoritarian-Nationalist. Typically, the Greens are on the GAL end of this scale whereas radical right parties are located on the TAN side.

5. We decided not to use the measure of the party's position towards European integration in our analysis as this interferes with our categorisation of non-Eurosceptic, soft and hard Eurosceptic MEPs.

References

Akkerman, T. (2012). Comparing radical right parties in government: Immigration and integration policies in nine countries (1996–2010). *West European Politics, 35*(3), 511–529.

Bakker, R., Hooghe, L., Jolly, S., Marks, G., Polk, J., Rovny, J., Steenbergen, M., & Vachudova, M. A. (2020). *2019 Chapel Hill Expert Survey. Version 2019.1.* University of North Carolina. https://www.chesdata.eu/2019-chapel-hill-expert-surveya

Behm, A.-S., & Brack, N. (2019). Sheep in wolf's clothing? Comparing Eurosceptic and non-Eurosceptic MEPs' parliamentary behaviour. *Journal of European Integration, 41*(8), 1069–1088.

Benedetto, G. (2008). Explaining the failure of Euroscepticism in the European Parliament. In A. Szczerbiak, & P. Taggart (Eds.), *Opposing Europe? The comparative party politics of Euroscepticism, Vol. 2: Comparative and theoretical perspectives* (pp. 127–150). Oxford University Press.

Brack, N. (2015). The roles of Eurosceptic members of the European Parliament and their implications for the EU. *International Political Science Review, 36*(3), 337–350.

Brack, N. (2018). *Opposing Europe in the European Parliament: Rebels and radicals in the chamber.* Palgrave McMillan.

Brack, N., & Costa, O. (2018). Democracy in parliament vs. democracy through parliament? Defining the rules of the game in the European Parliament. *The Journal of Legislative Studies, 24*(1), 51–71.

Brack, N., Costa, O., & Awenig, M. (2022). The new political equilibrium and coalition dynamics within the European Parliament. In O. Costa, & S. Van Hecke (Eds.), *The EU at a turning point? The 2019 EP election outcome*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Briard, B., Bernhard, L., & Betz, H.-G. (2019). *Do they make a difference? The policy influence of radical right populist parties in Western Europe*. ECPR Press.

Broniecki, P., & Obholzer, L. (2020, February 10). *Substantive representation of Euroscepticism contesting European integration within the European Parliament* [Workshop presentation]. Eurosceptic contestations in EU Legislative Politics, Berlin, Germany. https://ecpr.eu/Events/Event/PaperDetails/49503

Carlotti, B. (2021). *Patterns of opposition in the European Parliament: Opposing Europe from the inside?* Palgrave Macmillan.

Cavalloro, M., Flacher, D., & Zanetti, M. A. (2018). Radical right parties and European economic integration: Evidence from the seventh European Parliament. *European Union Politics, 19*(2), 321–342.

Conti, N., & Memoli, V. (2012). The multifaceted nature of party-based Euroscepticism. *Acta Politica, 47*(2), 91–112.

Dahl, R. A. (1966). *Political oppositions in western democracies*. Yale University Press.

Daniel, W., & Obholzer, L. (2020). Reaching out to the voter? Campaigning on Twitter during the 2019 European elections. *Research and Politics, 7*(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/2053168020917256

De Lange, S. L. (2012). New alliances: Why mainstream parties govern with radical right-wing populist parties. *Political Studies, 60*(4), 899–918.

Deschouwer, K., & Van Assche, M. (2008). Hard but hardly relevant: Party-based Euroscepticism in Belgium. In A. Szczerbiak, & P. Taggart (Eds.), *Opposing Europe*: *The comparative party politics of Euroscepticism, Case studies and country surveys* (pp. 75–92). Oxford University Press.

De Vries, C. E., & Edwards, E. E. (2009). Taking Europe to its extremes: Extremist parties and public Euroscepticism. *Party Politics, 15*(1), 5–28.

Down, I., & Han, K. J. (2021). Far right parties and 'Europe': Societal polarization and the limits of EU issue contestation. *Journal of European Integration, 43*(1), 65–81.

Emanuele, V., Maggini, N., & Marino, B. (2016). Gaining votes in Europe against Europe? How national contexts shaped the results of Eurosceptic parties in the 2014 European Parliament elections. *Journal of Contemporary European Research, 12*(3), 697–715.

Fabbrini, S., & Puetter, U. (2016). Integration without supranationalisation: Studying the lead roles of the European Council and the Council in post-Lisbon EU politics. *Journal of European Integration, 38*(5), 481–495.

Hobolt, S. (2015). The 2014 European Parliament elections: Divided in unity? *Journal of Common Market Studies, 53*(S1), 6–21.

Hoerner, J. (2017). Scrutiny or smoke and mirrors: The determinants and role of resolutions in national parliaments in European Union affairs. *European Union Politics, 18*(2), 307–322.

Hooghe, L., & Marks, G. (2007). Sources of Euroscepticism. *Acta Politica, 42*(2/3), 119–127.

Kantola, J., & Miller, C. (2021). Party politics and radical right populism in the European Parliament: Analysing political groups as democratic actors. *Journal of Common Market Studies, 59*(4), 782–801.

Kantola, J., & Lombardo, E. (2021). Strategies of right populists in opposing gender equality in a polarized European Parliament. *International Political Science Review, 42*(5), 565–579.

Kopecky, P., & Mudde, C. (2002). The two sides of Euroscepticism: Party positions on European integration in East Central Europe. *European Union Politics, 3*(3), 297–326.

Lynch, P., Whitaker, R., & Loomes, G. (2012). The UK Independence Party: Understanding a niche party's strategy, candidates and supporters. *Parliamentary Affairs, 65*(4), 733–757.

Mair, P. (2007). Political opposition and the European Union. *Government and Opposition, 42*(1), 1–17.

Mair, P. (2011). Bini Smaghi vs. the parties: Representative government and institutional constraints. *Working paper, EUI RSCAS, 2021/22.* Retrieved January 30, 2021 from: http://hdl.handle.net/1814/16354

Mamadouh, V., & Raunio, T. (2003). The committee system: Powers, appointments and report allocation. *Journal of Common Market Studies, 41*(2), 333–351.

Marié, A. (2019). European Parliament: Is the grand coalition really a thing of the past? Bruges Political Research Papers, 75/2019. Retrieved January 31, 2021 from: http://aei.pitt.edu/97364/1/wp75_marie.pdf

McDonnell, D., & Werner, A. (2018). Respectable radicals: Why some radical right parties in the European Parliament forsake policy congruence. *Journal of European Public Policy, 25*(5), 747–763.

McDonnell, D., & Werner, A. (2019). *International populism: The radical right in the European Parliament*. Hurst.

Meijers, M. (2017). Contagious Euroscepticism: The impact of Eurosceptic support on mainstream party positions on European integration. *Party Politics, 23*(4), 413–423.

Mudde, C. (2011). Sussex v. North Carolina: The comparative study of party-based Euroscepticism. *East European Politics, 28*(2), 193–202.

Obholzer, L., & Daniel, W. (2016). An online electoral connection? How electoral systems condition representatives' social media use. *European Union Politics, 17*(3), 387–407.

Otjes, S., & Louwerse, T. (2015). Populists in parliament: Comparing left-wing and right-wing populism in the Netherlands. *Political Studies, 63*(1), 60–79.

Otjes, S., & Louwerse, T. (2018). How populists wage opposition: Parliamentary opposition behaviour and populism in Netherlands. *Political Studies, 67*(2), 479–495.

Persson, T., Martensson, M., & Karlsson, C. (2019). Eurosceptic challenger parties and political opposition in European Union politics: Part of the problem or part of the solution? *Scandinavian Political Studies, 42*(3–4), 245–269.

Pirro, A. L., & Taggart, P. (2018). The populist politics of Euroscepticism in times of crisis: A framework for analysis. *Politics, 38*(3), 253–262.

Polk, J., Rovny, J., Bakker, R., Edwards, E., Hooghe, L., Jolly, S., Koedam, J., Kostelka, F., Marks, G., Schumacher, G., Steenbergen, M., Vachudova, M., & Zilovic, M. (2017). Explaining the salience of anti-elitism and reducing political corruption for political parties in Europe with the 2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey data. *Research & Politics*, *4*(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/2053168016686915

Proksch, S. O., & Slapin, J. (2010). Parliamentary questions and oversight in the European Union. *European Journal of Political Research, 50*(1), 53–79.

Rauh, C., & De Wilde, P. (2018). The opposition deficit in EU accountability: Evidence from over 20 years of plenary debate in four member states. *European Journal of Political Research, 57*(1), 194–216.

Ripoll Servent, A., & Panning, L. (2019). Eurosceptics in trilogue settings: Interest formation and contestation in the European Parliament. *West European Politics, 42*(4), 755–775.

Salvati, E. (2021). The persistent dilemma of supranational representation: Framing the weakness of the European Parliament's representative function in light of the rise of Euroscepticism. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2021.1909543

Senninger, R. (2017). Issue expansion and selective scrutiny—How opposition parties used parliamentary questions about the European Union in the national arena from 1973 to 2013. *European Union Politics, 18*(2), 283–306.

Settembri, P. (2006). Is the European Parliament competitive or consensual? And why bother? *Paper presented at the conference the European Parliament and the European Political space*. Retrieved January 31, 2021 from https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.531.7791&rep=rep1&type=pdf

Settembri, P., & Neuhold, C. (2009). Achieving consensus through committees: Does the European Parliament manage? *Journal of Common Market Studies, 47*(1), 127–151.

Startin, N. (2010). Where to for the radical right in the European Parliament? The rise and fall of transnational political cooperation. *Perspectives on European Politics and Society, 11*(4), 429–449.

Szczerbiak, A., & Taggart, P. (Eds.). (2008). *Opposing Europe?* Oxford University Press.

Taggart, P. (1998). A touchstone of dissent: Euroscepticism in contemporary western European party systems. *European Journal of Political Research, 33*(3), 363–388.

Treib, O. (2021). Euroscepticism is here to stay: What cleavage theory can teach us about the 2019 European Parliament elections. *Journal of European Public Policy, 28*(2), 174–189.

Vasilopoulou, S. (2013). Continuity and change in the study of Euroscepticism: Plus ça change? *Journal of Common Market Studies, 51*(1), 153–168.

Whitaker, R., & Lynch, P. (2014). Understanding the formation and actions of Eurosceptic groups in the European Parliament: Pragmatism, principles and publicity. *Government and Opposition, 49*(2), 232–263.

Shaping the EU's Future? Europarties, European Parliament's Political Groups and the Conference on the Future of Europe

Karl Magnus Johansson and Tapio Raunio

Introduction

Europarties are most likely unknown organisations even among most activists of their national member parties. This is not surprising. In European Parliament (EP) elections, the political groups of the Europarties remain firmly in the background, and Europarties and the EP groups seldom feature in national medias. Europarties and EP political groups are officially independent of each other, but it is nonetheless more realistic to view them as part of the same Europarty organisation. Political groups

K. M. Johansson
Södertörn University, Stockholm, Sweden
e-mail: karl.magnus.johansson@sh.se

T. Raunio (✉)
Tampere University, Tampere, Finland
e-mail: tapio.raunio@tuni.fi

173

exist in the Parliament, while Europarties are extra-parliamentary organisations that bring together national parties across the European Union (EU) to pursue shared political objectives and to field candidates for the post of Commission President (the so-called *Spitzenkandidaten*).

Through their national heads of government, EP groups and Commission portfolios, Europarties are in a powerful position to shape the laws, policies and agenda of the EU. Europarties and EP political groups have also decades of experience from Treaty amendments and inter-institutional bargaining. Given the initially weak powers of the Parliament, in these constitutional processes the Europarties have successfully campaigned in favour of empowering the EP, thereby also consolidating the role of the Europarties in the EU's political regime. The Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) represents thus another opportunity for the Europarties and the EP groups to shape both the direction of integration and the institutional set-up of the EU. Designed as a major exercise in deliberative democracy to discuss the future of Europe and bringing together citizens across the Union, the start of the CoFoE was delayed until May 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Utilising both virtual platforms and events in Brussels, Strasbourg and the member states, by spring 2022 the Conference is expected to reach conclusions and provide guidance on the future of Europe. However, member states remain hesitant about the CoFoE resulting in Treaty change.

Examining the CoFoE and focusing on the three largest Europarties, the European People's Party (EPP), the Party of European Socialists (PES) and the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), our study is guided by three research questions. First, it explores the various avenues and strategies through which the Europarties and EP groups seek to influence the Conference: coalition-building in the Parliament, and links with the Commission, national member parties and European political foundations that are linked to the Europarties. Second, it analyses the division of labour between Europarties and their EP groups as well as the balance of power inside the political groups regarding the CoFoE. And third, on a more normative level, it examines whether 'political parties at European level contribute to forming European political awareness and to expressing the will of citizens of the Union' as outlined in the EU treaties (Article 10(4), Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union). Europarties and EP groups can enhance the legitimacy of European integration, particularly if they facilitate citizen participation in EU constitutional processes.

The theoretical framework is divided into two parts. The next section focuses on the importance of agenda-setting in EU politics, while the subsequent section examines the strategies of Europarties and the EP political groups in previous rounds of constitutional reform. The empirical analysis, drawing on interviews and document analysis, covers the initial phases of the process: the decision to set up the CoFoE and defining its agenda. The interviewees are from the central offices of EPP, PES and ALDE, select MEPs involved in the Conference, as well as individuals from the Commission, the Parliament and the political foundations affiliated with the three Europarties. The interviews were semi-structured and carried out between spring 2020 and the summer of 2021. Documents consist of position papers, resolutions, press releases and other material produced by the EU institutions, Europarties, media and the political foundations. The concluding section summarises the findings and discusses how our study contributes to the understanding of EU democracy.

Agenda-Setting in EU Politics

Agenda-setting is a fundamentally important stage of any decision-making process. Starting with Cobb and Elder (1971), academic research has produced a number of different typologies and approaches to studying agenda-setting. The literature often identifies three types of agendas: the public agenda includes issues that citizens find salient; the media agenda consists of issues that are covered by the media; and the political agenda includes issues that policy-makers deal with. According to the so-called multiple streams framework (MSF) model (Ackrill et al., 2013; Béland & Howlett, 2016; Kingdon, 1984), policy-making processes consist of three streams: the problem stream consists of problem perceptions among policy-makers; the solution stream consists of proposals for political decisions; and the politics stream consists of political activities and developments like lobby campaigns, or the political context in which decision-making occurs. The links between the three streams are made by issue entrepreneurs, individuals or organisations that 'are willing to invest their time and energy in promoting a particular issue' (Elder & Cobb, 1984, p. 121). And when these three streams meet, a 'policy window' opens and the issue moves to the agenda of decision-makers. Within MSF, 'the analytical task is to specify the dynamic and complex interactions that generate specific policy outcomes' (Ackrill et al., 2013, pp. 872–873), but

particularly in complex settings such as the EU, this can be inherently difficult. Hence, we focus on how and to what extent Europarties and their EP groups influence the CoFoE agenda.

As for the origins of issues on the agenda, they can come from the external environment or from the political actors themselves (Mansbach & Vasquez, 1981). The former approach sees political issues arising from the international environment. The latter category in turn includes issues that arise from the interests of the actual stakeholders, the political institutions and actors within them. As argued by Princen (2007, 2009), in EU governance the latter approach is normally more appropriate for understanding the sources of items on the agenda of the EU institutions, although major external developments such as terrorist attacks, refugee crisis or climate change can obviously feature high on the EU agenda. National governments or interest groups try to move issues to the Brussels agenda, and the European level actors have their own strong reasons for having matters debated in EU institutions.

Agenda-setting success is often influenced by how problems are framed. Issue entrepreneurs can refer to broadly shared fundamental values (e.g. human rights, sustainable development or democracy), or use an alternative strategy of 'small steps' whereby support is gradually built up through more low-key strategies, including behind-the-scenes processes and depoliticisation of issues (Princen, 2011). A related tactic is issue bundling or what in MSF terminology is called coupling: 'Apart from skills and resources, entrepreneurs pursue strategies to join together problems and policies into attractive packages, which are then "sold" to receptive policy-makers' (Ackrill et al., 2013, p. 873). Considering the 'distance' between Brussels and average citizens, 'agenda-setting strategies in the EU will be focused more exclusively on dynamics that take place within policy communities than on reaching out to larger audiences outside of those communities' (Princen, 2011, p. 940). And, as Princen also points out, broadening the scope of participation entails the risk of creating controversy and opposition. Regarding the CoFoE, proposals such as transnational lists for EP elections are sure not to please the more Eurosceptical politicians.

Another key dimension concerns the 'venue' (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993), that is, where and by whom the issue is debated. Princen (2011) distinguishes between venue shopping and venue modification. 'Venue shopping occurs when agenda-setters seek out a venue (among those available to them) that is most receptive to their cause. Within the EU,

venue shopping may occur between EU institutions (horizontal venue shopping) and between the different "levels" in the multilevel system that the EU forms part of (vertical venue shopping)' (Princen, 2011, p. 931). Venue shopping occurs among already existing venues, whereas venue modification means that 'if a suitable venue is not available, actors may sometimes also be able to modify the range of available venues in order to create one that is better suited to their purposes' (Princen, 2011, p. 933). For example, in EU governance environmental activists may prefer that environmental policies are on the agenda of actors that are likely to have more pro-environment positions. For CoFoE, the relevant question is the balance between supranational (EP, Commission) and more intergovernmental (Council, European Council) institutions.

EU Constitutional Reforms, Party Politics and Accumulated Experience

The Europarties have been recognised in the EU Treaties since the 1990s. Since 2004 the Europarties have received money from the EU's budget, and this has triggered the establishment of several new Europarties. Existing research has mainly analysed the internal organisation and organisational development of Europarties (e.g. Delwit et al., 2004; Gagatek, 2008, 2009; Timus & Lightfoot, 2014), or their constitutionalisation and financial regulation (e.g. Johansson & Raunio, 2005; Wolfs, 2019).

However, existing research grapples with the question of impact: do Europarties matter? Most of the existing research has focused on the role of Europarties in Intergovernmental Conferences (IGC) negotiating Treaty reforms. Here the evidence is somewhat mixed, but points in the direction of Europarties and the EP groups wielding even decisive influence in the IGCs and the European Council summits. The standard answer is that influence is conditional, depending largely on the capacity of Europarties to mobilise 'their' heads of national governments for the party cause (Johansson, 2016, 2017; see also Van Hecke, 2010). Pre-European Council summit meetings among government/party leaders are a central aspect of this mobilisation process, but their significance appears to vary over time and across party families. For example, the influence of the EPP was apparent during the Maastricht Treaty negotiations (Johansson, 2002a). Yet, there is also evidence from the PES that a lack of commitment by the heads of government has reduced its significance (e.g. Van Hecke & Johansson, 2013a, 2013b). Obviously the

relative bargaining weight of individual Europarties is stronger when they are more strongly represented in the European Council (Hix & Lord, 1997; Johansson, 1999, 2002a, 2002b, 2016, 2017; Lightfoot, 2005; Tallberg & Johansson, 2008).

It can also be difficult to draw a line between influence exerted by Europarties and their respective EP groups. Exploring the role of the EPP political group in Treaty reform processes since the 1980s, Johansson (2020) concludes that the EPP group mostly emerges as an influential player, even if not always a unitary actor. Johansson also showed that the EPP political group and the actual Europarty seemed very much in sync throughout the Treaty reforms, and that the EPP has developed its own strategies and networks over the decades—experience that clearly facilitates policy influence. Informal, even personal, partisan links can be highly crucial. For example, there is ample evidence that individuals with privileged access to the German Christian Democratic Chancellors and their assistants have been the key players within the EPP. Moreover, power asymmetries inside the political group cannot be avoided, with some individual MEPs and national delegations carrying more political weight than others. These are dimensions we also explore in our empirical analysis.

This leads to our case selection. We concentrate on the three largest and traditionally most influential European party families—the centre-right (conservatives and Christian Democrats) EPP, the centre-left PES and the liberal ALDE. In the Parliament, the respective group names are EPP, Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) and Renew Europe—the liberal group adopted its current name after the 2019 elections when it formed a pact with the La République En Marche!, the party established by the French President Emmanuel Macron. There is substantial overlap in terms of national parties. Measuring the percentage of MEPs belonging to the EP political group that are also members of a national party belonging to the corresponding Europarty, in the 2009–2014 and 2014–2019 legislative terms the overlap was around 90% or above in EPP and PES while somewhat lower in ALDE. The EP political groups are strongly present in the various decision-making bodies of the Europarties, and have much better resources than the respective Europarties, both in terms of funding and staff. (For details, see Calossi, 2014; Calossi & Cicchi, 2019).

Turning to the weight of the three party families in the EU institutions, the EP party system has throughout the history of the Parliament been in practice dominated by the 'grand coalition' of EPP and social

democrats, with the liberal group also present in the chamber since the 1950s (Hix et al., 2007). EPP has been the largest political group since the 1999 elections. In June 2021, EPP controls 178 seats, S&D 146 and Renew 97 (out of a total of 705 seats). In fact, after the 2019 elections, the two largest groups for the first time control less than half of the seats in the chamber—a situation which should increase the bargaining weight of the smaller political groups. While the primary decision rule in EP is simple majority, for certain issues (mainly budget amendments and second-reading legislative amendments adopted under the co-decision procedure), the Parliament needs absolute majorities (50% plus one MEP). Apart from this absolute majority requirement, cooperation between EPP and S&D is also influenced by inter-institutional considerations as the Parliament has needed to moderate its resolutions in order to get its amendments accepted by the Council and the Commission (Kreppel, 2002). And when the two large groups have failed to agree, the numerically much smaller liberal group, situated ideologically between the EPP and PES, has often been in a pivotal position in forming winning coalitions in the chamber. Pragmatic cooperation between the EPP and S&D means that most issues are essentially precooked at the committee stage—thus paving the way for plenary votes adopted by 'supermajorities', or what Bowler and McElroy (2015) have called 'hurrah votes'.

The main EP political groups are definitely institutionalised, mature organisations. They have decades of experience of building unitary group positions, of bargaining with each other in order to form winning coalitions, and of interacting with the Commission and other European level actors. Equally important is the 'underdog' position of the Parliament. Initially a purely consultative body with members seconded from national parliaments, the EP is today vested with significant legislative, control and budgetary powers. In addition, MEPs have proven remarkably inventive in pushing for more powers between IGCs, adopting practices that have over time become the established course of action (Héritier et al., 2019). In these inter-institutional battles, the leading figures in the Parliament—notably political group chairs—have been strongly present, thereby signalling that the issue is important for the Parliament and that there is broad support in the chamber for the reform. This stands in contrast to normal legislative processes, where rapporteurs and MEPs with relevant policy expertise are influential within the political groups and in the Parliament as a whole. As the agenda of the CoFoE focuses

quite strongly on institutional questions, the EP and its political groups thus have their own interests at stake.

The same party-political situation extends to the Commission, where EPP, PES and ALDE have controlled most and occasionally even all portfolios since the 1950s. In the Commission appointed in late 2019 and led by Ursula von der Leyen (EPP), EPP has ten, PES nine and ALDE five Commissioners (having thus 24 out of 27 positions). Informal ties are also important, with for example the EPP, both its political group and the Europarty, having regular dinners and other modes of contact with the Commission (Bardi, 2020). Moreover, Europarties and EP groups can seek to influence agenda-setting more indirectly via interest groups, think-tanks and other actors close to them—and indeed, these same actors can in turn lobby the Europarties. Of specific interest are political foundations, organisations funded via the EU budget and affiliated with a Europarty that should contribute to debates about both European public policy issues and the broader process of European integration. The political foundations mainly do this through publications and organising various events such as seminars and conferences, as well as through maintaining active networks with their national member foundations, each other and of course with the Europarties and their EP groups. The respective foundations have very close links with their Europarties, helping them in drafting manifestos, resolutions, as well as more long-term strategies and programmes (Bardi et al., 2014; Gagatek & Van Hecke, 2014). As of 2021, EPP has the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, PES the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) and ALDE the European Liberal Forum. Given the quite limited resources of Europarties, the political foundations should improve their policy-making capacity, not least in terms of offering new ideas and perspectives.

Europarties are easily perceived as being part of the 'Brussels bubble' that should do more to reach out to civil society and citizens (Van Hecke et al., 2018). Europarties have introduced membership for individuals, but in her pioneering study, Hertner (2019) showed that Europarties had only very small numbers of individual members, with national member parties often against giving individual members stronger participation rights. Europarties face the challenge of scale: even democratic innovations such as deliberative panels or various online platforms cannot bring all citizens or party members across Europe together. Here the CoFoE would seem a good opportunity for involving the Europarties' grassroots

members: it is, at least according to the official declarations and documents, dedicated to listening to Europeans, not least through setting up various citizens' assemblies and other consultation mechanisms.

Pulling the various threads of our theoretical framework together, we put forward three propositions that guide our empirical analysis. First, it is worth reminding that the Europarties and their EP groups are not new to this game. Quite the opposite, they have decades of accumulated experience from building networks and coalitions in IGCs and inter-institutional bargaining rounds. Temporal dimension and experience are also identified in agenda-setting and MSF: 'Importantly, what emerges as a potential solution in response to the opening of a policy window is the result of prior advocacy for ideas and proposals by entrepreneurs, in particular their skill, persistence and resources in pushing particular project. For MSF applications to the EU, it is their ability to sell these ideas to policy makers in response to policy windows—and thereby couple the politics, problems and policy streams—that explains whether windows of policy opportunity actually result in policy change' (Ackrill et al., 2013, p. 880). This experience should work in the favour of Europarties and their EP groups.

Regarding the division of labour between Europarties and their EP groups, the agenda of CoFoE contains issues that are directly relevant for both actors. At the same time, the Conference is not designed as a formal IGC resulting in Treaty changes. Hence, the EP groups should be more prominent than the extra-parliamentary Europarties. The former are more present in the EU policy process, have considerable experience of direct inter-institutional bargaining, and also have substantially stronger resources.

Proposition 1: In setting the agenda of CoFoE, the EP political groups are the central partisan actors, with the Europarties in a more limited role.

Not only have the Parliament and its political groups considerable experience of constitutional reform processes, they also understand that parliamentary unity should help the EP in reaching its objectives. Therefore, we expect to see active collaboration between the main political groups that are used to building broad coalitions, with most plenary votes adopted by large majorities that often extend beyond the 'grand coalition' of EPP and S&D.

Proposition 2: The positions adopted by the Parliament on CoFoE are based on broad coalitions between the main political groups.

Turning to balance of power within the political groups, unlike in more day-to-day legislation where particularly rapporteurs and MEPs seated in the respective committees are influential in shaping group positions, we expect the group leaders to be the dominant actors. To increase the chances of the Parliament's voice being heard, the leaderships of the political groups should take an active role in guiding the issues through the Parliament and in expressing the positions of the EP and the political groups.

Proposition 3: Political group chairs take the leading role in articulating group positions and in guiding the issues through the Parliament.

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS: BUSINESS AS USUAL FOR THE EP POLITICAL GROUPS

The empirical section consists of two parts. The first explores the rationale for the CoFoE and the involvement of Europarties and the EU institutions in setting its agenda. The second part focuses on political dynamics inside the Parliament and traces the contribution of the three Europarties and their EP groups.

The Road to the Conference

The 2010s was a turbulent decade for the EU, with both the Euro crisis and the refugee crisis revealing strong tensions between the member states and different political families. Brexit in turn fuelled concerns about the rise of Eurosceptical movements and the democratic legitimacy of integration. Several key figures—notably the French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker—gave high-profile speeches that included initiatives for debates about the future of integration. The Commission proposed five scenarios for the future of Europe in March 2017, and this was crucial in triggering the subsequent reflections and concrete initiatives for reforming the EU.[1] The Juncker Commission also made active use of Citizens' Dialogues, first initiated by the Commission in 2012.[2] In September 2017, President Macron initiated citizens' consultations that were held in most member states during 2018.[3] President of the EP Antonio Tajani invited the heads of state or government of EU countries to give their visions on the Future of Europe in the EP plenaries.[4]

In March 2019 Macron in an 'open letter' addressed to all Europeans specifically called for the establishment of a 'Conference for Europe' that should proceed 'without taboos' and be based on wide-ranging consultation with citizens and civil society actors.[5] The European Council adopted the Sibiu Declaration, outlining ten commitments for the future of Europe.[6] The Parliament continued its tradition of adopting resolutions in favour of both deeper integration and of increasing its own powers.[7] MEPs surely felt relieved when turnout increased in the 2019 EP elections quite significantly to just over 50% and the predicted rise in Eurosceptical vote did not materialise, although a nationalist Identity and Democracy (ID) group was formed after the elections. In terms of agenda-setting, there clearly was in the aftermath of the crises a 'policy window' open for debates about the future of integration.

The EP did not appreciate the European Council ignoring the *Spitzenkandidaten* when choosing the candidate for the Commission President. But the candidate, Ursula von der Leyen, needed the majority of MEPs behind her. Thus, under the heading 'A new push for European democracy' in the guidelines for her Commission, von der Leyen expressed her commitment to a Conference on the Future of Europe:

> I want citizens to have their say at a Conference on the Future of Europe, to start in 2020 and run for two years. The Conference should bring together citizens, including a significant role for young people, civil society, and European institutions as equal partners. The Conference should be well prepared with a clear scope and clear objectives, agreed between the Parliament, the Council and the Commission. I am ready to follow up on what is agreed, including by legislative action if appropriate. I am also open to Treaty change. Should there be a Member of the European Parliament put forward to chair the Conference, I will fully support this idea.[8]

The same guidelines stated that the CoFoE should address both the *Spitzenkandidaten* system and the introduction of transnational lists in EP elections. Not surprisingly, both items have long been on the agenda of both the Europarties and the Parliament. Particularly the *Spitzenkandidaten* mechanism has been defended by referring to fundamental values such as democracy and citizen participation. Von der Leyen further specified her thoughts on the Conference in the 'mission letter' to Dubravka Šuica, at that point the Vice-President-designate for Democracy and

Demography.[9] Šuica is responsible for dealing with the Conference in the Commission.

In subsequent position papers, we can detect elements of both issue framing and venue shopping. On 26 November 2019, France and Germany published a paper that could be interpreted as trying to steer the process in a more intergovernmental direction and as an attempt to keep CoFoE more focused on policies instead of institutional questions.[10] However, the joint contribution from France and Germany simultaneously gave a 'strong push' for CoFoE (Fabbrini, 2019, p. 6), offering legitimacy and highest level political support for the project amidst some more lukewarm receptions in member state capitals—and of course it was Macron who had initiated the whole Conference with his 'open letter'. The European Council of December 2019 gave a mission to Croatian Presidency to prepare the Council position, underlining the need to focus on policies.[11] Also various interest groups intervened. For example, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) called for the inclusion of social and labour market issues on the agenda.[12]

On January 22, 2020 the Commission presented its Communication,[13] according to which CoFoE should deal with policies and institutions. Regarding the latter, the Communication restated the need to re-examine the *Spitzenkandidaten* process and the idea of transnational lists. The Communication also expressed commitment to listening to Europeans through a variety of channels such as deliberative panels and digital platforms. While largely agreeing with the viewpoints of the Commission, critical voices among MEPs saw that the Commission was not as ambitious as the Parliament, both in terms of the format and outcome of CoFoE (see below).[14] On the Council side, the General Affairs Council addressed the issue on 28 January, concluding that ministers 'underlined the need to ensure a balanced representation of the three EU institutions and to fully involve national parliaments'.[15] But after the COVID-19 crisis set in, there was mainly silence.

Throughout the process, there have been disagreements between the EU institutions (Parliament, Commission, Council) about the organisation of CoFoE, including who chairs it, its content, as well as whether it could result in Treaty changes. Even if the Conference manages to agree on ambitious reform proposals, implementing them can be difficult and Treaty change requires unanimity. The position of the Council has been decidedly more intergovernmental and 'institutional' than those of the Commission and the Parliament, with most governments against or at

least very hesitant about Treaty change and other binding outcomes.[16] Also the Commission is hesitant about public commitments to Treaty reform. The Parliament, its political groups and also the Commission urged the Council to move ahead,[17] and finally in early February 2021, it adopted its position.[18] This paved the way for the joint statement of the three EU institutions adopted on 10 March, which outlined that CoFoE operates under the authority of the Joint Presidency (presidents of the EP, Council and Commission); has an Executive Board where the three institutions have three seats each (Guy Verhofstadt from Renew Europe is a co-chair of the board and the other two MEPs are Manfred Weber from EPP and Iratxe García Pérez from S&D); a Conference Plenary; a multilingual digital platform[19]; and citizens' panels organised nationally and by the EU institutions.[20] The Conference was officially launched on 9 May and is expected to reach conclusions by spring 2022.

Coalitions and Leadership in the Parliament

Turning to the Parliament, we can see from the beginning the EP trying to claim 'ownership' of the Conference. There has clearly been from the outset rather high interest in CoFoE among the MEPs. Significantly, the leaders of political groups have been strongly involved. The Conference of Presidents—the body responsible for organising Parliament's business that consists of the EP President and the chairs of the political groups—established a Working Group, with the Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO) having the main responsibility for dealing with the matter. Chaired by EP President David Sassoli (S&D), the Working Group brought together representatives from the political groups, including Paulo Rangel (EPP), Gabriele Bischoff (S&D),[21] Guy Verhofstadt (Renew Europe) and Antonio Tajani (EPP) in his capacity as the AFCO chair.[22] AFCO did not appoint a rapporteur, as it did not issue a report, just the opinion mentioned below.

AFCO organised a public hearing on 4 December 2019 that featured a long list of speakers from EU institutions, academia and civil society.[23] AFCO adopted its opinion on 9 December but not before sifting through the 238 amendments tabled by the MEPs in the committee.[24] This was the only 'outreach' effort by AFCO, but interviews suggest that MEPs spread the word about CoFoE in different ways from engaging with civil society actors to blog texts to speaking about the Conference within their national parties or with colleagues from national legislatures.

The Working Group reported to the Conference of Presidents on 19 December, stating that the 'note reflects the current consensus among a majority of the political groups on the scope, governance and outcome of the Conference'.[25] The fact that the preparations for CoFoE were overseen by the Conference of Presidents indicates the high salience of the topic in the Parliament—and is simultaneously also a signal for the other EU institutions that CoFoE deserves to be taken seriously.

The main contents of the Working Group paper were included in the subsequent EP resolution adopted on 15 January 2020.[26] The motion for the resolution was tabled by MEPs from all political groups with the exception of the two Eurosceptical groups, European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) and ID. On behalf of EPP it was signed by Manfred Weber, Paulo Rangel, Antonio Tajani and Danuta Maria Hübner; from S&D by Iratxe García Pérez, Gabriele Bischoff and Domènec Ruiz Devesa; and from Renew Europe by Dacian Cioloş, Guy Verhofstadt and Pascal Durand.[27] The plenary discussed the issue in the presence of Commissioner Šuica and the Council Presidency, with active input from across the political groups.[28] The debate reflected the broad partisan consensus, with the Eurosceptics adopting more critical positions.[29] After the debate and votes on 37 amendments, the Parliament adopted its rather detailed resolution with 494 votes to 147 and 49 abstentions. In the EPP group cohesion was 97.3%, in S&D 95.7% and in Renew Europe 95.5%.[30] Examining the composition of the Working Group and the actors involved in the Parliament, we note the presence of group leaders (Weber and vice-chair Rangel from EPP, García Pérez from S&D, and Cioloş from Renew) and other seasoned veterans (such as Verhofstadt) of inter-institutional bargaining.

Reflecting the positions of the Commission and the Council, the EP resolution highlighted listening to the citizens, identified a broad range of policies to be tackled and opined that 'issues such as the lead candidate system and transnational lists should be taken into consideration'. According to the resolution CoFoE plenary should involve representatives from the Parliament, the Council, the Commission, national parliaments, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions, as well as EU-level social partners. The Presidents of the EP, the European Council and the Commission should oversee the process and both a Steering Committee and the Executive Coordination Board should have representation from the Parliament, the Commission and the Council. The Parliament's resolution did not hide the ambition of

the EP to lead the Conference. The next day the Conference of Presidents outlined the composition of the Executive Coordination Board for CoFoE, with MEPs from EPP, S&D and Renew Europe and representative each from the Council and the Commission. According to this plan Verhofstadt would be the CoFoE president, with Weber (EPP) and a representative of the S&D group as his deputies.[31]

Turning to the activities of the three Europarties and their EP groups, the latter produced more public material, indicating again the strong presence of the Parliament in the process. CoFoE, or anything related to it, did not feature in the programmes or the resolutions of the Europarty congresses held in 2019. While the PES congress took place already in February in Madrid (and thus before the open letter of Macron), the congresses of ALDE (Athens, October) and EPP (November, Zagreb) were organised well after the initial plans for CoFoE had been laid out.[32] The Europarty ALDE had made plans prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic about organising events involving member parties and individual party members to collect and shape ideas feeding into CoFoE. In November 2020, ALDE council issued a rather detailed position paper on CoFoE, recommending a series of concrete changes to how the EU institutions work—and that after CoFoE, 'a European Convention should be convened in order to implement necessary treaty adjustments'.[33] ALDE has also stated that it 'will, in the second half of 2021, organise its own Conference on the Future of Europe'.[34]

Regarding the political groups, the EPP group issued a brief general press release coinciding with the adoption of the EP resolution, with Rangel, the group vice-chair in charge of preparing CoFoE, basically just summarising the planned agenda and format.[35] Coinciding with the report of the parliamentary Working Group, S&D in its press release emphasised the need to engage with citizens, with Bischoff arguing that 'S&D Group has led the way in citizen engagement in recent years, with a bottom-up approach to regular debate and conversations with local people all over Europe. We must have citizens and civil society at the heart of the Conference on the Future of Europe'.[36] S&D organised a streamed event in Brussels titled 'The Political Vision of the EU's Constitutional Future' on 6 February 2020, with representatives from EU institutions, FEPS, civil society actors (including ETUC) and academics among the speakers.[37] In December 2020, the S&D group adopted its strategy on CoFoE, specifically emphasising diversity and the need to 'approach

in particular those that are more excluded from the usual communication campaigns, to rebalance the perception of the European institutions targeting only a particular group of citizens, while remaining attractive for active citizens in European organisations, trade unions' leaders, academics, students'.[38] The Renew Europe group issued a press release coinciding with the EP resolution, claiming that the 'resolution adopted includes most of the proposals from the Renew Europe group and its negotiators Guy Verhofstadt (Open-VLD, Belgium) and Pascal Durand (Renaissance, France)'.[39] Another press release the day after stated that 'Renew Europe put forward the proposal on the Conference on the Future of Europe and I am delighted our family will play a central role in driving it', referring to the proposed leading role of Verhofstadt.[40]

Turning to the political foundations, they organised various events, even together, and produced a steady stream of publications, often drawing on academic expertise, that either directly dealt with CoFoE or more generally with the future of Europe and institutional questions. Most of the interaction between political foundations, Europarties and the EP groups is informal and active, with overlap in terms of personnel, and this also applied to the preparatory stages of CoFoE. Party-political links between the Parliament and the Commission were strong, and the positions of the two institutions were broadly congruent.

Concluding Discussion

This chapter has analysed the involvement of the Europarties and particularly their EP groups in the agenda-setting stage of the Conference for the Future of Europe. In line with our first proposition, we detected very limited input of the Europarties, whereas the main EP political groups, acting together and drawing on their collective experience from previous rounds of constitutional reform, displayed active interest and also influence. As one of our interviewees explained, Europarties become more prominent in intergovernmental processes (such as IGCs), while in supranational, inter-institutional bargaining the EP groups are strongly engaged. These types of constitutional processes are 'business as usual' for the Parliament and its main groups, and, referring to values such as democracy and representation, they have proven successful in proactively shaping the agenda of inter-institutional reforms. To be sure, the EP does not always reach its objectives (Héritier et al., 2019), and the same may well apply to CoFoE. Venue matters also, and hence there were

disagreements between the Council and the Parliament about both who chairs CoFoE and its eventual organisation. But there is no denying the influence of the EP groups during the early stages of CoFoE.

Confirming our second proposition, inside the Parliament the usual pattern of coalition-building was evident, with the pro-EU centrist groups aligning together and the Eurosceptics opposed to the EP positions. Parliamentary unity should facilitate bargaining success vis-à-vis the national governments, while the strong presence of political group chairs signals that the issue is of high salience for the EP. CoFoE clearly attracted broader interest in the chamber, but within political groups the role of group leaders was prominent, not least in terms of presenting and communicating group positions. Hence, during constitutional reform processes, the balance of power shifts towards group leaders, unlike in normal legislation where particularly rapporteurs and MEPs seated in the respective committees are influential in shaping group positions. This finding validates our third proposition. Our analysis also provided evidence of the strong partisan and institutional ties between the EP and the Commission, and of routine interaction between the Europarties, their EP groups and the respective political foundations.

In terms of agenda-setting, concerns about the democratic deficit and legitimacy of integration have been key drivers behind the increased powers of the EP (Rittberger, 2005), and the same themes appear in the framing of CoFoE by the Parliament and the Commission. One can also detect a built-in pro-EU bias in the agenda and format of CoFoE, although EU leaders have promised that all shades of opinions matter.[41] Even before the Conference has been launched, it has attracted strong criticism on grounds of being too top-down and elitist, with particularly civil society actors calling for genuine dialogue with citizens, also during the crucial agenda-setting stage.[42] Indeed, our analysis shows that the Europarties and their EP groups hardly attempted to reach out to the citizens and grassroots party members. Beyond some press releases and events organised by political foundations, it was impossible to detect any engagement with civil society actors. National member parties in turn seemed rather ignorant of CoFoE. Obviously, this might change after the Conference kicks off, but we have underlined the importance of agenda-setting as it strongly guides the debates in CoFoE. In terms of agenda-setting literature, this implies that the 'political agenda' (the interests of the actual policy-makers) predominated at the expense of the 'public agenda'.

Notes

1. White Paper on the Future of Europe: Reflections and scenarios for the EU27 by 2025. European Commission, COM (2017) 2025 of 1 March 2017.
2. European Commission, Citizens' dialogues and citizens' consultations, Key conclusions, https://ec.europa.eu/info/about-european-commission/get-involved/citizens-dialogues_en; 30.4.2019.
3. President Macron gives speech on new initiative for Europe, Office of the President of the French Republic, 26 September 2017, https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2017/09/26/initiative-pour-l-europe-discours-d-emmanuel-macron-pour-une-europe-souveraine-unie-democr atique.
4. The Future of Europe debates in the European Parliament, 2018–2019: A synthesis of speeches by EU Heads of State or Government, In-Depth Analysis, European Parliamentary Research Service, PE 637.948—May 2019.
5. «Pour une Renaissance européenne»: la lettre d'Emmanuel Macron aux Européens, http://www.leparisien.fr/politique/pour-une-renaissance-eur opeenne-la-lettre-d-emmanuel-macron-aux-europeens-04-03-2019-802 4766.php#xtor=AD-1481423553, 4.3.2019.
6. The Sibiu Declaration, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/05/09/the-sibiu-declaration/, European Council, 9.5.2019.
7. See for example European Parliament resolution of 16 February 2017 on improving the functioning of the European Union building on the potential of the Lisbon Treaty (2014/2249(INI)), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2017-0049_EN.html?redirect; European Parliament resolution of 16 February 2017 on possible evolutions of and adjustments to the current institutional set-up of the European Union (2014/2248(INI), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2017-0048_EN.html?redirect; and European Parliament resolution of 13 February 2019 on the state of the debate on the future of Europe (2018/2094(INI)), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2019-0098_EN.html.
8. Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2019-2024, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/resources/library/media/20190716R ES57231/20190716RES57231.pdf, 16.7.2019.
9. Ursula von der Leyen, President-elect of the European Commission, Mission letter, Dubravka Šuica, Vice-President-designate for Democracy and Demography, Brussels, 10 September 2019.

10. Conference on the Future of Europe, Franco-German non-paper on key questions and guidelines, https://www.politico.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Conference-on-the-Future-of-Europe.pdf.

11. European Council meeting (12 December 2019)—Conclusions, Brussels, 12 December 2019, EUCO 29/19.

12. Social issues should be priority for the Conference on the Future of Europe, https://www.etuc.org/en/pressrelease/social-issues-should-be-priority-conference-future-europe, 16.1.2020.

13. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, Shaping the Conference on the Future of Europe, Brussels, 22.1.2020, COM(2020) 27 final; The Commission's contribution to shaping the Conference on the Future of Europe, 22.1.2020.

14. Commission to Parliament: Let's calm down on EU makeover, https://www.politico.eu/article/european-commission-to-parliament-lets-calm-down-on-eu-makeover-ursula-von-der-leyen-emmanuel-macron/, 21.1.2020; Conference on the Future of Europe: Don't mention the T word, https://www.politico.eu/article/conference-on-the-future-of-europe-dont-mention-the-treaty-word-european-commission-parliament-ursula-von-der-leyen/, 22.1.2020.

15. Council of the European Union, Outcome of the Council meeting, General Affairs, Brussels, 28 January 2020, 5573/20.

16. Future of Europe: EU Council vetoes treaty change, https://euobserver.com/institutional/148755, 25.6.2020; Dozen EU states spell out 'Future of Europe' priorities, https://euobserver.com/democracy/151319.

17. E.g. Future of Europe Conference: Council urged to move now, https://euobserver.com/social/148472, 27.5.2020; Conference on the Future of Europe: MEPs to push for launch by autumn, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/agenda/briefing/2020-06-17/2/conference-on-the-future-of-europe-meps-to-push-for-launch-by-autumn; Co-creating a citizens-centred Conference on the Future of Europe, https://voxeurop.eu/en/co-creating-a-citizens-centered-conference-on-the-future-of-europe/, 9.10.2020; Future of Europe: EU Council urged to propose a chair, https://euobserver.com/institutional/149743, 14.10.2020; Liberal Pre-Summit meeting ahead of crucial EU Council, https://www.aldeparty.eu/liberal_pre_summit_meeting_ahead_of_crucial_eu_summit, 16.12.2020; Time for the Conference on the Future of Europe to start, https://euobserver.com/opinion/150564, 12.1.2021; Future of Europe: don't waste any more time, https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/news/future-of-europe-don-t-waste-any-more-time, 4.2.2021.

18. Council of the European Union, Conference on the Future of Europe—revised Council position, Brussels, 3 February 2021, 5911/21.

19. https://futureu.europa.eu/.

20. Joint Declaration on the Conference on the Future of Europe, Engaging with Citizens for Democracy—Building a More Resilient Europe, 10 March 2021.
21. Two experienced social democratic MEPs with considerable experience from constitutional issues, Richard Corbett and Jo Leinen, were no longer so directly involved. Corbett had to leave the EP due to Brexit but will advise the EP President during CoFoE, while Leinen failed to renew his seat in the 2019 elections.
22. Preparing the Conference on the Future of Europe, Briefing, European Parliamentary Research Service, European Parliament, December 2019. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI(2019)644202.
23. Conference on the Future of Europe: hearing with Parliament and Commission VPs, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20191205IPR68320/conference-on-the-future-of-europe-hearing-with-parliament-and-commission-vps, 5.12.2019; https://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/product-details/20191120CHE06561.
24. Opinion on the Conference on the Future of Europe, Constitutional Affairs Committee, 10.12.2019; https://emeeting.europarl.europa.eu/emeeting/committee/agenda/201912/AFCO?meeting=AFCO-2019-1209_1P&session=12-09-18-00.
25. Conference on the Future of Europe, Main outcome of the Working Group, 19.12.2019.
26. European Parliament's position on the Conference on the Future of Europe. European Parliament resolution of 15 January 2020 on the European Parliament's position on the Conference on the Future of Europe (2019/2990(RSP)), European Parliament's position on the Conference on the Future of Europe, 15.1.2020.
27. Motion for a resolution to wind up the debate on the statements by the Council and the Commission pursuant to Rule 132(2) of the Rules of Procedure on the European Parliament's position on the Conference on the Future of Europe (2019/2990(RSP)), 9.1.2020; https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/B-9-2020-0036_EN.html.
28. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2020-01-15-ITM-006_EN.html.
29. Parliament kicks off debate on the Future of Europe conference, https://www.euractiv.com/section/future-eu/news/parliament-kicks-off-debate-on-the-future-of-europe-conference/, 16.1.2020.
30. Voting statistics from https://www.votewatch.eu/.
31. Parliament picks Verhofstadt for new president role, https://www.politico.eu/article/parliament-picks-guy-verhofstadt-for-new-president-role/, 16.1.2020.

32. The only partial exception was the ALDE congress, where the programme had a panel on 'Debating our Future!—Young Liberals on Pan-European Challenges', while the congress adopted resolutions on 'Transnational lists' and on 'Strengthening European democracy and values'. The latter resolution calls for 'the ALDE Party to provide its contribution to the "Conference on the Future of Europe" in the most effective way(s)'. See https://www.aldeparty.eu/Congress.

33. ALDE input to the Conference on the Future of Europe, ALDE virtual council, https://www.aldeparty.eu/tags/council_online_november_2020.

34. Liberal Pre-Summit meeting ahead of crucial EU Council, https://www.aldeparty.eu/liberal_pre_summit_meeting_ahead_of_crucial_eu_summit, 16.12.2020.

35. Broad, open, interactive and inclusive debate on the future of Europe, https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/news/broad-open-and-inclusive-debate-on-the-future-of-europe, 15.1.2020.

36. Citizens must be at the heart of the Conference on the Future of Europe, https://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/newsroom/citizens-must-be-heart-conference-future-europe, 19.12.2019. See also Europe needs strong social rights, http://pr.euractiv.com/pr/europe-needs-strong-social-rights-200170, 28.1.2020.

37. https://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/events/political-vision-eus-constitutional-future, 6.2.2020.

38. S&D Strategy on the Conference on the Future of Europe, https://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/newsroom/conference-future-europe-should-be-extended-until-2023-say-iratxe-garcia-and-marek-belka, 10.12.2020.

39. Conference on the future of Europe: the time has come to democratize the European Union, https://reneweuropegroup.eu/en/news/1406-conference-on-the-future-of-europe-the-time-has-come-to-democratize-the-european-union/, 15.1.2020.

40. Renew Europe will have a central role in the Conference on the future of Europe, https://reneweuropegroup.eu/en/news/1411-renew-europe-will-have-a-central-role-in-the-conference-on-the-future-of-europe/, 16.1.2020.

41. For example, Future of Europe: What happens if a majority of citizens asks for 'less Europe'?, https://www.euractiv.com/section/future-eu/news/future-of-europe-what-happens-if-a-majority-of-citizens-asks-for-less-europe/, 22.1.2020.

42. Recommendations for a successful and effective Conference on the Future of Europe, https://ecas.org/recommendations-for-a-successful-and-effective-conference-on-the-future-of-europe/, 18.12.2019; Alberto Alemanno, The EU won't fix its democratic deficit with another top-down 'conference', https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jan/21/eu-democratic-deficit-top-down-conference-verhofstadt, 21.1.2020;

The Conference on the Future of Europe: an Open Letter, https://ver
fassungsblog.de/the-conference-on-the-future-of-europe-an-open-letter/,
1.2.2020; 'Top-down' future of Europe conference 'will fail' warning,
https://euobserver.com/institutional/147431, 13.2.2020; Future of
Europe conference: one year on standby, https://euobserver.com/instit
utional/150431, 21.12.2020.

References

Ackrill, R., Kay, A., & Zahariadis, N. (2013). Ambiguity, multiple streams, and
EU policy. *Journal of European Public Policy, 20*(6), 871–887.

Bardi, L. (2020). The heart of the core: The EPP group in the EU institu-
tional and political framework. In L. Bardi, W. Gagatek, C. Germond, K.
M. Johansson, W. Kaiser, & S. Sassano (Eds.), *The European ambition: The
group of the European People's Party and European integration* (pp. 255–334).
Nomos.

Bardi, L., Bressanelli, E., Calossi, E., Cicchi, L., Gagatek, W., & Pizzimenti, E.
(2014). *Political parties and political foundations at European level. Challenges
and opportunities*. The European Parliament.

Baumgartner, F. R., & Jones, B. D. (1993). *Agendas and instability in American
politics*. University of Chicago Press.

Béland, D., & Howlett, M. (2016). The role and impact of multiple-streams
approach in comparative policy research. *Journal of Comparative Policy
Analysis, 18*(3), 221–227.

Bowler, S., & McElroy, G. (2015). Political group cohesion and 'hurrah' voting
in the European Parliament. *Journal of European Public Policy, 22*(9), 1355–
1365.

Calossi, E. (2014). European Parliament political groups and European Political
parties: Between cooperation and competition. In *Challenges in constitutional
affairs in the new term: Taking stock and looking forward*, *Workshop for the
AFCO Committee*, (pp. 87–102). The European Parliament.

Calossi, E., & Cicchi, L. (2019). European Parliament political groups and Euro-
pean Political parties: Development and relationship between two faces of the
EU political system. *Quaderni Del Circolo Rosselli, 39*(2), 15–31.

Cobb, R. W., & Elder, C. D. (1971). The politics of agenda-building: An alterna-
tive perspective for modern democratic theory. *The Journal of Politics, 33*(4),
892–915.

Delwit, P., Külahci, E., & Van de Walle, C. (Eds.) (2004). *The Europarties:
Organisation and influence*. Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles.

Elder, C. D., & Cobb, R. W. (1984). Agenda-building and the politics of aging.
Policy Studies Journal, 13(1), 115–129.

Fabbrini, F. (2019). The conference on the future of Europe: A new model to reform the EU? *Brexit Institute Working Paper Series* No. 12/2018.

Gagatek, W. (2008). *Political parties at the European Level: Their organization and activities*. European University Institute.

Gagatek, W. (2009). *European political parties as campaign organizations: Toward a greater politicisation of the European Parliament elections*. Centre for European Studies.

Gagatek, W., & Van Hecke, S. (2014). The development of European political foundations and their role in strengthening Europarties. *Acta Politica, 49*(1), 86–104.

Héritier, A., Meissner L. K., Moury C., & Schoeller M. G. (2019). *European Parliament ascendant: Parliamentary strategies of self-empowerment in the EU*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Hertner, I. (2019). United in diversity? Europarties and their individual members' rights. *Journal of European Integration, 41*(4), 487–505.

Hix, S., & Lord, C. (1997). *Political parties in the European Union*. Macmillan.

Hix, S., Noury, A. G., & Roland, G. (2007). *Democratic politics in the European Parliament*. Cambridge University Press.

Johansson, K. M. (1999). Tracing the employment title in the Amsterdam Treaty: Uncovering transnational coalitions. *Journal of European Public Policy, 6*(1), 85–101.

Johansson, K. M. (2002a). Another road to Maastricht: The Christian Democrat coalition and the quest for European union. *Journal of Common Market Studies, 40*(5), 871–893.

Johansson, K. M. (2002b). Party elites in multilevel Europe: The Christian Democrats and the Single European Act. *Party Politics, 8*(4), 423–439.

Johansson, K. M. (2016). Europarty influence and its limits – The case of the European People's Party and the Amsterdam Treaty. *Journal of European Integration, 38*(1), 79–94.

Johansson, K. M. (2017). The role of Europarties in EU treaty reform: Theory and practice. *Acta Politica, 52*(3), 286–305.

Johansson, K. M. (2020). Constitutionalising the union: The role of the EPP Group. In L. Bardi, W. Gagatek, C. Germond, K. M. Johansson, W. Kaiser, & S. Sassano (Eds.), *The European ambition: The group of the European People's Party and European integration* (pp. 89–130). Nomos.

Johansson, K. M., & Raunio, T. (2005). Regulating Europarties: Cross-party coalitions capitalizing on incomplete contracts. *Party Politics, 11*(5), 515–534.

Kingdon, J. W. (1984). *Agendas, alternatives and public policies*. Little, Brown & Co.

Kreppel, A. (2002). *The European Parliament and the supranational party system: A study of institutional development*. Cambridge University Press.

Lightfoot, S. (2005). *Europeanizing Social Democracy?* Routledge.

Mansbach, R. W., & Vasquez, J. A. (1981). *In search of theory*. Columbia University Press.

Princen, S. (2007). Agenda-setting in the European Union: A theoretical exploration and agenda for research. *Journal of European Public Policy, 14*(1), 21–38.

Princen, S. (2009). *Agenda-setting in the European Union*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Princen, S. (2011). Agenda-setting strategies in EU policy processes. *Journal of European Public Policy, 18*(7), 927–943.

Rittberger, B. (2005). *Building Europe's Parliament: Democratic representation beyond the Nation-State*. Oxford University Press

Tallberg, J., & Johansson, K. M. (2008). Party politics in the European Council. *Journal of European Public Policy, 15*(8), 1222–1242.

Timus, N., & Lightfoot, S. (2014). Europarties between 'deepening' and 'widening.' *Acta Politica, 49*(1), 1–4.

Van Hecke, S. (2010). Do transnational party federations matter? (… and why should we care?). *Journal of Contemporary European Research, 6*(3), 395–411.

Van Hecke, S., Andrione-Moylan, A., Brack, N., de Coninck, I., Day, S., Gagatek, W., van Haute, E., Hertner, I., Johansson, K. M., Lavrelashvili, T., Pittoors, G., & Wolfs, W. (2018). Reconnecting European political parties with European Union citizens. *International IDEA Discussion Paper* 6/2018.

Van Hecke, S., & Johansson, K. M. (2013a). Gipfelpolitik politischer Parteien auf europäischer Ebene: Eine vergleichende Analyse. In T. Poguntke, M. Morlok, & H. Merten (Eds.), *Auf dem Weg zu einer europäischen Parteiendemokratie?* (pp. 175–190). Nomos.

Van Hecke, S., & Johansson, K. M. (2013b). Summitry of political parties at European level: The case of the PES Leaders' conference. In E. Stetter, K. Duffek, & A. Skrzypek (Eds.), *In the name of political union—Europarties on the rise* (pp. 62–76). FEPS.

Wolfs, W. (2019). *The funding of European political parties: A process-tracing analysis of the factors driving the 2018 reform of the party finance rules*. Faculteit Sociale Wetenschappen.

(Disap)pointing in the Mirror: The European Parliament's Obligations to Protect EU Basic Values in Member States and at EU Level

John Morijn

Introduction

The political groups that constitute the European Parliament (EP) are usually portrayed (and think of themselves) as the main champion of protecting EU values like democracy, the rule of law and human rights in the EU setting. This translates into a majority of Members of European Parliament (MEPs) laudably insisting with the Commission and the Council to act to protect these values inside and outside the EU (Morijn, 2018). The most visible aspect of this is consistent criticism, laid down in political resolutions supported by a majority of the EP's members, of member states where rule of law backsliding occurs. The

J. Morijn (✉)
University of Groningen, Groningen, Netherlands
e-mail: j.morijn@rug.nl

real target of such criticism is the actions of heads of states, prime ministers and ministers of governing parties in member states such as Poland and Hungary.

However, such member state level politics and politicians are not entirely divorced from politics at EU level. The same national governing parties that are criticised by the EP's political groups form part of the Council of Ministers, the EP's co-legislating partner-EU institution. They also nominate persons to serve in the most European of political EU institutions, the Commission. Member State level rule of law backsliding has therefore already 'trickled up'. This has caused the EU to be less able to respond to backsliding. Instead, it is caught in an 'authoritarian equilibrium' (Kelemen, 2020). It is crucial to realise that the EP is part of that problem too. In fact, when political groups put pressure on and criticise the behaviour of member states and other EU political actors vis-à-vis EU basic values, they have an unexpected further target … themselves.

How so? Its own members are elected in nationally organised European elections, including of course in the member states that a majority of the political groups consistently criticise for rule of law violations. Political parties leading national governments in member states that violate EU values evidently also successfully participate in EP elections. As a logical consequence, politicians affiliated to these very same national political parties end up as MEPs. They become member parties in Europarties and members in political groups alongside national parties and MEPs that have criticised, in EP resolutions, the very same national political parties through which they were elected. This logically means that when a majority in the EP rightly preaches, it is directly criticising its own ranks.

Building on previous research (Morijn, 2018, 2019a, 2019b), this chapter aims to map and reflect on the track-record of political groups in the EP with regard to the use of tools at their disposal to act on their legal obligations to protect EU basic values at both member state and EU level. Remedies to deal with member state level problems are well-known and include political resolutions and Article 7 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) (rule of law clause), as well as infringement proceedings and the more recent Regulation 2020/2042 (rule of law conditionality regulation). With regard to the EP's role in addressing EU-level rule of law problems, three tools are worth highlighting. Firstly, Parliament proposed changes to the Electoral Act to erect a 5% electoral threshold for EP elections. Secondly, Regulation 1141/2014 on the statute and

funding of Europarties and European political foundations links EU-funding to continued compliance with EU basic values. Thirdly, the EP's own Rules of Procedure (EPRoP) include instructions on how the EP itself will use Regulation 1141/2014.

This web of different legal and policy commitments is then contrasted with the actual practice of political groups. It is argued that what becomes visible, in quite sharp contrast to their (self) image of being an active proponent of basic EU values, and perhaps their very self-understanding, is the large disconnect between the political groups' activity in upholding these values versus member states and their inactivity to do the same at EU level. In other words: by criticising only member states, political groups act problematically inconsistently—and are (disap)pointing in the mirror.

This chapter first provides an overview of different frequently discussed tools to protect EU values *at member state level*, with a focus on the EP's political groups' role in putting these to use. It then zooms in specifically on instruments available to the political groups inside the EP to protect EU basic values *at the EU level itself*, particularly the Electoral Act regulating EP elections, requirements incumbent on Europarties and European political foundations regarding complying with EU values and the EPRoP. Based on this, it is assessed how these instruments are actually used and what improvements could be considered to (better) reach the aim of protection and promotion of EU basic values across all the EP's activities with this purpose. A conclusion wraps up the discussion.

Context: EU Protection of EU Values at Member State Level and the EP

When pressed on the question of how EU institutions fight to uphold EU values, such as the rule of law, democracy and fundamental rights (Article 6 TEU) at Member State level, most observers will likely primarily point to how the Council is trying to address this through Article 7 TEU. As is well-known, this procedure was initiated with regard to two member states, Poland (European Commission, 2017) and Hungary (European Parliament, 2018). Political groups play a role in this procedure too. In fact, it was them, particularly the mainstream political groups like the liberal Renew Europe, the Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA), the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) and the (large majority of) the European People's Party (EPP),

that referred the case of Hungary to the Council. After Hungary had challenged whether a sufficient number of MEPs had supported the resolution, the European Court of Justice recently upheld the legality of this action (European Court of Justice, 2021). The EP also adopts regular resolutions aimed specifically at the ongoing Article 7 proceedings (European Parliament, 2020a). However, the EP's further role in Article 7 proceedings is, unfortunately, rather secondary. For example, it is not formally invited to, and therefore not directly involved in Article 7 TEU hearings when they take place in the Council (Pech et al., 2019).

For a variety of reasons, the EU institutions' intervention under Article 7 TEU has not yet led to concrete change within the two member states concerned. The most important reason is that this mechanism was never designed for a possible situation in which it would (likely) need to be applied to more than one Member State at a time. In the current situation, Poland and Hungary can veto truly effective actions against the other Member State. On the other hand, periodic attention at the ministerial level may be in fact be instrumental to gradually driving home the political importance of the topic in the long run. In any event this is by no means the only route through which the EU's political institutions are engaged in enforcing EU basic values at Member State level. Indeed, there are various other political and legal means, that each entail a different role for the EP.

As to political tools, political groups have a long track-record of adopting political, legally non-binding resolutions addressing the situation regarding EU basic values in member states, varying from Poland and Hungary to Malta and the Czech Republic (Morijn, 2018). Majorities vary somewhat, as MEPs are unlikely to vote to criticise their own member state, but by and large they are supported by Renew, the Greens/EFA, the S&D and the EPP. The Commission also operates various political tools. The most prominent is its Annual Rule of Law Report, which it introduced to create a facts-based basis for 'dialogue' with and between member states (European Commission, 2020b, 2021b). These reports are now bi-annually discussed in the Council, where five member states are being discussed each time. There is no role for the EP in this, although the EP often organises its own hearings on specific member states or particular EU basic values-related procedures.

Likely as a result of the EP's exclusion from political discussions about basic EU values, the EP has itself adopted resolutions that somewhat replicate the political dialogue mechanism based on the Commission's

reports. There are some subtle differences, but the central issue is to give a more central role to the EP itself. In 2016, it adopted a resolution calling on the Commission for an EU mechanism on Democracy, Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights (DRF) to be set up, that would also aim to constitute a dialogue about how EU basic values are protected by and at Member State level, based on objective facts, and that would involve both the EP and national parliaments (European Parliament, 2016). More recently, a similar mechanism was called for by the EP once again and received very wide support among the four mainstream political groups (European Parliament, 2020b).[1] The Commission has so far not really embraced these proposals, instead of pointing out that what the EP is asking for is already being done. In that respect, the Commission has disregarded the EP's plea to widen the political debate from only the Council to also the EP, or to at least end the practice that discussions are now not undertaken in a way that engages the three political EU institutions equally or simultaneously.

In addition, tools that are more legal in nature, and more consequential in their effect, have been employed and developed by EU institutions to try and induce change at member states level. These involve the EP and its political groups in various ways, but most importantly simply in its role as the EU institution exercising democratic control over the Commission as executive, or as co-legislator together with the Council.

The most important tool is the Commission's power under Article 258 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) to enforce Union law vis-à-vis member states. Until recently the Commission was criticised for doing too little too late in that respect, even if EU values are clearly binding EU law (Scheppele et al., 2020). The paralysis resulting from a refusal to use tools that were clearly the best for the job at hand was rightly criticised as highly damaging and lamentable (Pech & Scheppele, 2017). That state of play can now be written about in the past tense. The Commission has now initiated a number of infringement procedures against Hungary and Poland to try and induce compliance with various aspects of EU basic values, such as judicial independence, media freedom and LGBTI rights (European Commission, 2021a) and gone back to the Court of Justice to insist a ruling about judicial independence in Poland is properly implemented (European Commission, 2021a). The EP had often called for this type of actions in political resolutions, but it is an open question whether and to what extent the Commission has moved to being more assertive *because* the EP has called upon it to do so.

A powerful example of legislation that is aimed at enforcing basic EU values that the EP has helped bring about in its role of co-legislator is Regulation 2020/2042, the so-called rule of law conditionality regulation.[2] This instrument links the principle of sound financial management of any EU funds handed out to member states to compliance with rule of law principles. It enables the Commission to propose to the Council to block EU funds when well-documented and persistent Member State level problems to enforce basic EU values 'affect' or 'risk affecting' how EU funds are spent (Kelemen et al., 2021).[3] The instrument is in force since 1 January 2021, and political groups have put pressure on the Commission to apply this instrument more quickly. In a recent resolution, supported by the four mainstream political groups, the EP even threatened to sue the Commission for failure to act under Article 265 TFEU—an unprecedented move (European Parliament, 2021). This underlines the political commitment to act on protecting EU values at member state level.

The purpose of this overview is to signal these developments as relevant context and to highlight that these EP efforts are focused on addressing and suppressing the practice of illiberal politics, which may contravene EU values at *national*, Member State level. The rationale of EU-level intervention against specific member states, however, is not only to change the situation in these member states themselves. Perhaps as importantly it is to avoid that illiberalism spills over to other member states, or gets permanently anchored within EU institutions, in the sense that nationally and EU-level elected and appointed politicians with an agenda that is at odds with EU values consolidate their position. If that remains uncontested, this could create an 'authoritarian equilibrium' (Kelemen, 2020).

In that regard, it may be both important and somewhat surprising to learn that EU institutions have in fact put in place measures to protect basic EU values not *only* vis-à-vis member states, but also at EU level itself. Indeed, these measures, their significance and their implementation, as well as how that compares to political groups' activity when it comes to member state level enforcement of basic EU values, are not frequently analysed and commented upon. The next three sections aim to do just that.

The EP and Regulating Compliance with Basic EU Values at EU Level: Instruments

EU institutions have accompanied measures to confront member states violating EU values with legislation and other measures that aim to engage with the mirror problem at the EU level. This stems from the necessity to deal with the knock-on effects that the same problems in the same member states can have or are already having on the EU's *own* political setting. In particular, the EU legislator, and therefore also the EP and its political groups, have moved to introduce legislation and rules within the EP's self-regulatory EPRoP that boil down to measures to *restrict and condition access to and participation in* the EP political arena to only those Europarties and political groups that commit to complying with EU values. These measures are motivated by the overarching aim to avoid that the EU-level political setting is used to undermine the legally binding minimum commitments laid down in Article 2 TEU.

Restricting *access* to the EP political arena for political parties was attempted by the EP by proposing the inclusion of a compulsory 5% electoral threshold in the Electoral Act. This legal text lays down rules for how member states need to organise the EP elections. Under current rules, electoral thresholds, by which you need a minimum percentage of the vote to be able to gain seats at all, are allowed but not compulsory. Some member states, but far from all, use them for EP elections too. Justifications for using an electoral threshold can vary. Sometimes a seemingly objective reason is given, like avoiding political instability through fragmentation of parliament into too many different political parties. In reality, although sometimes more implicitly, more substantive implicit reasons appear to animate a desire to denying access to specific political parties with agendas that are perceived to be odds with basic EU values, as was the case for the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) that was growing at the time that the electoral threshold was proposed.

The push to include an EU-level *obligation* too, rather than the already existing mere possibility, resulted from 2011 and 2014 rulings by the German Federal Supreme Court. That court stated twice that the German national rules to apply the electoral threshold in national German elections could not be used for the EP elections as the EU setting had different characteristics (German Federal Supreme Court, 2014a, 2014b). The German government, comprised at the time of the Christian Democratic Party (CDU/CSU) and the Social Democrats (SPD),

and represented in the EPP and S&D political groups, wanted to be able to apply the same electoral rules to different elections. It therefore lobbied the EP, that has the right of initiative on this file (Article 223 TFEU), for there to be an explicit EU legal basis for the obligation to use an electoral threshold too.

The initial EP proposal to amend the Electoral Act[4] suggested a compulsory threshold for member states with more than 26 EP seats. The final result in the negotiations was to apply the obligation only to single-constituency member states with more than 35 EP seats. The key phrase, Article 3(2), reads as follows:

> Member States in which the list system is used shall set a minimum threshold for the allocation of seats for constituencies which comprise more than 35 seats. This threshold shall not be lower than 2 per cent, and shall not exceed 5 per cent, of the valid votes cast in the constituency concerned, including a single-constituency Member State.[5]

Remarkably, after the re-allocation of EP seats due to Brexit, this wording meant it would only apply to *two* member states: Germany and Spain.[6] These are not, evidently, two member states that have been on the EU institutions radar in that governing parties have a systemic and problematic track-record in terms of upholding EU basic values. The choice to formulate the requirement in such a way that it only focuses on two member states is not explicated. Given the unanimity requirement in the Council, it is clearly a political compromise. The practical effect, nonetheless, would be that these threshold rules would make it harder for smaller parties from only these member states to enter the EU political arena (including, but *not* limited to political parties that would likely violate EU basic values once in power). Interestingly, one of three member states that did not ratify the rules in time to be applicable to the 2019 EP elections was … Germany[7] (European Parliament, 2020c; EPRS, 2021).

The EU legislator, and political parties in the EP on their own, have also acted in two ways to condition the terms of *participation* by MEPs in the EU political debate once elected. First by laying down rules in Regulation 1141/2014[8] about compliance with basic EU values by Europarties and European Political Foundations, adopted by the ordinary legislative procedure (i.e. Commission proposal, EP deciding by majority, Council by qualified majority). Second, through establishing rules about the formation of political groups laid down in the EPRoP (Brack &

Costa, 2018), which, according to Article 232 TFEU, are adopted and can be adapted by a simple majority of the EP. The applicable rules and procedures will be described in turn.

As a starting point, however, it is important to note first that Europarties and political groups, although governed by different rules, are interconnected in many respects (see Bressanelli; Johansson and Raunio in this volume). A Europarty is defined as a political alliance of member political parties from at least 25% of EU member states.[9] Its purpose is to develop a common European political agenda. A European political foundation is a think tank related to it. A Europarty is distinct from, yet linked to political groups in the EP. A political group, according to the EPRoP[10] is a group of at least 23 MEPs from at least 25% of EU member states that shares a political affinity (see Bressanelli; Ahrens and Kantola in this volume).[11] The purpose of such cooperation is access to political influence by dividing speaking times and files.

The intricate connection between Europarties and political groups[12] was explained by the Court of Justice too in a case which confirmed the legality of the need for a substantive political affiliation when forming a political group.[13] The large majority of MEPs belong to Europarties, which in turn belong to political groups in their entirety. Some political groups are home to more than one Europarty. It is possible, but not common, for MEPs not be part of a Europarty but still to be part of a political group (non-affiliated). It is equally possible, but again rare, to be part of a Europarty but not of a political group (non-aligned). Most of the directly elected MEPs perform their functions both within a Europarty and a political group.

As concerns Europarties and European political foundations, protection of EU values was strengthened by amending long existing (but never enforced) rules that lay down the requirement that EU-funding to Europarties can only be issued on the condition that in their programme and actions basic EU values (Article 2 TEU) are complied with (Grasso & Perrone, 2019; Katsaitis, 2020; Morijn, 2019a, 2019b; Norman, 2021; Norman & Wolfs, 2022; Saitto, 2017; Wolfs & Smulders, 2018). To this effect Regulation 1141/2014, recently further amended by Regulation 2018/673,[14] introduced a registration obligation for Europarties with a newly established, independent Authority for European Political Parties and European Political Foundations (APPF).

Next to a check on whether establishment criteria to set up a Europarty or European Political Foundation are fulfilled, part of the requirement is a

written pledge of allegiance to the basic EU values Article 2 TEU. Failure to register with the APPF means not receiving any EU-funding. In addition, a procedure was set up to verify continuing values compliance after the moment of registration. This can be triggered by the Commission, Council and the EP itself. It involves alerting the APPF, that in turn can ask the help of a special committee of independent experts to assess continued compliance with EU values (Morijn, 2019a).

The EP has adopted rules in the EPRoP on how to trigger this procedure. At the request of 25% of MEPs who represent at least three political groups, the EP can take a vote to trigger the EU values verification procedure under Regulation 1141/2014 (Rule 353(2)). Such a request should include substantial factual evidence showing that a Europarty does not comply with EU values in its actions (Rule 235(2)). The EP president will then forward it to be considered by the Constitutional Affairs Committee (AFCO) (EPRoP Annex VI). If AFCO orders an investigation into EU values violations by a Europarty to go ahead, the Conference of President appoints two members of the committee of eminent persons to help investigate the allegation of EU values violations further (Rule 235(5)). Once the APPF has investigated the requests and actually proposes for a Europarty to be deregistered, 25% of MEPs representing at least three political groups, can ask for the full EP to object to the APPF decisions (Rule 235(4)).

More recently the EP has also discussed, and apparently adapted various times, other wording in the EPRoP with a more indirect bearing on protection of EU basic values. In an effort to establish more stringent criteria for political groups, it included that MEPs can form themselves into groups according to their *political affinities* (Rule 33(1)). This seems to be innocuous, but has been a de facto attempt to make it more difficult for MEPs to benefit from being in a political group together. This was clearly intended to ensure that 'likely value violators' would be less likely to form a political group while not entirely agreeing on an agenda.

However, the most recent version of Rule 33(1) has a somewhat mysterious addition, even provided fully in italics (to stress it has the nature of an explanatory memorandum to the rule itself), that reads:

> *Parliament need not normally evaluate the political affinity of members of a group. In forming a group together under this Rule, the Members concerned accept by definition that they have political affinity. Only when this is denied*

by the Members concerned is it necessary for Parliament to evaluate whether the group has been constituted in accordance with the Rules.

This seems to mean that there is a default understanding that if MEPs from at least seven member states team up together as a political group, each of them is to be taken to agree they have a political affiliation in common with the other MEPs in the political group. At the same time, the subsequent Rule 33(5), setting out the necessary content of a political declaration that needs to be part of an application to be considered a political group sets out, again in an explanatory memorandum-like italics, that:

The political declaration of a group shall set out the values that the group stands for and the main political objectives which its members intend to pursue together in the framework of the exercise of their mandate. The declaration shall describe the common political orientation of the group in a substantial, distinctive and genuine way.

This seems to mean that only MEPs that agree on a substantial and distinctive political direction, and do so in a genuine way (i.e. not as a simple political marriage of convenience to fulfil requirements to get funding and access to power) can form a political group.

As these two passages are strongly at odds with one another, this wording has all the hallmarks of a compromise. Yet, read in combination, on balance this has likely made it harder for national delegations and MEPs on the fringes of the political spectrum, including those with political agendas that openly set out to violate EU values, to have a political deal to cooperate based purely on political expediency. One example that may test the meaning of this wording is how MEPs and national delegations that strongly disagree on how to deal with Russia, for example, could still be able to set up a new political group if they wanted to, Think of a combination of pro-Russian Hungarian Fidesz and Italian Lega and anti-Russian Polish Law and Justice (PiS). Would such a political affiliation, required to form a political group under the EPRoP, then be *substantial, distinctive and genuine*? Arguably not. But will other political groups decide to test the self-certification?

All in all, there is quite the robust set of instruments applicable or available to political groups to protect EU values at EU level, particularly in their own setting. But have these been used?

The EP and Regulating Compliance
with EU Values at EU Level: Practice

As previously noted, rules have been agreed or are already in force that regulate both access to the EP political arena itself, and—once such access is gained—conditions for participation in it. The relevant rules for access to the EP, those on the electoral threshold, have not yet been ratified by all member states (European Parliament, 2020c). But once they will be, they would be applicable to the 2024 EP elections if all member states do so.

Let us imagine for a moment that these rules will be ratified by the three remaining member states that have not yet done so. Even if it can then be debated whether this 'partial militant democracy' approach at EU level (see Müller, 2015; Wagrandl, 2018) should be judged as 'better something than nothing' or rather a failed attempt to regulate this aspect fully, the fact will be that the legislation introduces a de facto distinction in treatment between German/Spanish and non-German/Spanish politicians belonging to national parties running on a political agenda intended to roll back on EU basic values participating in EU-level elections. To the first category a compulsory threshold of 5% would apply, to all other political candidates from all other EU member states running for EP elections it would not. That is partial and incomplete, and not particularly tailored to the nature of the problem of fortifying against degradation of EU values. If indeed this is seen as a potentially suitable tool by the EP to act to protect EU values at EU level—i.e. by avoiding that MEPs belonging to certain political parties running on a political agenda to undermine EU values can too easily enter the EU political arena—perhaps there is time to develop something more comprehensive and less one-sided before the 2024 EP elections. The obvious solution is to introduce the 5% compulsory electoral threshold across the board, in all member states.

Also practice with regard to regulating participation in the EP political agenda once elected to ensure (continued) compliance with EU values has been quite different from the theoretical discussions underlying developments of legislation and the self-regulation in the form of the EPRoP. For although most attention in the negotiations on Regulation 1141/2014 was on how the values verification would work, this was not where the real effect has been so far. For what is remarkable is that the registration requirement *itself*, rather than the explicit EU values verifications, seems

to have served as a major hurdle. Many Europarties in existence (and funded) before the entry into force of the Regulation have not registered, thereby foregoing EU-funding. Those who have not registered are almost entirely in the (extreme) right-wing corner.

These implications of the rules laid down in Regulation 1141/2014 suggest that perhaps the requirement to be seen to endorse Article 2 TEU was itself judged politically too damaging. Or rather, that the paperwork involved was simply too intense. There is also a recent instance where a group of national political parties with a distinctly extreme right-wing flavour attempted to register but found the APPF rejecting its application for reason it did not comply with the formal criteria of being represented in at least one-fourth of member states.[15] In this sense, arguably, the rules have been helpful in addressing (potential) violation of EU basic values at EU level, albeit in unexpected and unintended ways. It is too early to tell whether adapted EPRoP rules that necessitate showing political affinity as MEPs to form a political group will have a similarly chilling effect on those MEPs belonging to national parties that operate a political agenda in tension with EU basic values.

As concerns Regulation 1141/2014 the lack of practice also shows highly problematic aspects. The EPRoP-requirement of support by at least three different political groups to trigger a verification request with Article 2 TEU values under Regulation 1141/2014 is proving counter-productive. It almost certainly serves to protect 'values violators' who sit inside mainstream Europarties and political groups. To make this more concrete: The EPP until recently harboured Hungarian Fidesz, and still contains national parties and MEPs elected through national parties with track records that are in strong tension with basic values, like the Bulgarian governing party. The S&D harbour the Maltese and Romanian governing parties, member states that were both scolded for Rule of Law related problems by majority adopted European Parliament (2014–2019) resolutions. Renew harbours the Czech ANO ruling party, which also faced majority backed European Parliament (2014–2019) scrutiny. Polish PiS sits in the right-wing European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group, where it cooperates with at least a few politicians who are not themselves to be categorised as potential values violators in quite the same ways but apparently have no problems to rub elbows, and base part of their own power and influence on closely cooperating with them.

Apparently, then, picking principle over power is not yet sufficiently politically attractive (or, put the other way: not acting on principle is

not yet sufficiently politically damaging). As *all* mainstream Europarties have some such illiberal forces, it is unlikely political groups that largely contain the very same political actors would act against other mainstream Europarties. This would certainly cause fingers to point the other way too, and why expose their own 'bad apples'? (Morijn & Butler, 2019).

In this way the EP, in implementing Regulation 1141/2014 that it was responsible for as a co-legislator, inadvertently but surely, may have actually *entrenched* the problem rather than effectively acting against the backsliding. It has come up with a solution that only hits at part of the 'values violators' in the EP without a real justification for why (indeed, some of the worst of bad apples are unaffected by this legislation). An EP majority may still act against Europarties fully consisting of values violating national parties, however, both under the Regulation and the EPRoP. This has not yet occurred, but may be on the horizon if Hungarian Fidesz, which recently 'voluntarily left' the EPP group, succeeds in forming a new Europarty after also leaving the EPP Europarty. If such a Europarty would be set up, and a concomitant political group as well, current possibilities under Regulation 1141/2014 and the EPRoP could make it hard for these cooperating national delegations in the EP to register, have access to funding and have access to political power inside the EP, even if they would be quite a few in number. In that scenario, EU-level enforcement of EU values could happen under the current rules.

What emerges therefore is that political groups have not acted under Regulation 1141/2014 and have not enforced the EPRoP with regard to political groups. None of the illiberal elements in each of the political groups and European political parties has so far been effectively confronted for violating EU basic values using the actual tools developed for it (even if Parliament has itself called these illiberal elements out in other settings and ways, e.g. Article 7 TEU procedures and majority adopted political resolutions). When Fidesz was forced out of the EPP, this was done politically as an EPP internal matter.

Worse, the Regulation as currently structured and the EPRoP as formulated actually continue to *nurture* sustaining liberal–illiberal cooperation within political actors inside the EP (Wolkenstein, 2022). This is because they each require participants from at least 25% of member states for reason of European representativeness and financially and politically reward such formation more than that they reward values compliance. In

other words: Parliament is setting itself up to fail in fulfilling its duties to protect EU basic values.

Taking a milder perspective, it could perhaps be argued that the current role that political groups have to nudge the EU-level approach to restricting access to and participation in the EU political arena is at heart correct but just a work in progress that needs to slowly come of age. On that reading over time, it could be further sharpened and ratcheted up because it is and remains desirable politically to incapacitate MEPs, political groups and Europarties aiming to act on an agenda directly at odds with EU basic values. After all: why finance political parties with a stated aim and track-record of acting on us versus them which will inevitably undermine what the EU is built on? This is a difficult debate about the desirability of a fleshing out militant democracy approach at EU level (Müller, 2015; Wagrandl, 2018). Reasonable observers may disagree. A (more) open debate about it is, however, desirable. Currently the EU legislator clearly makes these choices implicitly and in isolated ways. But practice shows too that it is largely divorced from rules in force.

In any event, given the above description, the EP urgently needs to act more consistently and seriously to protect EU basic values at EU level itself if its valuable value rhetoric, that is currently almost entirely outwardly focused, is to have any lasting effect or political credibility and resonance. It will, quite simply, need to look in the mirror and improve on what it sees there. Various methods and instruments can be considered in this respect. Yet it requires careful consideration on how to do/go about with this. In the following section, some ideas are provisionally formulated for this purpose.

Some Proposals to Strengthen Protection of EU Values by Political Groups

In terms of substance, the combination of the regulatory solutions as laid down in the Regulation and the EPRoP currently has a very uneven effect on efforts to protect EU basic values at EU level—it hits some 'likely EU values violators', but very likely not others. This raises the political question: is it possible to re-design the rules of access to funding in such a way that it actually hits all political actors aiming to act contrary to Article 2 TEU values?

This seems to touch on more general choices concerning the regulation of the composition of Europarties and political groups, that represent

a balance between considerations about Europe-wide representativeness in the form of geographical distribution in political cooperation, on the one hand, and choices about what sort of cooperation is deemed worthy of EU financing in the first place, on the other. These are questions that are at the heart of what supranational democracy should be about. However, they evidently have a direct bearing on how EU basic values can be protected. It may therefore be worthwhile to reconsider these basic rules with a view to placing greater emphasis on protecting EU basic values. In terms of options would it, for example, help to limit the number of member states where MEPs should originate from (currently 25%) and/or lower the number of MEPs required to form a political group? This would need to be further investigated. Perhaps the Conference on the Future of Europe (European Commission, 2020a) would be a useful forum for that (see Johansson and Raunio in this volume).

One idea that seems particularly worthy of exploring in this context in any event is whether, rather than the behaviour of the Europarty or political group as a whole, the behaviour of just *one* member party or the behaviour of specific members of a political group should be what should be measured against protection of EU basic values. More concretely, should it not be sufficient to investigate the whole of a political group or Europarty if a part of it that is a sine qua non for the financing of the whole Europarty or political group shows signs of acting against EU basic values? This would reverse the logic from an intuition to deny, hide or harbour violations of EU basic values to confronting them straight away for it could endanger financing or access to power for the whole political cooperation.

Finally, a suggestion for improvement could be one of (legal) form. As shown above, regulation of the terms of participation in the political debate with a view to promoting protection of EU values at EU level is now achieved by a combination of a Regulation (adopted by the Union legislator, in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure) and the EPRoP (adopted by the EP itself, by simple majority). Given the interconnectedness, it can be questioned whether the EP should be allowed to regulate *itself* which colleague MEPs have access to power by a simple majority, without all the safeguards and input of other perspectives that a normal legislative procedure would guarantee. Indeed, it may be better to integrate this aspect of the governance of political groups in Regulation 2014/1141, so as to synchronise the way in which compliance with EU

basic values is promoted in all the actions of EU-level parties, in whatever precise context—Europarties or political groups—they take place. It may be at the cost of freedom of MEPs. And MEPs will definitely claim this infringes upon their free mandate. But the overwhelming logic of all protection of EU values is that freedom, of national and EU political actors, needs to be limited to the extent necessary for liberal democracy more generally to be protected.

Conclusion

EU institutions, including the EP, are trying to push back on the consequences of violating EU basic values. Yet the way in which they currently do so falls short. Although just very recently, we may be witnessing some change for the better, their efforts are so far ineffective at best when confronting problems where they typically receive most attention: the *national* level. However, as has been shown in this chapter, the full complexity of the challenge is often not even acknowledged. The member state political level is directly connected to the EU level too, and the protection of EU basic values has been put on the agenda at EU level too. It is therefore necessary to study the EP's efforts to protect EU basic values in comprehensive fashion.

On close inspection, the analysis must be that the EP's efforts to protect EU basic values at EU level, such as the introduction of an electoral threshold, Regulation 1141/2014 and its RoP, not only stand in marked contrast to the active stance taken with regard to the member state level, but are also partial and one-sided, partially entrenching or deepening problems, and mostly not implemented. This is highly paradoxical. And therefore, given the stakes, highly undesirable. Because disappointing in the mirror undermines political groups' own credibility and legitimacy.

Notes

1. 446 votes in favour, 178 against, 41 abstentions.
2. Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2020/2092 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2020 on a general regime of conditionality for the protection of the Union budget, OJ L 433 I, 22 December 2020, pp. 1–10.

3. This study was conducted at the request of Daniel Freund, an MEP from the Green Party. It shows how the Commission could immediately trigger this mechanism with regard to Hungary.

4. All documents relating to the file can be found at: http://www.europarl. europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-union-of-democratic-change/file-ref orm-of-the-electoral-law-of-the-eu

5. Council Decision 2018/995 of 13 July amending the [1976 Electoral Act], OJ EU L178/1, 16 July 2018.

6. Poland (52), Italy (76) and France (79) have more seats in the post-Brexit EP, but have multiple constituencies, i.e. EP seats are divided locally rather than based on the vote over the whole territory.

7. Given the political situation in Germany at the time of initiation of the negotiations, the political party that may have been targeted for prevention from entering the political arena at the time of formulation of these rules was the right-wing party Alternative für Deutschland. However, due to political developments after that, that political party would likely have easily cleared any threshold (it won more than 10% in the 2019 EP elections). It could of course have hit any other small party not clearing the threshold, including political parties considered mainstream. For example, the small liberal party FDP (Freie Demokratische Partei), a past government party, scored barely over 5%.

8. Regulation (EU, Euratom) No. 1141/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2014 on the statute and funding of European political parties and European political foundation, OJ L 317, 4 November 2014, 1.

9. Regulation 1141/2014, Article 3(b).

10. The latest version of January 2021 can be found here: https://www. europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/RULES-9-2021-01-18-TOC_EN. html.

11. Rule 33(2). The number of MEPs required to form a political group is somewhat subject to change. Until recently it was 25.

12. For a visualisation of the interconnection between Europarties and political groups as the situation stood in 2019, see Morijn (2019a), p. 623.

13. Court of First Instance, Joined cases T-222/99 *Jean-Claude Martinez and Charles de Gaulle v European Parliament.*

14. Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/673 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 3 May 2018 amending [Regulation 1141/2014], OJ L 114I, 4 May 2018, 1.

15. For examples, see: http://www.appf.europa.eu/appf/en/applications/ applications-not-approved.

References

Brack, N., & Costa, O. (2018). Democracy in parliament vs. democracy through parliament? Defining the rules of the game in the European Parliament. *The Journal of Legislative Studies, 24*(1), 51–71.

European Commission. (2017). Reasoned proposal in accordance with Article 7(1) of the TEU regarding the rule of law in Poland, COM(2017)835, 20 December 2017.

European Commission. (2020a). Shaping the Conference on the Future of Europe, COM(2020a)27, 22 January 2020.

European Commission. (2020b). Communication 2020 Rule of Law Report, COM(2020)580, 30 September 2020.

European Commission. (2021a). Press release of 31 March 2021: Rule of Law: European Commission refers Poland to the European Court of Justice to protect independence of Polish judges and asks for interim measures. Retrieved June 30, 2021 from https://ec.europa.eu/commission/pressc orner/detail/en/ip_21_1524

European Commission. (2021b). Communication 2021 Rule of Law Report, COM(2021)700, 20 July 2021.

European Court of Justice. (2021). Case C-650/18, Hungary v. European Parliament, 3 June 2021.

European Parliament. (2016). Resolution of 25 October 2016 with recommendations to the Commission on the establishment of an EU mechanism on democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights, Do. P8_TA(2016)0409.

European Parliament. (2018). Resolution of 12 September 2018 on a proposal calling on the Council to determine, pursuant to Article 7(1) TEU, the existence of a clear risk of a serious breach by Hungary of the values on which the Union is founded, Doc. A8-0250/2018.

European Parliament. (2020a). Resolution of 16 January 2020 on ongoing hearings under Article 7(1) of the TEU regarding Poland and Hungary, Doc. 2020/2513(RSP).

European Parliament. (2020b). Resolution of 7 October 2020 on the establishment of an EU Mechanism on Democracy, the Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights, Doc. 2020/2072(INI).

European Parliament. (2020c). Resolution of 26 November 2020 on stocktaking of European elections (2020/2088(INI), Document P9 TA(2020)0327.

European Parliament. (2021). Resolution on the rule of law situation in the European Union and the application of the Conditionality Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2020/2092, 10 June 2021, Doc P9_TA(2021)0287.

European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS). (2021). Statute and funding of European political parties under Regulation 1141/2014: Ex post evaluation. *Doc. ST, 2021*, 662646.

Grasso, G., & Perrone, R. (2019). European political parties and the respect for the values on which the European Union is founded between the European legislation and the national laws. *European Public Law, 25*(4), 665–688.

German Federal Supreme Court. (2014a). Decision 2BvE 2/13 etc., 26 February 2014.

German Federal Supreme Court. (2014b). Press release: Three-percent electoral threshold in the law governing European elections unconstitutional under the current legal and factual circumstances, 26 February 2014. Retrieved June 30, 2021 from https://www.bundesverfassungsgericht.de/SharedDocs/Pressemit teilungen/EN/2014/bvg14-014.html

Katsaitis, A. (2020). Following the money: Exploring business financial contributions to the European Union's political parties. *Journal of Common Market Studies, 58*(5), 1342–1351.

Kelemen, R. D. (2020). The European Union's authoritarian equilibrium. *Journal of European Public Policy, 27*(3), 481–499.

Kelemen, R. D., Scheppele, K. L., & Morijn, J. (2021). The EU Commission has to cut funding to Hungary: The legal case. Report prepared for the Greens/EFA Group in the European Parliament, 7 July 2021. Retrieved June 30, 2021 from https://danielfreund.eu/rule-of-law-study/?lang=en

Morijn, J. (2018). Post-Lisbon civil rights protection by the EU's political institutions. In S. De Vries, H. De Waele, & M.-P. Granger (Eds.), *Civil rights and EU citizenship* (pp. 14–42). Edward Elgar.

Morijn, J. (2019a). Responding to populist politics in the EU: The case of Regulation 1141/2014 and beyond. *International Journal of Constitutional Law, 17*(2), 617–640.

Morijn, J. (2019b). Formation and funding of European Parliament political groups, political parties and political foundations v EU-level political rights. In A. Pahladsingh & R. Grimbergen (Eds.), *The Charter and the Court of Justice of the European Union: Notable cases 2016–2018* (pp. 257–272). Wolf Publishing.

Morijn, J., & Butler, I. (2019). Tracking anti-values MEPs: EP seat projections and Rule of Law protection. *Verfassungsblog*, Retrieved February 20, 2019 from https://verfassungsblog.de/tracking-anti-values-meps-ep-seat-pro jections-and-rule-of-law-protection/

Müller, J.-W. (2015). Should the EU protect democracy and the rule of law inside Member States? *European Law Journal, 21*(2), 141–160.

Norman, L. (2021). To democratize or to protect? How the response to anti-system parties reshapes the EU's transnational party system. *Journal of Common Market Studies, 59*(3), 721–737.

Norman, L., & Wolfs, W. (2022). Is the governance of Europe's transnational party system contributing to EU democracy? *Journal of Common Market Studies, 60*(2), 463–479.

Pech, L., & Scheppele, K.-L. (2017). Illiberalism within: Rule of law backsliding in the EU. *Cambridge Yearbook of European Legal Studies, 19*, 3–47.

Pech, L., Kochenov, D., & Platon S. (2019). The European Parliament sidelined—On the Council's distorted reading of Article 7(1) TEU. *Verfassungsblog*, 8 December 2019. Retrieved June 30, 2021 from https://verfassungsblog.de/the-european-parliament-sidelined/

Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2020/2092 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2020 on a general regime of conditionality for the protection of the Union budget, OJ L 433 I, 22 December 2020, pp. 1–10.

Saitto, F. (2017). European political parties and European public space from the Maastricht Treaty to the Reg. No. 1141/2014. *ZBW Discussion Paper* No. 2/17, Europa-Kolleg Hamburg, Institute for European Integration, Hamburg.

Scheppele, K., Kochenov, D., & Grabowska-Moroz, B. (2020). EU values are law, after all—Enforcing EU values through systemic infringement actions by the European Commission and the member states of the European Union. *Yearbook of European Law, 39*, 3–121.

Wagrandl, U. (2018). Transnational militant democracy. *Global Constitutionalism, 7*(2), 143–172.

Wolfs, W., & Smulders, J. (2018). Party finance at the level of the European Union—Party finance reform to vitalize the EU's proto-party system? In J. Mendilow & E. Phélippeau (Eds.), *Handbook of political party funding* (pp. 182–202). Edward Elgar.

Wolkenstein, F. (2022). European political parties' complicity in democratic backsliding. *Global Constitutionalism, 11*(1), 55–82.

Parliamentary Politics and Polarisation Around Gender: Tackling Inequalities in Political Groups in the European Parliament

Johanna Kantola

Introduction

Gender equality is at the heart of political representation, democracy and European integration, and its position as a core value of the European Union (EU) is enshrined in the various treaties. The conditions for good democracy require that everyone can freely express their views, unconstrained by hate speech, sexual harassment or stereotypes that challenge expertise (Galligan, 2015). The European Parliament (EP) upholds gender equality as a legitimate value and norm in its public statements and policy positions and works towards being a gender-equal institution. Its various gender-related measures suggest that gender equality is

J. Kantola (✉)
Tampere University, Tampere, Finland
e-mail: johanna.kantola@tuni.fi

221

a legitimate norm guiding parliamentary work and the achievement of democracy.

Nevertheless, in contemporary European politics, gender equality has become highly contested. Importantly, in the 2008 global economic crisis, the EU failed to uphold the norm of gender equality and prioritised economic concerns (Elomäki, 2021; Jacquot, 2017; Kantola & Lombardo, 2017). Furthermore, the rise of radical right populism has led to a fundamental contestation of gender equality and LGBTQI rights, constructing their advancement as harmful elite projects and ideologies (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017).

The EP is not isolated from these developments. Despite strong beliefs in neutrality, fair distribution of positions and the centrality of factors other than gender being decisive in EP decision- and policy-making, extant research shows how gender has continued to shape the practices and policies of political groups (Kantola & Rolandsen Agustín, 2019). Furthermore, the number of MEPs who oppose gender equality and women's rights rose to over 30% (around 210 of 705 MEPs) following the 2019 EP elections, essentially doubling in comparison to the previous legislature (Zacharenko, 2020).

In this chapter, I analyse the internal functioning of political groups within the EP from the perspective of gender equality. Rather than focusing on gendered policies and policy-making processes, the chapter focuses on the ways in which political groups are perceived by MEPs and EP staff in terms of working as gendered actors. To do this, I examine both remaining gender inequalities and the various practices for advancing gender equality. The research questions are as follows: How do MEPs and political staff perceive gender equality within their political group? How do MEPs and political staff construct the role of gender equality measures and practices within political groups?

The chapter draws on a large qualitative dataset of 135 interviews with MEPs and political staff conducted in 2018–2021 during the final year of the eighth legislature and the first years of the ninth legislature. The interviews covered all political groups and formed a representative sample of countries and genders. The analysis shows that the interviewees in the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA) and the Left Group (GUE/NGL) constructed gender equality as a fundamental principle of the groups, which was upheld with formal and informal practices. The interviewees from the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) and the Renew Europe Group (formerly

Alliance for Liberals and Democrats for Europe, ALDE), perceived gender equality as an important but flexible norm. The interviewees from the Group of European People's Party (Christian Democrats) (EPP), the European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR) and the Europe for Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD) group perceived gender equality as a highly contradictory and divisive issue. Finally, the radical right populist Identity and Democracy (ID) group (formerly Europe of Nations and Freedom, ENF) saw gender as a dangerous construct; for them, attempts to advance gender equality within political group practices was derided as nonsense. The findings illustrate that gender has become polarising: staunchly supported by some groups, who recognise the shortcomings in achieving gender equality, and vigorously opposed by others as irrelevant or dangerous. The chapter also provides internal distinctions among the political groups: gender equality is contradictory not just within conservative or radical right populist groups but also within some left groups, and it can also be supported by some conservative and populist actors.

Researching Gendered Inequalities and Gender Equality Practices in Parliaments

This chapter brings together two dimensions, usually kept apart when analysing the gendered workings of political parties and parliaments: (i) *gendered inequalities* within political groups and (ii) *practices for promoting gender equality* within political groups aimed at remedying these inequalities. Bringing the two together arguably adds insights to the dynamics around gender equality in political groups. It enables the pinpointing of consistencies and contradictions within political groups: if gendered inequalities are identified and gender equality is upheld as a norm, are there actual practices aimed at tackling the problems? Alternatively, even if gender equality is seen as a non-starter by some groups, they may have some measures in place. The chapter is based on the insight that analysing both gendered inequalities and gender equality practices within political groups results in richer and more nuanced findings. This section discusses each approach in turn.

There is a long tradition of gender and politics research analysing gendered inequalities as instrumental in shaping women's chances of being elected to political office. In recent years, this tradition has also generated important research and findings on the EP. In the EP, member

state electoral systems, the use of gender quotas and the characteristics of political parties have been shown to impact the share of women in political groups (Lühiste & Kenny, 2016; Sundström & Stockemer, 2022). More specifically, political party ideology matters a great deal for women's political representation in the political groups within the EP, with the left (GUE/NGL), green (Greens/EFA) and liberals (ALDE) performing better than the radical right populist groups (ECR; EFDD) (Sundström & Stockemer, 2022, p. 12). Other studies have shown that women MEPs are more likely to come from left-leaning parties, which are more likely to employ gender quotas (Lühiste & Kenny, 2016). Chiva (2014), however, suggested that the left/right division does not hold for women's descriptive representation and Central and Eastern European countries. Building on these debates, Aldrich and Daniel (2020) found that quotas actually help promote women with prior political experience, thereby raising the number of politically experienced representatives at the European level.

Once in office, women's political careers and the quality of their representative work are shaped by the gendered inequalities in parliaments (Erikson & Verge, 2022). In the EP, extant research shows that, first, gendered leadership structures and expectations have led to women being more equally represented in policy leadership (in committee chair and coordinator positions) than in political (political group leaders) or administrative (secretaries general) leadership positions (Kantola & Miller, 2022). Second, patterns of gender-based discrimination have been identified. Women members of staff and parliamentarians are subjected to sexual harassment, which severely limits their work chances (Berthet & Kantola, 2020). Racist and sexist language has also been used in EP plenary debates, creating a hostile, discriminatory atmosphere towards women and minoritised politicians and staff and for the advancement of gender equality and women, minority and LGBTQI rights (Bartlomiejczyk, 2020; Kantola & Lombardo, 2021). Third, gendered inequalities include the long working hours culture of the EP and the difficulties involved in combining political work and care responsibilities. Parliamentary work continues to be influenced by gendered expectations and stereotypes, with the economic sphere being particularly resistant to women's contributions (Elomäki, 2021; Kantola & Rolandsen Agustín, 2019). These gendered inequalities create a toxic environment, especially for young women MEPs (Kantola & Rolandsen Agustín, 2019; see also Erikson & Josefsson, 2022). Finally, the strengthening of radical right populism and its anti-gender agenda within the EP (Zacharenko, 2020) challenges

gender equality and creates a polarising and hostile atmosphere towards its advancement (Kantola & Lombardo, 2021).

These gendered inequalities also appear at the level of political groups. Similar to women's descriptive representation, left and green groups have been shown to perform better in terms of advancing gender equality than conservative and right groups (Kantola & Rolandsen Agustín, 2016, 2019). The pattern is not uniform, however, as there are internal contradictions. Examples include undemocratic gendered practices within the left and green political groups in terms of informal institutions (Kantola & Miller, 2021). In relation to sexual harassment, MEPs from some political groups, such as the EPP, were more interested in the reputation of the institution than addressing the problem of sexual harassment (Berthet & Kantola, 2020). However, opposition to a firm stance from the EP against sexual harassment has also faced opposition within the left S&D (Berthet & Kantola, 2020). Nevertheless, it has been argued that the EPP is of particular concern (Kantola & Miller, 2021, 2022) and that its brand of gender conservatism poses challenges to the advancement of gender equality policy-making within the EP (Elomäki, 2021). In sum, extant research suggests that political groups are gendered in different ways.

There is much less research on the *practices for promoting gender equality within the political groups* in the EP. As mentioned above, gender quotas and their effects have received a great deal of attention, including in relation to the EP. At the parliamentary level, such equality guarantees translate into formal rules for gender equality, for example, for the leadership positions outlined in parliamentary rules of procedure or political group statutes (see Ahrens and Kantola; Bressanelli in this volume). Beyond such guarantees, a wider range of gender equality measures are needed in order to eradicate the complex and structural gendered inequalities outlined above. Gender-sensitive parliamentary frameworks lay out such measures at the parliamentary level (Childs & Palmieri, 2022). At the level of political groups, these may include aspects such as gender action plans based on identifying gendered inequalities within groups; institutionalising the position of gender mainstreaming in all political group policy-making; gender training for policy-making and countering sexual harassment and obtrusive behaviour; equal allocation of speaking time and other political resources (offices, staff); commitments to gender equality in all decision- and policy-making and measures against sexual harassment. Feminist institutionalism adds an important analytical dimension to these gender equality practices. Measures can be formal and formalised in the

workings of political groups and enshrined in statutes and other guiding documents. Alternatively, they may be informal and unwritten, constituting 'the ways that things are done around here' (Chappell & Waylen, 2013).

Research Data and Methods

The theoretical thrust of the chapter is constructionist in nature. The interview research material was not treated as descriptions of objective truth about gendered inequalities and gender equality practices within the political groups examined. For example, denials of problems of equality by the radical right populists needed to be analysed rather than taken at face value. This held for all the interview citations. In line with discursive approaches to gender equality (Lombardo et al., 2009), the citations were treated as constructions of reality, some of which are dominant and all of which have effects on the ways in which gendered inequalities can be understood and tackled. To address the complex questions about the ways in which gender equality and the practices for promoting it are constructed at the political group level, the chapter drew on a large qualitative dataset of 135 interviews with MEPs and political staff conducted over the course of the eighth and ninth parliaments in Brussels, Strasbourg and online (Table 10.1).

The interviews form part of a larger study about the gendered practices and policies of the political groups within the EP, which was carried out by

Table 10.1 Interviews with MEPs and staff at the European Parliament 2018–2021

Political group	F MEP	M MEP	F staff	M staff	Total
EPP	10	4	4	1	19
S&D	10	6	11	3	30
ALDE/Renew	4	2	5	5	16
Greens/EFA	8	2	6	2	18
GUE/NGL	2	2	3	6	13
ECR	2	5		2	9
EFDD/NI	4	6		2	12
ENF/ID	1	4		3	8
Other (EP secretariat)	–	–	5	5	10
Total	41	31	34	29	**135**

members of the European Research Council (ERC)-funded EUGenDem research project. The interviewees included MEPs, their assistants, political group staff and parliamentary staff. They were semi-structured, with questions about the political groups' work, leadership, gender equality and policy-making practices as well as the lives of MEPs/staff. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and anonymised.

The interviews were coded by the team members using Atlas.ti. The codes were developed jointly and covered both topical and theoretical areas. As a general rule, the team members were encouraged to use codes as extensively as possible to secure full coverage of important empirical material. The codes analysed in this chapter include both 'gendered practices' and 'gender equality practices', with subcodes on discrimination, division of labour, hierarchies, inappropriate behaviour, gendered interaction, sexist language, gendered expertise and sexual harassment. Using the Atlas.ti reports, the interview material was analysed and compared in an iterative process to isolate the perceived gendered inequalities and the ways in which the groups were addressing them. Additionally, the most recent political group statutes were read and analysed.

Gender Equality as a Fundamental Principle: Greens/EFA and GUE/NGL

The assumption in the literature is that left/green parties are more amenable to gender equality than conservative/right-wing parties, an assumption borne out in the research material: the Greens/EFA and GUE/NGL interviewees perceived gender equality as a fundamental principle guiding the work of their respective political groups. Gender equality as a central part of the political group's identity was discussed in the interviews by all genders and by both MEPs and staff. Intersectionality was somewhat recognised, and gendered inequalities were seen as inextricably linked to other areas of inequality such as race, ethnicity, class, disability and sexual orientation. There was a willingness to recognise challenges involving gender equality within one's own political group, and the interviewees referred to the formal and informal gender equality practices with which their group attempted to tackle these challenges.

In the representative interview quotations, which were typical of the data, one GUE/NGL staff interviewee said that the political group 'is a good place' in terms of gender equality (GUE/NGL Staff F 070220). The interviewees from the two groups typically mentioned the gender

balance in terms of the MEPs numbers they had reached; the fact that the groups were co-chaired by a woman and a man; the general secretary being a woman and gender balance being sought when filling key positions, including the bureau, coordinators, committee chairs and different working groups. To substantiate these claims, the actual numbers showed that women constituted 53% of the Green/EFA MEPs and 41% of the GUE/NGL and that both groups were co-chaired by a woman and a man. The Greens/EFA group had two women serving as committee chairs, while at the GUE/NGL, it was one man. The coordinator positions were equally divided (Kantola & Miller, 2022).

The interviewees from both political groups conceded that there were remaining gendered inequalities and that there was 'room for improvement' (GUE/NGL Staff M 210220; Greens/EFA Staff F 100320). The extant literature is replete with examples of these inequalities, including the persistent gendered division of labour, namely women's and men's areas of political expertise. For example, one Green/EFA MEP suggested that agriculture is 'quite a men's issue' in EU politics in general as well as in the political group, as were the environment, finance, industry and research; however, 'human rights and FEMM, gender aspects, social things, then you will have much more women' (Greens/EFA MEP F 100320). Other specific gendered inequalities mentioned specifically included discrimination in the form of inappropriate behaviour (GUE/NGL MEP F 100320). Such inequalities accumulated in the positions of young women politicians (Erikson & Josefsson, 2022; Kantola & Rolandsen Agustín, 2019). One interviewee described that the young woman leader of the group had to earn respect—it was not automatically granted to her with the position (GUE/NGL Staff F 160320).

One of the central problems emerging from many of the interviews with the Greens/EFA MEPs was that speaking time was unequally divided into group meetings with men dominating. This was systematically mentioned in a number of interviews variously describing how and why men felt entitled to 'talk, talk, talk' and do it in a 'competitive way' (Greens/EFA MEP F 130320; Greens/EFA MEP F 190319; Greens/EFA MEP F 210120; Greens-EFA MEP F 300919). The interview material contained different explanations, with some being related to beliefs about 'how women and men are', while others explained that it was a consequence of speaking time being distributed by national delegations chaired mainly by men (Greens/EFA MEP F 300919). The position of the heads of national delegations exemplifies informal rule—heads of

national delegation speaking first—undermining a general commitment to gender equality.

Practices for Promoting Gender Equality

The gender equality practices of the Greens/EFA were institutionalised in the group statutes. In the bureau, half of the chair posts were to be held by women (3.9). The statutes stated that the group shall have an ombudsperson as a complaints-, conflict-solving and reporting mechanism (4.-4.3). The ombudsperson writes a report every two years and is an MEP elected by group staff (Greens/EFA Staff F 210319). The group also commits 'to full gender equality' in staff practices (5.3). Beyond the statutes, gender balance was a strong norm for the way in which the group operated when nominating and selecting MEPs for different positions. This was described as follows: 'we have a lot of internal rules which are not in the statutes and are implementing rules which are not in the statutes, where practically the question of the gender balance is completely, completely covered' (Greens/EFA Staff F 200319).

The Greens/EFA developed their gender-mainstreaming measures in the eighth parliament and shifted the focus to an internal gender action plan in the ninth parliament. The group implemented a practice whereby all the policy briefings produced by staff were to include a section on gender impacts. This was accompanied by trainings on gender equality issues for all staff members (Greens/EFA Group Staff F 100320; Greens/EFA Staff F 210319). There was also mention of the need to develop a monitoring process at the next stage in order to assess whether this was implemented, thereby making the practices more effective (Greens/EFA Staff F 100320). In addition, the group held mandatory training for MEPs and staff on sexual harassment (Greens/EFA Staff F 210319), an approach considered highly controversial in many other groups (see Berthet & Kantola, 2020). The group had also created a 'network of confidential counsellors' consisting of two women and two men as 'first entry points' in harassment cases (Greens/EFA Staff F 210319). The Greens/EFA approach can thus be characterised as proactive and not just reactive in relation to gender equality.

The GUE/NGL had no statutes in place. Since 2014, there has been a working group on 'GUE/NGL rules of procedure', but there has been no consensus. It was suggested to us in written communication that the confederal character of the group complicated and obstructed all kinds

of decision-making processes and that it was not uncommon to not reach agreement on a topic (written communication GUE/NGL Staff 030419). The interviewees said that promoting gender balance was, in any case, a strong practice in the group and described how gender equality practices were informally institutionalised. Gender balance was considered when dividing committee positions and in relation to speaking time in group meetings, where the group leader 'tries to have alternate female and male speakers on the speakers list' (GUE-NGL Staff F 150519). The group had also funding ear-marked for gender equality events (Feminist Forum around 8 March) (GUE-NGL Staff F 150519) and had a harassment policy, which included training.

The diversity of practices for gender equality in these two left–green groups illustrates the range of practices that can be adopted by political groups to address remaining gender inequalities. Such practices can be either formal or informal and can be efficient in the presence of political commitment within the political group.

Gender Equality as a Flexible Norm: S&D and ALDE/Renew

The S&D and ALDE/Renew both achieved a good descriptive representation of women MEPs (43 and 47% in the 8th and 9th parliament, respectively) in their groups' push for gender equality policies within the parliament and applied gender mainstreaming in policy-making. The analysis of the interview data illustrates how gender equality became a more flexible norm than in the previous groups. More MEP and staff interviewees were lukewarm, ambivalent or indifferent towards gender equality, some of them even resisting it altogether. These groups are interesting because they potentially reveal what the deep-rooted gendered structures in political groups look like and how difficult it is to change them.

Typical of the S&D interview data were mentions of 'strong women' as 'important figures' and 'strong characters' within the group. The group was also singled out as 'the most feminist' by one male MEP (S&D MEP M 060320). A male staff member explained that achieving gender equality was 'organic' in the group. This meant that gender balance was 'not something decided politically; this is more organic, so it's the result of political process' (S&D Staff M 290419). Another male staff member echoed this by explaining that gender equality was 'the core DNA of our

group', which meant that 'It's not like you have to have special training or anything like that' (S&D Staff M 260219).

A number of ALDE/Renew MEPs and staff described the group's 'strong emphasis on gender equality' (ALDE Staff M 290119; Renew MEP F 060220). The liberal ideology of the group meant a stronger focus on individuals and equal opportunities as opposed to the socialist emphasis on structures and equality of outcome. As a female MEP put it, 'I'm quite hopeful that if somebody got elected to our group, they would be judged purely on their merit, and everybody has just the same equal chances to succeed because it's a priority for us to avoid any kind of discrimination' (Renew MEP F 060220).

The difference between the S&D and the Greens/EFA and GUE/NGL groups is exemplified by the multiple allusions by the interviewees to a 'lot of problems' with gender equality in the S&D, that the group had 'a lot of bias' and needed to improve (S&D Staff F 060220). They argued that progress was hampered by the self-image that socialists would always 'fight for women' (S&D Staff F 060220). One male MEP said that gender equality was good at the 'formal level' in terms of female representation but continued to describe how the behaviour, language and attitudes of some male MEPs were inappropriate within the group: 'I think the levels of awareness of what is appropriate and acceptable are very, very low. It's still at the end of the day dominated by middle-aged men with traditional male attitudes and behaviours, and there's no significant countervailing force' (S&D MEP M 161018). Another male staff member spoke of the persistence of gendered stereotypes: 'People tend to comment on how women dress, when the man will not be judged by the way they dress or anything. It's simple things. I'm not saying there's abuse or anything like that, but it's the stereotypes. … Even they believe that they are not being sexist or anything. They are at the end of the day' (S&D Staff M 260220).

The interviewees discussed different gender-based hierarchies within the S&D. Men were still favoured because of seniority—an important factor when key positions were delegated. As one interviewee put it: 'while women are still looking where the toilets are in the parliament, as they don't even know where the toilets are, the men have already shared the jobs' (S&D MEP F 060320). The newcomers first have to learn the rules before they are even able to change them. It takes even longer to uncover informal rules. Even within the secretariat, there were still more men than women in top positions: 'the management positions are filled

by more men than women. And this is something that is not changing. Our former political secretary general tried to change that a little bit, and it was really good' (S&D Staff F 060220; also S&D Staff F 180220). Some of these issues were deep-rooted. For instance, gendered speaking time was partially explained by the fact that the largest national S&D delegations were chaired by men, who spoke first in group meetings (S&D MEP F 200220).

There were claims in an interview that young women MEPs of the Renew group were subjected to questioning relating to their expertise and patronising behaviour towards them in the parliament, though not in the group (Renew Staff M 130320). Individual-level explanations were characteristic of accounts of persistent inequalities: 'For example, in ITRE Committee,[1] from our group, there are more men. And in the LIBE Committee,[2] more women. But this is because of the will of the members. … It's not because of the group but because it is how women are: more interested in social issues, human rights issues. And they want to become members of these committees. And men are more interested in technology and so on' (ALDE MEP F 210219).

Practices for Promoting Gender Equality

At the level of gender equality practices, 'organic' meant that, for some, there was no need for gender equality practices. As one senior staff member admitted, 'Luckily, gender balance is part of our political identity. Therefore, we do not need a specific strategy. It will catch colleagues' attention if we mostly quote male MEPs in the press release' (S&D Staff M 290419). In other words, when gender was thought of as part of one's identity, there was less of a need for specific measures and monitoring of whether gender balance was achieved as it was everyone's responsibility. According to the S&D group statutes (2014), the 'Group shall at all times operate according to the principles of equal opportunity and transparency' (Rule 16). It also contained a specific measure about gender balance in the bureau: 'it is necessary to ensure equal representation of women and men' (Rule 23). The ambivalences are described in the uncertain tone of the following citation:

> I think we have some internal rules as well. For instance, the bureau has some gender quota. I'm not sure about this. … There has to be the allocation of speaking time. For instance, in the plenary sessions, gender

representation in the debates also has to be respected. I'm not sure if it's always followed, but all these kinds of principles are to be taken into account when establishing the names of the members in the committee or something like that. The gender representation has to be considered. (S&D Staff M 260220)

A senior staff member explained how they tried to change the gendered hierarchies in positions by recruiting more men at the female-dominated assistant level (S&D Staff F 050320). They also conducted training so as 'to break a bit the unconscious bias about how women should only deal with certain areas of policies for instance' (S&D Staff F 050320).

The S&D staff members were highly active in the MeTooEP campaign against sexual harassment in the parliament (Berthet & Kantola, 2020). At the same time, the group itself faced challenges in implementing policies against sexual harassment. One of our interviewees maintained that MEPs were not expelled because of sexual harassment (S&D Staff M 260220). He called the training on sexual harassment 'a huge failure in terms of participation of members. They just don't engage in this initiative'. Despite being compulsory, participation in the training remained low (S&D Staff M 260220).

For the ALDE/Renew group, it was primarily down to individual MEPs to push for gender equality. As a female MEP said, 'we have quite democratic processes, so it's really up to participation. … So, yes be active and be vocal and have strong opinions and bring it out, and I think that we are a good place, to be there and listen' (Renew MEP F 060202). A senior staff member of ALDE told us that when, for example, distributing speaking time in the plenary, there was no focus on gender (ALDE Staff M 050419). The interviewee also described that, in the past, there was a 'raging debate' about quotas, which was settled against having a quota, and that the ALDE statutes from 2009 had no provisions on equality. Instead, individual commitment to vote women into leadership positions and a focus on merit were emphasised. In one of the interviews, a Renew female MEP group was also praised for its solidarity, networking and support (Renew Staff M 130320).

An analysis of these two groups showed the persistence of gendered inequalities, how they become entrenched in gendered structures and norms and how difficult it was to change them. Political ideology, such as liberalism and the priority given to individuals, shapes the ways in which equality is tackled.

CONTRADICTORY GENDER EQUALITY:
THE EPP, EFDD AND ECR

Three of the political groups in the two parliamentary terms under study can be deemed 'contradictory' in relation to gender equality. Most importantly, the biggest group in the parliament—the EPP—belonged to this category. It had the highest number of MEPs (187 in total, 34% women) and exerted a great deal of power, even if it has increasingly had to negotiate, including with other groups. The EPP has always been chaired by a man. It reached a near gender balance in committee chairs in 2019 (3 women and 4 men), representing a significant increase from 2014 (1 woman and 5 men). However, the coordinator positions remained male-dominated (82% men) (Kantola & Miller, 2022). The fact that it remains strongly conservative on gender issues explains much of the lack of progress in gender equality in the EP, for example, the lack of gender equality measures and gender mainstreaming in economic policy (Elomäki, 2021); the structural weakness of FEMM (Ahrens, 2016), its lagging behind in gender-balanced leadership (Kantola & Miller, 2022) and the lack of support for measures tackling sexual harassment within the parliament (Berthet & Kantola, 2020). A focus on the contradictory position of the EPP underscores the nature of the resistance to gender equality in the EP.

Placing the EFDD and ECR in this category highlights how a focus on gender and gender equality within a group can expose deep contradictions within them (intra-group dynamics). The EFDD was only part of the eighth parliament and was dominated by the uneasy coexistence of UKIP and the M5S (McDonnell & Werner, 2019). Their views on gender equality were often from opposite ends, with M5S being populist but amenable to gender equality concerns (Kantola & Lombardo, 2021). Altogether, 37.5% of the EFDD MEPs were women, and the group was chaired by a man. It had no committee chair positions (because of the *cordon sanitaire*, i.e. the practice of excluding radical right populists from key positions), and 35% of its committee coordinators were women (Kantola & Miller, 2022).

The ECR was also contradictory, with the British Conservative Party MEPs—especially women—speaking up for gender equality (Kantola & Miller, 2021) and the group exhibiting some progressive racial justice practices. Other national party delegations in the group were radical right populists, who were resented by some more moderate women MEPs

within the group (Kantola & Miller, 2021). Following Brexit, the political group became dominated by radical right populists, including the Polish PiS, and became more opposed to gender equality. The representation of women in the ECR was among the lowest of the parliament: 21% female MEPs in the eighth parliament and 32% in the ninth. There were two women committee chairs in the eighth and one woman and one man in the ninth. Twenty-nine per cent of the committee coordinators were women (Kantola & Miller, 2022).

Conservative political parties had long remained understudied by gender and politics scholars, and there were some expectations that conservative politicians could not or did not advance gender equality questions. This has since been disproved. Conservative parties and politicians both advance progressive, even feminist, politics or conservative gender equality policies (Celis & Childs, 2015). The EPP, for example, had an active group of women MEPs pushing for gender equality. Although it constituted a minority, it managed to change internal group practices and rally support (Kantola & Rolandsen Agustín, 2019).

At the same time, however, a number of our interviewees said that the EPP was highly conservative in relation to gender equality. Traditional and misogynistic attitudes towards women were outlined in the interviews:

> There are obviously quite misogynistic attitudes sometimes in a very overt way. … There's also… it can also be very old-school respectfulness towards women as well. Men will be obviously embarrassed if you try to pay for things. … if you try to pay for both of you, it's unheard of and absolutely mortifying. So, it's very old-school traditional, and that would even be from people my own age. So they're in the classically traditional Catholic Christian democratic way of thinking. There's a misogynistic, rude asshole variety as well, but there's also that. (EPP Staff F 060320)

A similar level of harshness was described by one woman MEP in policy-making:

> For example, in (name of the committee), I'm rocking the boat and, quite literally, our coordinator who is a bit of, I don't know how to describe this redneck, but you know, he's shouting at me, he's disrupting me, he doesn't even allow me to explain, he's playing games, he's trying to throw me out of my nominated posts, he's using all these, you don't behave like that. (EPP MEP F 291118)

Later, in the same interview, the woman MEP discussed gendered expectations within the group: 'women are expected to be these kinds of useful allies, not to challenge the group position, the party position or anyone in a leadership position'. One female MEP called the group one of the most backward in the EP in terms of gender equality. She suggested that the group could be divided into three camps: one-third of whom were 'modern' MEPs in relation to gender, another one-third were 'maybe a bit conservative' and the last third were 'very conservative' and against women's rights, including direct opposition to SRHR and gender minorities (EPP MEP F 100320). When reflecting on the consequences of this, she said that in her first term in the parliament, she struggled to be perceived as competent by the older men in the group, something she had not faced in her home country politics for decades.

The EFDD interviewees did not address the issue of gendered inequalities within their group. They had a preference for expressing general views about gender equality. This can be interpreted as a strategy of distancing the problems elsewhere in the society and diverting attention away from one's own context. In the EFDD, gendered inequalities were constructed as questions of opinion: 'we don't believe in gender equality, so we simply have a difference of opinion about it [with M5S]' (EFDD MEP M 290119_3). One male MEP commented on the campaign against sexual harassment: 'I actually think this MeToo thing is nonsense. I disagree with it profoundly. I think that it makes doing any form of business utterly impossible. It's one of the reasons why I'm very reluctant to hire people' (EFDD MEP M 290119_3). The MEP also suggested that gender equality, LGBTQI rights and equality-related work 'goes too far' in the EP.

When asked to reflect on gender equality, the interviews portrayed a familiar strategy, with blame for existing inequalities placed on women. As this woman MEP from the EFDD suggested, 'What we've found is because women work completely different to men, and one of the faults of women is that they tend—and this has been proved to be true—to just do the job. They do it very well and they do it quietly. And they think people will notice them doing the job very well and doing it quietly. They don't make, they don't draw as much attention to themselves as what men do. And I think that's sometimes why women get passed over for promotions' (EFDD MEP F 290119_1). According to this appraisal, women should, in the famous words of Sheryl Sandberg, 'lean in' a bit more. Advancing gender equality does not require changing structures

but changing women—not even men—as women should aspire to meet the standards set by men.

Practices for Promoting Gender Equality

Although it is typical for conservative political parties to oppose gender quotas, the EPP had a quota for the presidency of the group (consisting of a chair and ten vice-chairs), as explained below:

> When we did the presidency of the EPP Group in July, we have a gender quota for our presidency, which was respected. Then, a couple of the presidency members left as they got other positions in the parliament, but when filling them, the quota wasn't respected. So we haven't even respected our own quota now, which is worrying. (EPP Staff F 060320)

The formal rule in the political group statutes reads as follows: 'The Chairman *(sic!)* should ensure that, as a result of elections, the overall representation of members holding posts within the Group is composed of at least one-third of members belonging to another sex than the majority of members' (EPP 2013, p. 196). The interview citation above illustrates how such formal rules can be bypassed in political negotiations.

The other two groups, the EFDD and ECR, were opposed to quotas. In a very typical citation, one male MEP from the EFDD said that 'we don't believe in quotas, we believe in merit' (EFDD MEP M 290119_4). The opposition built between quotas and merit is a common construction against quotas, although this has been countered by research on the EP showing that quotas bring more competent MEPs to the parliament (Aldrich & Daniel, 2020). An ECR male staff member explained that the fact that the group had nominated women to important positions was 'entirely by accident' and had 'nothing to do with the fact that they were women'. He predicted that both 'negative' and 'positive discrimination' would be rejected by the group and particularly strongly by 'most of the women members' who have 'never made any demands for it' (ECR Staff M 200219). Similarly, a male MEP from the ECR explained to us that the group did not have 'any real policy of trying to get some sort of proportionality in its positions or anything like that' and that they did not want to do anything 'that's seen to be, in any way, providing a platform or an unfair basis of selection or promotion or encouraging people based on

gender, race or whatever. It's just simply a case of, well, whoever's the best person will get the job, and that's that' (ECR MEP M 120521).

In general, it was typical for these groups to seek solutions at the individual or private level. There were a number of manifestations of this in the interview material. In the ECR group, many interviewees mentioned the fact that the group had selected a disabled woman as the vice-president of the parliament and a Muslim as the co-chair of the group (ECR Staff M 200219; ECR MEP M 310119). These individual successes appeared to surprise those who viewed the group as racist, sexist or ableist and were used to portraying that individual merit was what mattered in the group.

Reflecting on the importance of the individual-level explanations in the EFDD, one male staff member said that their gender equality practices were based on the 'gender blindness' of the female secretary general of the group, who only focused on 'excellence, competence, and delivery'. He argued that this attitude was shared by the whole group (EFDD Staff M 070219). In the ECR, a male staff member said that instead of formal, permanent structures, there was an individual practice, 'an open-door policy' with the secretary general (ECR Staff M 180319). An ECR male MEP interviewee, who had advanced gender equality in the group through individual actions, explained how he had deliberately promoted women to certain positions because they were women but that he 'didn't wave a flag about it' (ECR MEP M 191219). Advancing gender equality could take place through such individual actions but was not to be celebrated in public or included in specific measures.

In sum, the analysis shows the contradictions that gendered inequalities and the advancement of gender equality with specific practices created for conservative and radical right populist groups. Thus, a focus on gender exposes divisions within these groups as well as the emergence of different forms of opposition.

IRRELEVANT AND DANGEROUS GENDER: ENF/ID

The radical right populist groups ENF (8th parliament) and ID (9th parliament) built their political identities and ideologies in direct opposition to gender equality, intersectionality and LGBTQI rights. This opposition was voiced in plenary debates, with both direct and indirect opposition strategies to gender equality (Kantola & Lombardo, 2021). Radical right populist parties have often been seen as men's parties as the

majority of their politicians and supporters are male (Köttig et al., 2017). The ENF had 31% women and, together with the EPP, had the lowest number of women MEPs in the eighth parliament. Contrary to expectations, the ID group had 39% women MEPs, bringing it on par with the S&D and Renew groups, which were just above 40% women MEPs.

Our access to the ENF and ID groups was more difficult than to the other groups (see Table 10.1). Some of the responses to the interview invitations were openly hostile towards research on gender equality but were mostly met with silence. The analysis here is based on a total of seven interviews. A key issue emerging across the interviews was the perception of gender as irrelevant to the work of the group. One male MEP explained to us as follows: 'Our political view is that it doesn't matter that from which gender you are. You have to be good at work. So you can be a woman or man; it doesn't really matter' (ID MEP M 130320). The MEP continued that the political group had MEPs 'from both sides— I've seen many staff members from the women's side and many from the men's side'. A senior staff member from the ENF articulated the same view by stating that the group takes 'the best person': 'And whether that person is a man or a woman, it's not relevant to me really' (ENF Staff M 260419). The view was echoed by a woman MEP who said that 'whenever someone has to say something, he *(sic!)* simply says it. There is no difference whether it's a man or a woman' (ID MEP F 110320).

Resembling radical right populist strategies that are oppositional to gender equality in the plenary debates (Kantola & Lombardo, 2021), a female MEP interviewee from the ID group said that biological differences explained everything and should be understood and respected. She said that while 'men and women are created equally with the same rights', she opposed the idea that 'men and women want the same thing'. Rather, they are different: 'there is scientific data that very clearly show that men and women want different things, they have different—how should I put this—needs, they have different priorities' (ID MEP F 110320). This quotation exemplifies the selective appeal to science to prove sex differences and using this to explain societal differences, for example, gendered labour markets (women and men 'naturally' choose differently).

Practices for advancing gender equality, including quotas, were deemed 'ridiculous': 'So that's, we don't have any of this kind of, the quota system that we have to have, 50–50 or something like that. I think, for me especially, it's ridiculous so, [chuckles] personally, it doesn't matter from which gender you are' (ID MEP M 130320). Another male MEP

was committed to advancing the position of women in politics. He said that the group did not have 'many lessons to take from the opponents who speak about populists and women discrimination' in terms of the number of women in the group. He also stated that the political culture was not discriminatory and that female political representation was 'better representation. Not only that, but it's better working politically. It's my personal feeling and personal experience that introducing women into the political structures promotes the way the outcome of the work. So we've got to go further' (ID MEP M 120320).

Conclusions

Both the representative work of MEPs and the political work of their staff continue to be shaped by gender. The findings of this chapter illustrate that despite differences between the political groups, gendered inequalities are persistent across the political spectrum. Such inequalities were seen as ranging from the unequal division of speaking time and committee positions to gendered expectations and hierarchies, inappropriate behaviour and misogyny. Gendered inequalities in political groups have become institutionalised as informal institutions and have thereby been normalised as ways of doing things in the EP. This makes it more difficult to change inequalities, turning them into questions about democracy and democratic practices: gendered structures can undermine individual politicians and staff agency and place them in pre-existing categories that have very little to do with their expectations and desires about political work in the EP.

Political group practices that enhance gender equality are also practices that make democracy work better. Only the Greens/EFA used their group statutes extensively for advancing gender equality. Other groups had only some or no provisions in their statutes, for example, for gender-balanced representation in key positions. There was also strong opposition to measures such as quotas within the radical right populist and liberal groups. Nevertheless, the findings also illustrated that practices fostering gender equality can also consist of informal norms, which can be effective. It was evident that a commitment to gender equality and the willingness to see gender inequalities were required to push political groups to adopt gender equality measures.

Gender equality is clearly an issue around which there is potential for political polarisation in the EP. Left, green and liberal groups

strongly support it; conservatives are more ambivalent and radical right populists oppose it. The findings also point to the differences within these groups and the contestation around gender equality within some left and liberal groups. For the purpose of democracy, it is important that gender equality remains a norm and goal and that the political debate centres on ways to achieve it rather than questioning and rejecting equality for political purposes. It is notable that the two groups that were most firmly committed to gender equality as a norm and to advancing it—the Greens/EFA and GUE/NGL—were only the fifth and seventh in size. The perceptions, commitment and practices of the two largest groups—the EPP and S&D—remained decisive.

Notes

1. European Parliament Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE).
2. European Parliament Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE).

References

Ahrens, P. (2016). The committee on women's rights and gender equality in the European Parliament: Taking advantage of institutional power play. *Parliamentary Affairs, 69*(4), 778–793.

Aldrich, A. S., & Daniel, W. T. (2020). The consequences of quotas: Assessing the effect of varied gender quotas on legislator experience in the European Parliament. *Politics & Gender, 16*(3), 738–767.

Bartlomiejczyk, M. (2020). How much noise can you make through an interpreter?: A case study on racist discourse in the European Parliament. *Interpreting, 22*(2), 238–261.

Berthet, V., & Kantola, J. (2020). Gender, violence and political institutions: Struggles over sexual harassment in the European Parliament. *Social Politics, 28*(1), 143–167.

Celis, K., & Childs, S. (2015). *Gender, conservatism and political representation.* ECPR Press.

Chappell, L., & Waylen, G. (2013). Gender and the hidden life of institutions. *Public Administration, 91*(3), 599–615.

Childs, S., & Palmieri, S. (2022). Gender sensitive parliaments: Feminizing formal political institutions. In M. Sawer, L. A. Banaszak, J. True, & J. Kantola (Eds.), *Handbook on feminist governance*. Edward Elgar.

Chiva, C. (2014). *Gender, institutions and political representation*. Palgrave MacMillan.

Elomäki, A. (2021). "It's a total no-no": The strategic silence about gender in the European Parliament's economic governance policies. *International Political Science Review*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512120978329

EPP. (2013). *Rules of procedure of the group of the European people's party (Christian Democrats) in the European Parliament (October 2013)*. Retrieved 30 January 2021, from: https://www.eppgroup.eu/sites/default/files/download/rules-of-procedure/en.pdf

Erikson, J., & Josefsson, C. (2022). The Parliament as a gendered workplace: How to research legislators' (UN)equal opportunities to represent? *Parliamentary Affairs*, *75*(1), 20–38.

Erikson, J. & Verge, T. (2022). Gender, power and privilege in the parliamentary workplace. *Parliamentary Affairs*, *75*(1), 1–19.

Galligan, Y. (2015). States of democracy: An overview. In Y. Galligan (Ed.), *States of democracy: Gender and politics in the European Union* (pp. 1–14). Routledge.

Jacquot, S. (2017). A policy in crisis: The dismantling of the EU gender equality policy. In J. Kantola, & E. Lombardo (Eds.), *Gender and the crisis in Europe: Politics, institutions, and intersectionality* (pp. 27–48). Palgrave Macmillan.

Kantola, J., & Lombardo, E. (Eds.) (2017). *Gender and the economic crisis: Politics, institutions and intersectionality*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Kantola, J., & Lombardo, E. (2021). Opposition strategies of right populists against gender equality in a polarized European Parliament. *International Political Science Review*, *42*(5), 565–579.

Kantola, J., & Miller, C. (2021). Party politics and radical right populism in the European Parliament: Analysing political groups as democratic actors. *Journal of Common Market Studies, 59*(4), 782–801.

Kantola, J., & Miller, C. (2022). Gendered leadership in the European Parliament's political groups. In H. Müller, & I. Tömmel (Eds.), *Women and leadership in the European Union* (pp. 150–169). Oxford University Press.

Kantola, J., & Rolandsen Agustín, L. (2016). Gendering transnational party politics: The case of European Union. *Party Politics, 22*(5), 641–651.

Kantola, J., & Rolandsen Agustín, L. (2019). Gendering the representative work of the European Parliament: A political analysis of women MEP's perceptions of gender equality in party groups. *Journal of Common Market Studies, 57*(4), 768–786.

Köttig, M., Bitzan, R., & Pető, A. (eds.) (2017). *Gender and far right politics in Europe*. Palgrave.

Kuhar, R., & Paternotte D. (eds.) (2017). *Anti-gender campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against equality*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Lombardo, E., Meier, P., & Verloo, M. (2009). *The discursive politics of gender equality*. Routledge.

Lühiste, M., & Kenny, M. (2016). Pathways to power: Women's representation in the 2014 European Parliament elections. *European Journal of Political Research, 55*(3), 626–641.

McDonnell, D., & Werner, A. (2019). *International populism: The radical right in the European Parliament*. Hurst.

Sundström, A., & Stockemer, D. (2022). Political party characteristics and women's representation: The case of the European Parliament. *Representation, 58*(1), 119–137.

Zacharenko, E. (2020). *Anti-gender mobilisations in Europe*: *Study for policymakers on opposition to sexual and reproductive rights (SRHR) in European Institutions. Greens/EFA of the European Parliament*. Retrieved January 31, 2021, from: https://heidihautala.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Anti-gender-Mobilisations-in-Europe_Nov25.pdf

CHAPTER 11

'Ethno, Ethno, What?': Using Ethnography to Explore the European Parliament's Political Groups in Turbulent Times

Cherry Miller

INTRODUCTION

This question, 'ethno, ethno, what?', was uttered to me by a male Member of the European Parliament (MEP) after reading an information sheet, as I embarked on a day of shadowing him. Fortunately, I had time to debrief the MEP and he avidly shouted in the office, 'follow the action through here, Cherry, bring a chair!' (FN 050219). Upon bumping into another MEP in the parliament who had been shadowed, I was asked if I was 'taking the temperatures and smelling the air' and getting enough 'ethno-feel' from the fieldwork (FN 190319). Since ethnography is not a common approach to most actors within the European Parliament (EP), this ambivalent knowledge is similarly shared by some political scientists, who 'on the whole, ethnography remains mysterious to' (Crewe,

C. Miller (✉)
Tampere University, Tampere, Finland
e-mail: cherry.miller@tuni.fi

2018), whereby the novelty of political science and anthropology collaborations is emphasised (Cerwonka & Malki 2007). Meanwhile, some political scientists are critical of a 'newness' narrative; therefore, they highlighted political science's forgotten history of observational methods (Schatz, 2017; Wedeen, 2010) and, in the words of Aronoff and Kubik (2012), a 'convergent approach' between political science and anthropology. Indeed, evidence for the latter perception may be seen in the domain of the EP and EU institutions (Abélès, 1993; Abélès et al., 1993; Busby, 2013; Shore, 2000; Wodak, 2003). This ethnographic research revealed insights into the political group's activities to a greater or lesser extent. Overall, there has been a 'double absence' of literature, both on political groups and from an in-depth ethnographic perspective. Surprisingly, the political groups have not received more attention in a field where the assumptions of parliaments and their parties as unitary actors are being questioned (Rai & Spary, 2019; Ripoll Servent this volume).

Parliamentary and party-political ethnographies are arguably broader subtypes of political ethnography (Baiocchi & Connor, 2008). Political ethnography is a broad umbrella term that prioritises methodological immersion in the study of power. Political ethnography contains subfields, such as policy ethnography (Shore et al., 2011), parliamentary ethnography (Crewe, 2021) and political party ethnography (Aronoff, 1977; Crewe, 2020; Faucher, 2020). Notably, it can be approached from different ontological and epistemological positions that influence the methods chosen (Schatz, 2009), and the practice of parliamentary ethnographies may change with the type of parliament (Miller, 2021; Adiputri, 2019). Ethnography can be used as part of a standalone approach. Regarding specific methods, political ethnography includes participant observation and 'sensibility' (Wedeen, 2009, pp. 84–90). A sensibility tends to be a broader approach based on presence, materiality, long-term commitment and holistic analysis (Wedeen, 2009, p. 85). Alternatively, ethnography, as one part of a mixed-method approach, can be used to strengthen or test arguments. Overall, parliamentary studies' scholars are slowly embracing this approach with immersive methodologies in parliaments (Crewe, 2021).

My parliamentary ethnography discussed here was among the European Research Council-funded EUGenDem project on the operation of gender, democracy and party politics in the EP's political groups' policies and practices. For timing, fieldwork commenced in the 8th EP and at the beginning of the 9th EP. This chapter asks: What insights does

ethnography contribute to the study of political groups and how might we conduct it? To answer these questions, first, I locate parliamentary ethnography in the study of political groups. Second, I nuance the application of ethnography by showing extensively how shadowing, meeting ethnography and hanging out as ethnographic practices can provide insights into the three interlinked themes of the edited volume: democracy, party politics and turbulent times. Finally, I revisit the question of what parliamentary ethnography adds to our understanding of political groups. Overall, the chapter contributes to ameliorating charges of the routinisation of research on the EP and considers the informal dynamics of the EP as an institutional setting.

Parliamentary Ethnography and the Study of Political Groups

Can parliamentary ethnography be used, either as a standalone approach or to enhance existing research on the political groups? Research on EPs is maturing, but Olivier Costa (2019) has two charges. First, he notes that there is a 'routinisation' in EP's literature (p. 6), whereby similar datasets, substantive topics and approaches are used, and consequently, the value of each study tends to 'regress'. Second, Costa suggests that existing approaches are overspecialised and self-referential and 'tend to overlook the dynamics of the institution' (p. 6). My aim in this chapter is to demonstrate how ethnography ameliorates these charges to a degree. Regarding the first charge, ethnographic studies identify new topics, relationships and actors. They can also explore the 'ruptures, the ambiguity and fragmentary character' (Wedeen, 2009, p. 85) of EP life, overcoming routinisation. Regarding the second charge, ethnography's emphasis on entanglements embeds the groups within the EP setting and its capillaries. Furthermore, I argue that ethnographic enquiry is perfectly placed to dig beneath three interlinked themes at the heart of this edited collection: democracy, party politics and turbulent times.

Formalistic notions of democracy stress that the EP is an institution that claims to represent citizens' interests due to elections to the EP. However, formally the EP's Rules of Procedure structure the connections between the political groups. There are tensions between the rationalisation of political group activity to empower the EP, and representativeness, deliberation and agency in the parliament (Brack, 2018, p. 185; Mushaben, 2019; Ripoll Servent & Panning, 2019). Scholars of

democratic settings have argued that ethnography can highlight informal practices that challenge formal rules (Chappell & Waylen, 2013). There may be a contrast between formal democratic indicators and the lived experiences of democratic spaces.

Although political groups have made some efforts to enable electoral contestation, such as communicating their activities, significant gaps exist. Group meetings and working groups are closed. The European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL), now 'the Left', is the only group that publishes its group meetings online, although inconsistently. Group expenses are published annually but in an aggregate form. Voting lists, away-days, coordinators and Heads of National Party Delegations are not always published on websites. Regarding group democracy, statutes tell us the formal supranational and intergovernmental opportunities for democracy and participation (Bressanelli, 2014). However, democracy is not reduced to formal rules of procedure, and group archives are unevenly maintained. The ethnographic move to 'study up' has been cited as a democratic intervention (Nader, 1972) in gender equality (Donaldson & Poynting, 2013) and in understanding the EP. Busby (2013) locates ethnography's importance in the inverse relationship between the growing EP's powers and citizens' knowledge. However, scholars doubt whether the transparency afforded by ethnographic research necessarily induces progressive change (Pachirat, 2013). Either way, ethnography allows us to explore 'shallow democracy' dimensions in-between elections (Crewe, 2018).

Interpretive accounts explore how democracy is understood and performed by political actors and treat it as an analytical category (Wedeen, 2009). Commentators of the EP construct the condition of democracy as the spirit of an age (Applebaum, 2020), analyse the political-institutional design of democracy (Lord, 2018) and explore agonism and antagonism in political group debates (Kantola & Lombardo, 2021). The political groups articulate the language of democracy and representation as fundamental values to participate in the design of deliberative democracy (Johansson and Raunio in this volume). Some members of EP's political groups—The European People's Party Group (EPP), The Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D), Renew Europe (Renew), Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA)—share a norm of 'institutional patriotism' (Ripoll Servent, 2018, p. 5), and MEPs' activities in the EP regarding their groups may be informed by their conception

of democracy. Ethnography explores how actors attach meanings in situ to everyday group activities.

The second theme is party politics. The EP's party system has been characterised as having a so-called grand coalition of the EPP and S&D who had always held a majority, but they lost this in the 2019 elections. There has been increasing politicisation, polarisation and ideological diversity, which has intensified the dynamics of inter-group cooperation and competition, and the EP provides a different environment from national party systems since political groups in the EP cannot as easily speculate about the electoral consequences of their choices (Ripoll Servent in this volume). These struggles occur in a working parliament (Lord, 2018), which has consequences for groups that must compromise with other groups. It is precisely because of the perceived consensual working that makes deeper explorations of group dynamics important (Ahrens & Rolandsen Agustín, 2019, p. 9). Political groups are uneasy marriages of different national party delegations (Ahrens and Kantola in this volume), and exploring the lines of contestation within them is important.

Ethnographies of party politics allow researchers to get underneath the skin of political groups to explore coalition building, personalities, mediators, disagreements, identity-building practices and group members' processes of relating. Generally, several anthropologists of elite actors have noted a gap in ethnographic research on party politics (Crewe, 2020; Faucher, 2020; Gusterson, 2017). Finally, political groups are conceptualised as rational, goal-oriented and purposeful collective actors who maximise their power and influence in the EP. However, they are also affective and communal entities, with some shared aspirations and struggles towards these ends. Shaming and feeling rules are powerful tools for governing behaviour (Hochschild, 1979) and may tell us about group cohesion without formal disciplinary tools. Ethnography is best placed to explicitly explore these relational dynamics.

Third, regarding turbulent times, the EP faces challenges such as differentiated (dis)integration (Lombardo & Kantola, 2019), right-wing populism, Eurosceptic contestation (see Börzel and Hartlapp in this volume) and the politicisation of the Union and gender (Warasin, 2020). While there are some highly ritualised events, such as the State of the Union address (the annual presentation of the Commission's work programme and commissioner hearings), decision-making can often move with great pace, intensity and uncertainty. Crewe (2021) notes that party

politicians manage chronic emergencies, implying that the stakes of their relationships are high and that their politics operate 'with the dial turned up' (p. 173). Thus, ethnography can offer insights into the context of so-called EU crises. Observation provides richer insights than interviews conducted in calmer, controlled environments. Furthermore, researchers have struggled to recruit participants to discuss some interview topics, such as those around morality issues, particularly for those positioned on the conservative side of the parliament, and MEPs tend not to refer to their behaviour but to their colleagues' (Mondo & Close, 2018, p. 1006).

Ethnography is beneficial for exploring everyday discourses and practices of (dis)integration (Lombardo & Kantola, 2019), a phenomenon that is a process rather than an end state. When exploring turbulent times, 'marking time' (Rabinow, 2008) of the contemporary is important. This involves bearing witness and making connections, including addressing voices and perspectives that have been submerged in grand narratives of democratic developments in the EU. Without ethnography, disproportional weight can be placed on linear narratives of change and consensual understandings. Ethnography can thicken the analysis of the affective nature of this turbulence and capture ambivalences that oppose signifiers of institutional power and influence.

Given the benefits to qualitative research on the themes of democracy, party politics and turbulent times discussed above, I will now consider the affordances of shadowing, meeting ethnography and hanging out—key ethnographic practices to our understanding of the political groups.

Shadowing, Meeting Ethnography and Hanging Out

To echo Richard Fenno's sentiments in a methodological appendix to his book *Home Style,* this section is 'written less about how this kind of research is done than about how one particular research project was done' (Fenno, 1978, p. 249). The epistemological use of specific ethnographic practices to meet substantive research questions remains under-conceptualised and can be conflated or go undetected (Nair, 2021, p. 3). Therefore, this section ties specific ethnographic practices to the particular themes of the book. As mentioned, the project was based on research on gendered practices—understood intersectionally— of the political groups. This affected the research practices, which will be

explained later in the chapter. Notably, while these three research practices are elucidated, the epistemological impulse towards ethnography as a sensibility (Miller, 2021; Wedeen, 2009) meant that each practice required different degrees of participation.

My research design comprised a pilot study of shadowing nine MEPs from five political groups and a longer stay as a study visitor. This ethnography took a political focus, centring on activities, rules and practices in the 7–8 supranational political groups regarding the EP in the 8th and 9th parliaments. The political groups in the 8th EP, in order of size, were EPP, S&D, The Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR), Greens/EFA, Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD), GUE/NGL and Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF). In the 9th EP, Greens/EFA had temporarily grown in size, ALDE became Renew and was again the third largest group, the ECR was heavily reduced in size, and the ENF group was dissolved, but the newly formed Identity and Democracy group (ID) at 73 members was almost double the size. Meanwhile, the EFDD was dissolved and the largest delegation of the EP, the 29-member Brexit Party, sat in the Non-Inscrits (NI). For researching turbulent times, this was an opportune moment; since the fieldwork was undertaken as a member state, the UK left the European Union, and their MEPs left the EP, too.

Access was achieved in the 8th parliament through individual MEPs' offices. Some parliamentary infrastructure supports observational work, such as internship schemes (Loewenberg, 2011). In the 9th parliament, access was achieved through a two-month academic visitor position at the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS). The physical library reading room was a helpful base for contacting parliamentary actors for interviews, shadowing opportunities, access by appointment to group meetings, working groups and national party delegation meetings.

For the data recording, a reflexive approach was taken. The fieldwork began with a pilot study in the 8th EP, whereby a fieldwork diary written in chronological order was used. In the second stage of the fieldwork, based on what we had learnt, an observational protocol derived from the concepts of feminist institutionalism and geared towards the themes of the project was used. The categories were (1) event setting, (2) power relations, (3) democracy, (4) gendered practices, (5) the political group as a workplace, (6) affect and (7) researcher role. Added to over 30

observation protocols and the field notes totalling 193 pages, 131 interviews were conducted in phases: first, 53 interviews in Brussels in the 8th legislature (2014–2019) and, second, 74 interviews in Brussels, MEPs' home countries and through Skype in the 9th legislature (2014–2019). Interviews were semi-structured. The COVID-19 pandemic affected the fieldwork by creating an atypical 'exit' from the field, meaning that scheduling observations and interviews at the height of the fieldwork became fraught, and in crisis conditions, I became more of an 'outsider'. However, dialogic and flexible communication was maintained with key interlocutors upon leaving the EP.

I will discuss three analytically distinct fieldwork practices: (1) shadowing, (2) meeting ethnography of group and working group meetings and (3) hanging out. First, I will delineate each practice and how it generated immersion and contributed to the substantive themes of democracy, party politics and turbulent times. Both formal semi-structured and informal interviews also played a key role in my ethnography; however, due to the large amount of literature on elite interviews, they are not discussed directly here.

Shadowing MEPs

Shadowing is the practice of accompanying actors throughout their daily work lives (Czarniawska, 2007; McDonald, 2005). It was popularised in political science by Richard Fenno (1978 and 1990), who shadowed 18 US Members of Congress in their districts. The time negotiated for the shadowing placements was between half a day and three days. I shadowed nine MEPs (S&D M, S&D F, EPP M, EPP F, ECR M, 2 X Greens/EFA F, Greens/EFA M, ENF M) for 12 days. Seven of these shadowing placements were supplemented with an interview. Shadowing is facilitated heavily by supportive offices that have familiarity with, and the staff to facilitate, a shadowing placement. Two Accredited Parliamentary Assistants (APAs) shared the MEPs' diaries, which helped organise shadowing. McDonald recommends not to 'go in cold' to a shadowing placement (2005), so I researched the legislative biography of each MEP using the EP website and undertook a generalised online search for their policy interests and personal biographies.

Democracy can be researched through the process of acquiring access. Access fluctuates between individuals for 'eminence versus nearness and transparency versus secrecy' (Rodríguez-Teruel & Daloz, 2017, p. 106).

My approach to recruitment changed accordingly around MEPs' world-views towards hierarchy. Walking through the corridors with staff some-times revealed a lack of MEP-staff hierarchies—one EFDD APA, took me on an impromptu door-knock to recruit MEPs (FN 290,119), while another EPP APA described her active MEP: 'we do not get to see the MEP much; she is difficult to pin down' (FN 271118). Previous research noted that politicians are more open to study than comparable elites, such as economic elites, due to 'the image of openness they generally try to convey, at least within democratic systems' (Rodríguez-Teruel, 2017, p. 106). One ECR office asked for my CV (FN 031218) to check my legitimacy or to provide research assistance by snowballing contacts.

Regarding democracy, spending time shadowing MEPs revealed how individual MEPs subjectively saw their group, their political efficacy inside it, their multiple positionings and the effects on their behaviour. These feelings cannot be read from statutes, plenary debates or committee recordings. There were several gripe sessions and uses of irony for describing groups. To deepen the analysis of policy-making (see Elomäki et al. in this volume), shadowing showed a distant relationship between a rapporteur and a committee member from the same group. The S&D MEP had a meeting with a Permanent Representative about a politically sensitive policy—a key policy for (dis)integration. The Permanent Repre-sentative wanted to know the S&D's red lines and was visiting other groups; therefore, a degree of guardedness and impression management was exercised. At that point, the S&D member had no communication with the rapporteur; he said: 'he looks the part but is incredibly thick' (FN 171018). Rather than epiphenomenal details, this suggests much about subjective assessments of report allocation, group democracy and who the rapporteur saw himself as working for. A Greens/EFA MEP critiqued shallow democracy in his group's communications. He resented generic content and 'beautification'—meaning idealised image manage-ment of some of his group's communication. He preferred more nation-ally targeted messages (FN 030320). These insights connect with broader discussions about conventionalised emotions in mainstream/centre party communications (Breeze, 2018).

Regarding party politics, shadowing provides unique insights into group switching in the fourth layer of political group formation (Ahrens and Kantola in this volume). I shadowed an MEP who had recently switched groups to the ENF political group. My ethnography shows a broader set of entanglements (Crewe, 2021) relevant to political work,

such as informal sanctions that follow a group switch. The MEP's APA felt that some more disloyal group actors had not received this social disapprobation. Sanctions that accompanied a group switch included unravelling accommodation arrangements, seeing former colleagues who had been personal friends around the EP and the career effects for the APA. The move by the MEP into a new group could not be explained in office, policy or reputational benefits. His APA articulated the switch in emotional discourses: the MEP was concerned about the history of the national party delegation and wanted to hold it together.

Party politics were further performed in an informal meeting held with the MEP's new ENF committee colleagues in the Mickey Mouse bar—a more informal and open bar in the EP. The MEP established himself as a reliable partner and explained his intended voting behaviour to his new colleagues. He could conceivably co-sign amendments. However, he could not be 'seen to be helping EU legislation, unless it reduced EU impact and increased member state involvement'. He promised 'never to vote against a Lopez-Moreno amendment'. If he strongly disagreed, he would not vote. He told the MEPs (through the translation by his APA): 'I am a controversial man; if they want to vote against me, there's no hard feelings' (FN EP8). When I asked the APA how she felt that the meeting had gone, she felt that the MEP had overpromised when assuring his new colleagues that he would not vote against their amendments. She ascribed this naivety to him not being a professional party politician. Shadowing showed how party-political group switches are informally intermediated by APAs, including Heads of Delegations and MEPs.

For researching turbulent times, shadowing this new ENF MEP showed that he was not only formally presenting himself as a reliable partner regarding party politics and amendments but also an empathetic partner, despite ostensibly breaking feeling rules surrounding (non)human suffering (Malmqvist, 2019). The MEP introduced himself by discussing his industry philosophy and said, 'There is one other difficult emotive issue that I want to raise' and raised the issue of animal welfare. 'Don't worry as it makes me look cruel, but in the country, we have laws to protect animals' (FN EP8). The MEPs also discussed Halal meat and 'rusty knives' and suggested that this was 'the thin end of a wedge of full Shariah law'. Therefore, he made himself accountable to his new team members for his views on what he had designated as emotive issues. Shadowing opportunities revealed one of the unparalleled aspects of an ethnography—the interactions with the researcher over a

sustained period. Since equalities' research is normative, several participants were concerned about the impression left on me as a researcher. For example, one APA sought assurances in a polarised parliament and asked, 'We are not so bad, are we?' (FN EP8). This is because the group was a radical right-wing populist group with a bad reputation for gender equality. Therefore, ethnography rewarded the project with insights into the discomfort that coincided with gender consciousness in EP.

The disadvantage of shadowing multi-national MEPs in political groups is that the parliament is multi-lingual. While sometimes I just did not understand the language, language could also be used in shadowing placements as a tool of privacy when shadowing certain MEPs. This makes the role of staff even greater, who may be significant interlocutors for MEPs, and it also prevents rapport in some instances. I ended one shadowing placement disappointed because the time spent with the MEP had been a matter of hours; however, the office helped set up meetings with key actors. Therefore, to adapt Fenno's (1990) phrase, the placement felt like 'soaking, poking and signposting'. Mobility has been cited as the key benefit of shadowing (Czarniawska, 2007), but arguably, shadowing provides guidance too. Shadowing might be particularly beneficial in unfamiliar environments, such as the Strasbourg parliament, which I had only visited once before COVID-19 and experienced it like a rabbit warren—where groups disappeared into different rooms and by-appointment meetings required negotiation.

Meeting Ethnography of Group Meetings and Working Groups

Meetings are ubiquitous in the EP and meeting ethnography is developing conceptually as an analytically distinct practice that explores what meetings do (Brown et al., 2017; Sandler & Thredvall, 2016). I will discuss the group and working group meetings. Formally, the role of the group meeting—the plenary assembly of political groups—is set out in group statutes. Here, forthcoming parliamentary business is discussed alongside unresolved issues in the working groups. The working groups formally develop a policy line. Attending both meetings offered insights into intra-group democracy and the plurality of perspectives beneath group press releases, adding to the account of intra-group policy formation provided by (see Elomäki et al. in this volume).

By observing formal aspects of democracy, such as when an issue was pushed to a vote in the group meeting, democracy could be observed

in practices such as (in)formal leadership styles (Kantola & Miller, 2022) and how the Heads of the largest National Party Delegations who were over-represented by men (Kantola & Miller, 2022) enjoyed space in the group meetings. Democracy was articulated in the group meeting's role, sensitivity and practices to maintain security. I observed the conservative ethos of the bigger groups, seniority norms and the invitation of 'seasoned veteran' (Johansson and Raunio in this volume) to address group meetings (S&D 181018). The practice of checking 'outsiders' identities adds to the exclusivity of the group meeting. The significance of the group meeting is shown in the orange cards reserved for media officers (EPP, 271118, p. 40) and the Renew Group has a viewing room for staff to watch if the main group meeting room is full. Staff in the EP administration discussed nostalgia for bygone days of group weeks and the centrality of the group meeting (FN 120,320). Undoubtedly, ethnography shows how group meetings 'contain and animate social worlds' (Brown et al., 2017, p. 11).

For democracy in working group meetings, S&D, EPP and Renew have had working groups for a long time (Bressanelli, 2014). I observed the creation of the Greens/EFA cluster scheme and entanglements. For example, there were anxieties from staff who had to estimate how much power new institutional bodies would have and how they would be staffed. A Greens/EFA cluster was vigilant of new temporary committees since it would take some of their power and expertise away. Staff attendance was actively considered. The terms 'cluster boss' and 'cluster buddy' were used by MEPs jovially to parody the new cluster structure playfully and to distance themselves from coldness that can accompany formal institutional positions. For democracy and participation, a Greens/EFA MEP who was the committee coordinator brought a poster to debrief working group members on forthcoming business—to show initiative, efficiency and openness. She presented from the floor in front of the dais and showed the learning and information involved in democracy by introducing the technical terms of the debate (FN 030320).

Discussions about the democratic division of labour between the group meeting and the working group meeting indicated how this structure was affectively managed. Tensions played out quite intensely when disagreements in the working groups were reopened in EPP and Renew group meetings—arguably the two most integrationist groups. In the Renew group meeting, it was suggested that 'the working group is sacred' (FN 050220) and its work should not be unravelled in the group meeting.

The working groups at the time of the research were affectively managed spaces, and MEPs were chastised through 'humiliating members of the working group' (FN 050220) by bringing 'marginal voices' and disagreements from the working group meeting. I observed a large 20-min discussion in a Renew group meeting about procedure. Since institutionalisation occurs where added value and boundedness are recognised, this indicates that the working group was insufficiently institutionalised (see also Bressanelli in this volume).

For party politics in the group meeting, following Crewe (2021, p. 132), riffs of meaning were used in declaratory discourses by group members after sensing the mood of the group meeting to boost morale and to construct how the groups managed party politics. My ethnography showed that the EPP narrated themselves as using evidence and eschewing emotive, impulsive decision-making in politicised policy areas (FN 071118). S&D members constructed themselves as a responsible moral group, especially for equalities. However, their discourses were confessional before the 2019 elections, where three rhetorical moves were used: first, that group had to be responsive to societal needs to avoid becoming irrelevant, and second, that all the self-evident benefits of international cooperation had to be questioned. Third, that 'listening' exercises would take place with civil society. The Renew Group narrated themselves as a 'capable' group at finding intra-group compromises, for example assuaging the economic liberals' concerns on the Green New Deal, the Greens/EFA called themselves the 'real' group listening to civil society in the development of policy, such as around the Copyright Law (FN 190319), the ECR saw themselves as a dialogic group based on the exchange of ideas and maintaining communication with difficult actors (FN 051218), the GUE/NGL group described themselves as punching above their institutional weight in the parliament and exerting political pressure regarding policy influence—being 'one step ahead' on migration (FN 110220) and EFDD Group members constructed themselves on the affective side of societal struggles, such as having 'utter fascination' with the *Gilets jaunes* protestors (FN 050,219).

Regarding researching party politics, private intra-group spaces are important for expressing views frankly since future compromises have to be made with other political groups; therefore, strong feelings cannot always be articulated. In the Renew working group meeting, strong language was used: 'It's always good to call out when the EPP are being misogynistic, but I trust your judgement on this [wink]' (FN 050220). In

a Renew working group, when reporting on a report on equalities, group members intervened and asked why some text had been deleted. The rapporteur looked exasperated and conveyed to the group how, without the amended text, the EPP political group was 'going to blow this whole resolution up' (FN 050220) due to their inner struggles if she pushed it any further. A senior MEP complained that she was 'tired of the EPP's red lines and to push them for a vote' (FN 050220). Therefore, observing this interaction showed how exposure of, and cooperation with, potential partners was a delicate balance in group party politics. Political distinctions between the groups were elaborated in moral economies. A staff member of the Greens/EFA regarded the S&D as 'populist' for bidding 23 points for a child benefit report, although the Greens/EFA and ALDE as co-rapporteurs were felt to have greater expertise and the staff member resented how the report had been presented in official EP committee communications as an achievement of consensus politics (FN 190318). Undoubtedly, observing these meetings revealed how political actors had to perform 'choreography'—presenting a case for how a file is linked to other files that the political group had expertise in and liaising with colleagues in other committees to get the file (FN 210120).

Attending group meetings in turbulent times revealed how strong emotions were elicited when so-called EU 'crises' were discussed. The atmospheres were palpable, as this vignette attests, in both the anticipation of the plenary and the feeling rules of groups: MEPs could use consideration of human suffering to bring the group back in line:

> MEP (male) anticipates the Greece/Turkey border plenary debate… I know how this will go. We'll hear a competition of statements: 'it's unbearable, it's untenable' putting the blame on Greece and saying how Erdogan is weaponising the issues. He shouts across the room that the most practical thing the group can ask for is to unblock the asylum package and create humanitarian corridors. He critiques routinisation in the plenary. 'Who can say things that are the most virtuous?' He argues to use letters, initiatives and parliamentary means rather than a competition of rhetoric.
>
> A female MEP speaks and shakes her hands: 'look at ourselves. There is disbelief in this political family that we are indifferent to human suffering…' X delegation wanted to write to Von Der Leyen (Commission President). She turns and slams the microphone off. A chair of the meeting acknowledges the MEP's passion but pleads: please don't say that the X group is not sensitive to this. We need to listen to each other and allow

people to speak. The job has to be organised to allow people to speak and agree on what initiatives might come forward. (FN 030320)

For turbulent times, meeting ethnography showed how working groups could be affected by changes in membership and the loss of critical actors and the expertise that goes with them. For example, a meeting of a Working Group on Extremism and Democracy was thinly attended (FN 050220) following the recent departure of a UK chair. This adds to accounts of the institutionalisation of group structures (see Bressanelli in this volume) since some group structures might be perceived as more important to maintain than others in the face of turbulence.

The disadvantage of meeting ethnography was finding points of access. I was less successful achieving access to a political group meeting through a Secretary General (SG) and their Assistant than through MEPs, though this cooperation differed by group. Alternatively, this could reveal where some types of power were (not) in political groups—for example, the Secretary General's office lacked the power to make decisions above the MEPs. However, this contrasted with another group meeting, where an APA to a senior MEP in the delegation asked me if I wanted the meeting recorded. The Greens/EFA group asked how far they were cooperating relative to the other groups. A member sought reassurance in a coffee queue: 'Are we the only group that you are having trouble accessing?' (FN 030320). Approaching another SG flanked only by a close and large group of male staffers felt challenging despite him personally cooperating with the project, thus illuminating the contradictory dynamics of gender and political groups (Kantola in this volume). The prioritisation of meetings with meeting ethnography is a drawback—especially since many political groups hold their group meetings simultaneously. This is less of a feature of shadowing. Furthermore, the thematic observational protocol obscured sequencing and chronology. Some 'elite' meetings were inaccessible, such as the Conference of Presidents, thereby making interviews and 'hanging out' (Nair, 2021) important. Regarding turbulence, negotiating access to observe sensitive meetings was uncomfortable for both the participants and me. At times, I felt like a 'disaster institutionalist', chasing access to turbulent institutional arrangements that were rapidly dissolving.

Hanging Out

In elite settings, the so-called practice of hanging out offers an alternative possibility for immersion. This is a more diffused and dialogic practice than meeting ethnography. Hanging out requires three facets: 'a period of continuous residence amid members of a field, engage[ment] in informal, ludic and sociable interactions sited outside or at the side-lines of members' professional habitats and participa[tion] in activities where striking and sustaining rapport is as important as the goals of the research' (Nair, 2021, p. 10). Densely clustered institutional spaces, such as the European Quarter, provide several immersive opportunities (Nair, 2021, p. 23; Lewicki, 2017). Inside the EP, this included *formally* attending plenaries and committees, and *informally* attending inter-group meetings, the Mickey Mouse bar, group corridors and exhibition areas, EPRS book talks, and civil society events. Outside the EP, this included presenting the project to a group of EPP APAs; informally arranged transportation in this case carpooling between Brussels and Strasbourg; it could include attending meetings at other EU institutions and *informally* going for groceries, hanging out in Flagey, Place Du Luxembourg, attending civil society events and living in Brussels. Hanging out had practical benefits. To refer to Costa's (2019) charge of routinisation, the ethnography allowed me to locate or, rather, *be located* by actors in the political groups who, upon hearing about the project, could provide situated and alternative perspectives on the groups' democratic credentials, which had been inadvertently unsolicited by other academic accounts. This was particularly acute in both the sensitive topics of harassment and racism, in which the actors were introduced *to* me. Hanging out also allowed me to snowball two ID respondents for interviews, a group from which the EUGenDem project struggled to gain cooperation in general.

Regarding democracy, hanging out at a Library Talk 'After the Velvet Revolution' illustrated that some EPP MEPs constructed democracy as anti-communism. This was shown when a GUE/NGL staff member spoke, and an EPP MEP remarked audibly and disapprovingly behind her hand, raising her eyebrows: 'she's a communist' (FN 060220). This discredited the speaker and reflected a lack of democracy since democracy is conceptualised as hearing other perspectives. Furthermore, ethnography allowed me to observe invited expertise by political groups and was suggestive of how group members conceptualise democracy. For example, a Renew MEP invited media scholars and sociologists to discuss

academic freedom in Hungary, many of whom were women; therefore, the invitation of actors and the choice of expertise can indicate a certain conceptualisation of democracy (FN 280120). Finally, hanging out in the venues where groups held their events showed relationships with civil society; for example, a GUE/NGL feminist forum was held in a venue distant from the EP.

For party politics, hanging out in EP's informal settings allowed me to comprehend groups as corporate entities. An ECR APA described the EPP's merchandise operation as 'guargantuan'—that is, enormous—compared to other groups, such as in bags, playing cards and baseball caps (FN 051218). The S&D had a poster in the Andy Warhol styles of its former group leaders, which evokes meanings of democratisation, mass communication, accessibility and popularity. Party politics were displayed in posters of the different national party delegations in the Renew Secretariat corridor; this shows pride in the group formation of the Renew Group (see also Ahrens and Kantola in this volume).

Hanging out in turbulent times generates 'thick' descriptions of political identity building in (in)formal EP spaces. Observing room bookings showed two events happening simultaneously in the EP: Rainbow families and the Traditional Family, but there was no discussion between the two. Hanging out also revealed affective atmospheres (Kantola & Miller, 2021) and postures. For example, progressive groups were criticised at an ECR event for their 'liberal stamina' (FN 050220). Virile masculinity also featured in descriptions of Rainbow families 'like vegan meatballs, not real meatballs, not real families' (FN 050220). Ethnography then provides insights into political group identity and its assertion in the parliament. Finally, turbulence in the EP featured informal chats with members of the parliamentary administration. We discussed how dilemmas from turbulent changes (such as a member state leaving) were endogenised into their everyday working practices (such as whether) to include UK data in social policy reporting and how the administration responded to the selective use of evidence to support political group agendas (FN 190220).

The disadvantages of hanging out in EP spaces are like those listed by Nair (2021). These range from the time and material-intensive costs to fieldwork, institutional support for accommodation and other expenses, childcare provision and always having a posture of openness to informal interaction. Researching the far-right generated issues of ethics, reciprocity and the risk of complicity. This occurred in the Beer Factory, the nearest bar to the parliament, when I was invited to sit with actors

in the far-right group, one of whom had been helpful for the research project (see also Gusterson, 2017). Finally, the vaunted 'aimless and disinterested flow of conversation' (Nair, 2021, p. 11) could not always be maintained. When speaking with an interpreter in the chamber about gendered speaking styles, he said, 'I see you're in work mode' (FN 090220); therefore, the interaction was not perceived as 'natural'.

Conclusion

To respond to the 'ethno, ethno what?' question in the chapter title, this chapter has explicated three ethnographic practices: shadowing, meeting ethnography and hanging out for researching EP political groups. I will now reflect on how studying EP's political groups at close range with ethnography deepens our understanding of democracy, party politics and turbulent times.

For realist scholars, regarding democracy, ethnographic insights can provide cues about what to expect from supranational democracy and the identification of critical actors for change. For interpretivist scholars, without ethnography, we can miss subjective, daily conceptions of group democracy. Finally, rather than uncompromising self-reference as (privileged) members of civil society, academics reflecting on their research relationships can illustrate degrees of openness and hierarchy in the political groups. The fundamental research practices of trying to achieve participation for normative research topics and how group actors can seek reassurance from the researcher about their (relative) standing in this reveal much.

Regarding party politics, my ethnography allowed me to observe political groups as affective and communal supranational entities. This included observing intra-group political struggles in the face of differences in aspirations or the means of achieving them, for example, over migration. Regarding inter-group struggles, I observed delicate balances of exposure and cooperation with other political groups and the entanglements of party–political actors that constrain their capacity for action.

For turbulent times, my ethnography showed how in throes of deep contestation and uncertainty and without conventional disciplinary tools, feeling rules and shaming at their trespassing could stabilise the groups during 'crisis' and provide an anchor when the group risks deviating from its normative values. Furthermore, without ethnographic immersion, accounts of ambivalence and reputational discomfort in the face

of gender equality conscientisation might be evacuated from analyses of group actors. This might matter for inducing change. Finally, in elucidating the 'ethno, ethno what?', I hope this chapter has inspired the question: 'ethno, ethno, when?'.

REFERENCES

Abélès, M. (1993). Political anthropology of the trans-national institution: The European Parliament. *French Politics & Society, 11*(1), 1–19.

Abélès, M., Bellier, I., & McDonald, M. (1993). *An anthropological approach to the European Commission.* European Commission. Retrieved January 31, 2021, from: http://aei.pitt.edu/41765/1/A5783.pdf

Adiputri, R. (2019). Social science research in southeast Asia: The challenges of studying parliamentary institutions. *The Indonesian Journal of South East Asian Studies, 2*(2), 147–179.

Ahrens, P., & Rolandsen Agustín, L. (2019). *Gendering the European Parliament: Structures, policies and practices.* ECPR Press/Rowman & Littlefield.

Applebaum, A. (2020). *The twilight of democracy: The seductive lure of authoritarianism.* Random House.

Aronoff, M. J. (1977). *Power and ritual in the Israel Labor Party.* Royal Van Gorcum.

Aronoff, M. J., & Kubik, J. (2012). *Anthropology and political science: A convergent approach.* Berghahn Books Incorporated.

Baiocchi, G., & Connor, B. T. (2008). The ethnos in the polis: Political ethnography as a mode of inquiry. *Sociology Compass, 2*(1), 139–155.

Brack, N. (2018). *Opposing Europe in the European Parliament: Rebels and radicals in the chamber.* Palgrave Macmillan.

Breeze, R. (2018). Emotion in politics: Affective-discursive practices in UKIP and Labour. *Discourse and Society, 30*(3), 24–43.

Bressanelli, E. (2014). Necessary deepening? How political groups in the European Parliament adapt to enlargement. *Journal of European Public Policy, 21*(5), 776–792.

Brown, H., Reed, A., & Yarrow, T. (2017). Introduction: Towards an ethnography of meeting. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 23*(1), 10–26.

Busby, A. (2013). Normal Parliament': Exploring the organisation of everyday political life in an MEP's office. *Journal of Contemporary European Research, 9*(1), 94–115.

Cerwonka, A., & Malkki, L.H. (2007). *Improvising theory: Process and temporality in ethnographic fieldwork*. University of Chicago Press.

Costa, O. (2019). The need for further research on the European Parliament. In O. Costa (Ed.), *The European Parliament in times of EU crisis* (pp. 1–21). Palgrave Macmillan.

Chappell, L., & Waylen, G. (2013). Gender and the hidden life of institutions. *Public Administration, 91*(3), 599–615.

Crewe, E. (2018). Ethnographies of parliament: Culture and uncertainty in shallow democracies. *Journal of Organizational Ethnography, 7*(1), 16–30.

Crewe, E. (2020). Rhythms, riffs, and rituals in political parties: An anthropological view of complex coalitions: Unpacking complex organizations. *Ephemera Theory and Politics in Organization, 21*(2), 187–198.

Crewe, E. (2021). *The anthropology of parliaments: Entanglements in democratic politics.* Routledge.

Czarniawska, B. (2007). *Shadowing and other techniques for doing fieldwork in modern societies*. Copenhagen Business School Press.

Donaldson, M., & Poynting, S. (2013). Peering upwards: Researching ruling-class men. In B. Pini & B. Pease (Eds.), *Men, masculinities and methodologies* (pp. 157–169). Palgrave MacMillan.

Faucher, F. (2020). An anthropology of contemporary political parties: Reflexions on methods and theory: Unpacking party organizations. *Ephemera: Theory & Politics in Organization, 21*(2), 53–75

Fenno, R. (1978). *Home style: House members in their districts*. Little Brown.

Fenno, R. (1990). *Watching politicians: Essays on participant observation*. University of California Press.

Gusterson, H. (2017). From Brexit to Trump: Anthropology and the rise of nationalist populism. *American Ethnologist: Journal of the American Ethnological Society, 44*(2), 209–214.

Hochschild, A. (1979). Emotion work, feeling rules, and social structure. *American Journal of Sociology, 85*(3), 551–575.

Kantola, J., & Miller, C. (2021). Party politics and radical right populism in the European Parliament: Analysing political groups as democratic actors. *Journal of Common Market Studies, 59*(4), 782–801.

Kantola, J., & Miller C. (2022). Gendered leadership in the European Parliament's political groups. In H. Müller & I. Tömmel (Eds.), *Women and leadership in the European Union* (pp. 150–169). Oxford University Press.

Kantola, J., & Lombardo, E. (2021). Challenges to democratic practices and discourses in the European Parliament: Feminist perspectives on the politics of political groups. *Social Politics, 28*(3), 579–602.

Lewicki, P. (2017). *EU-space and the Euroclass: modernity, nationality and lifestyle among Eurocrats in Brussels*. Transcript-Verlag Bielefeld.

Lombardo, E., & Kantola, J. (2019). European integration and disintegration: Feminist perspectives on inequalities and social justice. *Journal of Common Market Studies, 57*(S1), 62–76.

Loewenberg, G. (2011). *On legislatures: The puzzle of representation*. Routledge.

Lord, C. (2018). The European Parliament: A working parliament without a public. *The Journal of Legislative Studies, 24*(1), 34–50.

Malmqvist, K. (2019). Theatrical manipulation and seductive sentimentality: Constructions of empathy in Swedish online far right discourse about EU migrants. *Emotions and Society, 1*(2), 197–214.

McDonald, S. (2005). Studying actions in context: A qualitative shadowing method for organizational research. *Qualitative Research, 5*(4), 455–473.

Miller, C. (2021). *Gendering the everyday in the UK house of commons: Beneath the spectacle*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Mondo, E., & Close, C. (2018). Morality politics in the European parliament. A qualitative insight into MEPs' voting behavior on abortion and human embryonic stem research. *Journal of European Integration, 40*(7), 1001–1018.

Mushaben, J. (2019). Undermining critical mass: The impact of trilogues and treaty reforms on gender-sensitive decision-making in the European Parliament. In P. Ahrens, & L. Rolandsen Agustín (Eds.), *Gendering the European Parliament: Structures, policies and practices (*pp. 69–84). ECPR Press/Rowman & Littlefield.

Nader, L. (1972). Up the anthropologist – Perspectives gained from studying up. In D. Hymes (ed.), *Reinventing anthropology* (pp. 284–311). Random House.

Nair, D. (2021). Hanging 'out' while studying 'up': Doing ethnographic fieldwork in international relations. *International Studies Review.* Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viab001

Pachirat, T. (2013). A politics of sight. In T. Pachirat (Ed.), *Every twelve seconds: Industrialized slaughter and the politics of sight* (pp. 253–226). Yale University Press.

Rabinow, P. (2008). *Marking time: On the anthropology of the contemporary*. Princeton University Press.

Rai, S., & Spary, C. (2019). *Performing representation*. Oxford University Press.

Ripoll Servent, A. (2018). *The European Parliament*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Ripoll Servent, A., & Panning, L. (2019). Preparatory bodies as mediators of political conflict in trilogues: The European Parliament's shadows meetings. *Politics and Governance, 7*(3), 303–315.

Rodríguez-Teruel, J., & Daloz, J. P. (2017). Surveying and observing political elites. In H. Best & J. Higley (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of political elites* (pp. 93–114). Palgrave MacMillan.

Sandler, J., & Thedvall, R. (Eds.), (2016). *Meeting ethnography: meetings as key technologies of contemporary governance, development and resistance.* Routledge.

Schatz, E. (2009). *Political ethnography: What immersion contributes to the study of power.* Chicago University Press.

Schatz, E. (2017). Disciplines that forget: Political science and ethnography. *PS: Political Science and Politics, 50*(1), 135–138

Shore, C. (2000). *Building Europe: The cultural politics of European integration.* Routledge.

Shore, C., Wright, S., & Peró, D. (2011). *Policy worlds: Anthropology and the analysis of contemporary power.* Berghahn Books.

Warasin, M. (2020). The politicisation of the European Union and the role of the European Parliament: Opportunities, risks and limitations. *Journal of Management Policy and Practice, 21*(5), 1–32.

Wedeen, L. (2009). Ethnography as interpretative enterprise. In E. Schatz (Ed.), *Political Ethnography: What immersion counts to the study of power* (pp. 75–93). University of Chicago Press.

Wedeen, L. (2010). Reflections on ethnographic work in political science. *The Annual Review of Political Science, 13*(1), 255–272.

Wodak, R. (2003). Multiple identities: The role of female parliamentarians in the EU Parliament. In J. Holmes & M. Meyerhoff (Eds.), *The Handbook of language and gender* (pp. 671–698). Blackwell.

Turbulent Times for the European Parliament's Political Groups? Lessons on Continuity and Change

Anna Elomäki, Petra Ahrens, and Johanna Kantola

Introduction

The European Union (EU) has faced turbulent times especially over the past decade. It has been confronted with the economic, financial and Eurozone crisis since 2008; the so-called migration crisis since 2015; Brexit since the UK voted to leave the EU in 2016—and its eventual departure in 2020; and a rise in radical right populism, illiberalism and authoritarianism in member states (Zeitlin et al., 2019). These crises

A. Elomäki (✉) · P. Ahrens · J. Kantola
Tampere University, Tampere, Finland
e-mail: anna.elomaki@tuni.fi

P. Ahrens
e-mail: petra.ahrens@tuni.fi

J. Kantola
e-mail: johanna.kantola@tuni.fi

267

were topped with the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, which shut down member state economies and societies and closed their borders. The turbulent times of the continent and the EU have also impacted the work of the European Parliament (EP) (Costa, 2019). The EP has played varying roles in relation to these crises. At times, it has been pushed aside, as in the Eurozone crisis, with the Council of the European Union and the European Commission dominating decision-making (Bressanelli & Chelotti, 2016). Other times, it has exercised the powers granted to it or sought to maximise its powers beyond those formally granted to it, as in becoming a 'quasi-negotiator' in the Brexit process (Bressanelli et al., 2021; Meissner & Schoeller, 2019). The crises and crisis response policies have been extensively debated in the parliamentary plenaries. They have also impacted the dynamics within the parliament by changing power relations between the political groups and within them.

Fulfilling the formal requirements for political group formation, 23 MEPs from at least seven member states and shared political affinities, the seven political groups formed in the 9th Parliament (2019–2024) illustrate well the changes and continuities the EP faced. While some groups have existed since the 1950s, others were formed or renamed more recently. Political groups vary greatly in size, which influences their relative power in EP decision-making and policy-making, while the size of national party delegations shapes power relations within the political groups (see Ahrens and Kantola in this volume). Political affinities matter internally for political group identities and policy positions and also allow for distinguishing groups and their politics along various axes: along socio-economic left versus right cleavages (Hix et al., 2007), as either pro- or anti-EU integration (Otjes & van der Veer, 2016) or the GAL (Greens, Alternatives, Libertarians) versus TAN (Traditionalists, Authoritarians, Nationalists) dimension (Brack, 2018; Hooghe et al., 2002; see Brack and Behm; Börzel and Hartlapp; Ripoll Servent in this volume). Nevertheless, policy cohesion, and with it, voting cohesion, continued to remain high for the most established groups (Lefkofridi & Katsadinou, 2018; Warasin et al., 2019; Whitaker & Lynch, 2014) although changes occurred due to cleavages between debtor and creditor countries (Vesan & Corti, 2019) or due to specific national politics encouraging national parties to counter the political group line (Ahrens et al., 2022; Cavallaro et al., 2018; Mondo & Close, 2018; Rasmussen, 2008).

Providing innovative inroads into studying political groups as the key political actors in the EP was thus the key aim of this edited volume. This

specific focus was propelled by the turbulent times the EP and its political groups are subjected to, most of them still unresolved. Against this background, the chapters in this volume analysed the political groups' multiple functions, powers and practices both in terms of their *formal* institutional aspects and in terms of *informal* practices interacting with and shaping formal rules. Drawing on (new) institutionalism to define formal and informal institutions, many chapters engaged with political groups' activities and practices at inter-group, intra-group and inter-institutional levels. The *cordon sanitaire* closing off radical right populists from important EP functions and negotiations, is, for instance, a well-known informal *inter-group* practice (Kantola & Miller, 2021; Ripoll Servent, 2019; Ripoll Servent in this volume). Likewise, despite the turbulent times and changes in political groups, consensus-seeking and compromising characterise EP negotiations (Ripoll Servent, 2015; Roger, 2016), often to the detriment of smaller political groups (Elomäki, 2021; Kreppel, 2002). As for *intra-group* activities, these have become more formalised and centralised over the years (Bressanelli, 2014; see Bressanelli in this volume), and some chapters in this volume began to fill research gaps regarding formal and informal intra-group activities (see Ahrens and Kantola; Elomäki et al.; Miller in this volume). Moreover, several chapters engage with *inter-institutional* activities of the political groups, be it the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE), rule of law procedures or trilogues (see Johansson and Raunio; Morijn; Ripoll Servent in this volume). Unquestionably, these turbulent times affect the internal decision- and policy-making processes of the EP and its political groups.

In this conclusion, we compare lessons to learn from the chapters of this edited volume regarding core aspects of change and continuity: Euroscepticism and radical right populism, democracy and democratic practices and formal and informal practices by and within the political groups.

Euroscepticism, Radical Right Populism and Political Groups

Euroscepticism, as well as right-wing populism, has become a core characteristic of EU integration in recent years; this is also true for the political groups in the EP (Brack, 2018; Kantola & Lombardo, 2021a; McDonnell & Werner, 2019). The impact has been, thus far, mainly discursive and rhetorical, with strong visibility in EP plenaries, yet with

almost no effect on substantive policy-making in committees or trilogues (Brack, 2018; Kantola & Lombardo, 2021a; Ripoll Servent & Panning, 2019). With the Identity and Democracy Group (ID) becoming the fourth-largest group after Brexit, the EP faces a new situation. It seems unlikely that the absenteeism of Eurosceptic MEPs (see Brack, 2018) will continue; rather, we can likely expect more attempts to influence policy outcomes.

A significant number of the chapters of this volume have discussed the impact of Euroscepticism and radical right populism on the political groups. The strengthening of Euroscepticism and the rise of radical right populism are symptoms of the multiple crises the EU has faced, including especially the economic crisis and the so-called refugee crisis. The concern about Eurosceptic and radical right parties within the EP undermining EU integration, EU decision-making and EU core values is shared by all authors of this volume.

One specific contribution of the chapters has been to deepen the understanding of the engagement and disengagement of the Eurosceptic and radical right groups in EP policy-making. The chapter by Börzel and Hartlapp found that Eurosceptic groups' ability to form a coherent opposition depended on the policy field: it was higher in policy fields related to new political cleavages—such as gender equality and non-discrimination—than policies appealing to national interests or structured on the left–right axis. Brack and Behm's chapter, in turn, showed that soft and hard Eurosceptics favour parliamentary activities related to scrutinising other EU institutions, and channelling the discontent of citizens, instead of engaging in policy-work, not least due to the *cordon sanitaire*. These findings charted quite normal functioning of the parliament despite the rise of Euroscepticism.

A new research agenda emerging from the chapters is the cooperation and competition of Eurosceptic and radical right political groups with mainstream political groups. The respective chapters by Börzel and Hartlapp, as well as by Ripoll Servent, pointed out that there is policy congruence and shared discourse between the Eurosceptic groups and the mainstream parties. Their findings illustrate the limits of the *cordon sanitaire* and the difficulties in keeping radical right ideologies out of the mainstream in the EP. As the chapter by Ripoll Servent shows, of the mainstream political groups, the EPP in particular faces difficult trade-offs in terms of whether and how to engage with the 'respectable' radical right groups. However, Börzel and Hartlapp found behavioural

affinity between the Eurosceptic groups and the left as well—for instance, regarding economic nationalism and welfare chauvinism. These findings imply that studying the patterns of cooperation and competition between Eurosceptic and mainstream groups is all the more important for the ongoing legislature (9th EP) where the mainstream groups are more squeezed from the edges.

The chapters of this volume also drew attention to the turbulent times that the rise of radical right populism has caused for some core EU values that the EP normally upholds. Of EU values, gender equality is becoming particularly contested, which is especially relevant for the EP, a promoter of equality and non-discrimination. The impact of such opposition to the core value of equality was analysed in Kantola's chapter. It is, indeed, striking that nearly one third of the MEPs in the EP are opposed to gender equality. Radical right populism then leads to increased polarisation in the parliament. This chapter showed that there are groups that support equality strongly and those that build their identity on opposing this.

The chapter by Morijn illustrated that the political groups have been unable to protect EU values against the increasing presence of illiberal elements within the political groups. While the majority of political groups hold no issue in criticising member states for rule of law violations, they forgo addressing problems related to the political groups; in other words, to themselves. As Morijn shows, national party delegations violating EU basic values are represented in many political groups, including the mainstream political groups EPP, S&D and Renew, yet political groups' track-record of enforcing the tools available to protect these values within the EP is rather disillusioning. Moreover, the existing rules are formulated in a way that, according to Morijn, 'almost certainly serves to protect "values violators" who sit inside mainstream Europarties and political groups—a rather disappointing perspective with view to Eurosceptic and radical right political groups'.

Political Groups as Democratic Actors

Democracy is one of the core values on which the European Union was founded (Article 2 TEU). Yet, democracy and challenges to it have been at the heart of the multiple crises the EU has faced. For example, the financial, economic and Eurozone crises have been argued to de-democratise EU decision-making by shifting powers from democratically

elected bodies to fiscal bureaucracy (Crum, 2018). Radical right populism has resulted in democratic backsliding in member states, which has taken the form of idealising illiberal democracy, curtailing the freedom of the press, attacking courts, concentrating power in the hands of the executive and attacking minority rights (Galston, 2018; Gora & de Wilde, 2020). The European Parliament, as the only directly elected body, is the key democratic institution of the EU, and its political groups are seen as embodiments of the competition of political ideas required by democratic politics. As an institution, the European Parliament has taken an active role in scrutinising member states' rule of law situations and in calling the Commission to act on member states no longer adhering to liberal democracy. The EP upholds democracy and representation as important topics in inter-institutional negotiations (see Johansson and Raunio in this volume), and concerns about the democratic deficit and legitimacy of integration give a central role to the parliament. At the same time, scholars have called for scrutiny of the EP and its political groups as democratic actors (Kantola & Lombardo, 2021b; Kelemen, 2020; Morijn, 2019; see Morijn in this volume). This volume has provided a number of insights on these issues from the perspective of political groups.

Starting with the extent to which the political groups can be seen as expressing the will of the citizens and facilitating citizen participation (as in input legitimacy, see, e.g. Schmidt, 2020; Kantola et al. in this volume), the findings are ambivalent. Bressanelli's chapter suggested that established political groups are becoming more independent from national member parties. An interesting question to explore then becomes whether this leads to better representation of citizens or, rather, to a growing distance from citizens in the EU member states when national parties start losing their control. Johansson and Raunio, in turn, show that Europarties and the EP's political groups can enhance the legitimacy of European integration, particularly if they facilitate citizen participation in EU constitutional processes. The CoFoE, which has been seen as a way to address democratic deficits and increase the democratic legitimacy of EU integration, is a good case for assessing the extent to which political groups succeed in this task. As Johansson and Raunio showed in this chapter, even if the EP tried from the beginning to claim ownership of the Conference, and if the biggest political groups (EPP, S&D and Renew) were strongly engaged in the important agenda-setting phase, the main Europarties and political groups hardly attempted to reach out to the citizens and grass roots party members. The groups' approach to

the Conference was in line with the criticism of the CoFoE as elitist and top-down.

The lack of political contestation, and the large majority coalitions dominated by the EPP and the S&D, has been seen as another sign of the lack of citizens' representation in the EP. Brack and Behm's chapter suggested that even if the EP has been governed by a 'cartel' of mainstream parties, this has not led to the elimination of opposition. Rather, opposition actors—smaller, non-Eurosceptic groups that have not been part of the Grand Coalition and the Eurosceptics—play a key role in channelling conflicts within the EP and fill different democratic functions. While non-Eurosceptic opposition has aimed at shaping EU policies and providing alternatives to the Grand Coalition, soft Eurosceptics tend to act as watchdogs of EU institutions. Hard Eurosceptics, in turn, channel the claims of dissatisfied citizens within the EP and the EU. In Brack and Behm's words, 'a better understanding of opposition in the EP allows for a more nuanced view of their input and function for the institution and the EU as a whole'. Similarly, Börzel and Hartlapp's analysis of Eurosceptic contestation within the EP concluded that such contestation does not necessarily undermine the working of the EP, but may support responsiveness to citizens' concerns and contribute to more differentiated European integration. Analysing patterns of opposition and coalition building remains crucial in the 9th EP, where the Grand Coalition of S&D and the EPP has given way to more flexible and inclusive coalition building and left more room for opposition actors.

Adding to these discussions about input legitimacy, Morijn's chapter raised the question of how to balance the increasing representation of illiberal, anti-democratic political parties and their voters' interests in the EP with the protection of EU values. The EP and the EU have tried to protect EU values such as human rights and the rule of law through restricting illiberal political parties' access to and participation in the EP, but with limited effect. It is relevant to ask how limiting access of parties supported by voters at the national level might affect the support of 'the people' for the EU, or how representative and democratic the EP is if certain parties are excluded. Yet, as Morijn argues, such compromises might be necessary for EU values and liberal democracy in general to be protected.

Many of the chapters have added insights to the *democratic practices* of the political groups. A focus on the democratic practices of the political groups places the responsibility for ensuring democracy on the groups

themselves and draws attention to what the political groups are and could be doing to ensure that the goal and value of democracy is met. Several others illustrate how political groups are differently positioned in relation to this issue. For example, Ahrens and Kantola analysed the issue of political group formation in the parliament after EP elections and throughout the legislative terms. They showed how for some groups practices that supported democracy, such as fairness and openness, were important and upheld in this process, whilst for others it was a power struggle where concerns for political group size pushed aside values such as democracy. Similarly, in some political groups the political group formation practices were formalised, thereby supporting democratic functioning rather than ad hoc, as in radical right populist groups.

The chapters also provided insights in relation to democracy and decision-making within the political groups. Bressanelli's chapter described, on one hand, the centralisation of power in the political groups, and on the other hand, the bottom-up approach to decision-making. The chapter suggested that both the EPP and S&D groups operate in a bottom-up rather than a top-down manner. Arising conflicts are negotiated within the group, and cohesion is not imposed by the group leadership. However, the chapter identifies that the national party delegations have more influence on MEPs (in the EPP and S&D) than the group leadership.

Adding to this understanding of how cohesion is negotiated within groups, the chapter by Elomäki, Gaweda and Berthet mapped important trends in intra-group policy-making, such as the decreasing role of the political group plenaries and the increasing role of the political group presidencies when conflicting issues are referred to horizontal working groups chaired by vice-presidents. This chapter suggested that this can be interpreted in different ways: on one hand, a shift away from group plenaries decreases transparency. On the other hand, horizontal working groups provide a new deliberative arena. Analysing these shifts from the point of view of democratic practices, as well as shedding light on the differences between political groups—as done in the chapter by Elomäki, Gaweda and Berthet—remains crucial. Also, the chapter by Johansson and Raunio echoed the findings about the important role of group leadership in policy-making. In the CoFoE process, the balance of power within the groups shifted towards the group leaders and 'seasoned veterans of constitutional processes'.

Kantola's chapter broadened the common understanding of democratic practices by arguing that practices for promoting gender equality are practices for democracy. Here, a left–right, GAL-TAN distinction prevails, with conservative and radical right populist groups lagging behind left-green groups. Gender equality is a fundamental principle to two political groups and a flexible norm for two, but contradictory or dangerous to the rest. This sends some worrying signals about the current legitimacy of gender equality as a crucial facet of EU and EP democracy. Finally, Miller's chapter on using ethnography to explore political groups provides insight into how scholars can find new inroads to identify and study democratic practices. Miller argues that ethnographic inquiry is perfectly placed to study democratic practices; it can help to identify critical actors, address subjective, daily conceptions of group democracy and reveal contrasts between formal democratic indicators and lived experiences of democratic spaces. In sum, the chapters make a strong case that intra-group democratic practices—which differ from group to group—matter for the democratic legitimacy of the EP's decision-making, and thereby for the legitimacy of the EU legislative process.

Formal and Informal Institutions of the Political Groups

Getting at these dynamics discussed above, for example, in relation to democracy and democratic practices, has benefitted from the chapters focusing—in line with (new) institutionalism (cf. Gains & Lowndes, 2021)—on both formal and informal institutions and on their complex interplay. For example, Kantola's chapter showed how gendered inequalities in political groups, such as unequal division of speaking time or allocation of committee positions according to gendered expectations, have become institutionalised as informal institutions and have thereby been normalised as ways of doing things in the EP. This makes it harder to change inequalities and turns them into questions about democracy and democratic practices. Gendered structures can undermine individual politicians' agency and place them in pre-existing categories which have very little to do with their expectations or desires about political work in the parliament.

Bressanelli's chapter also addressed the complementarity and competition between formal and informal institutions—and the need to analyse

both to understand the political groups. Bressanelli showed how the political groups' formal rules have become more detailed and specific over time. Institutionalisation has made the groups stronger as organisations, and more differentiated and centralised. Yet, analysing formal rules only takes one so far. As Bressanelli notes, 'much of what is happening within the groups takes place informally […] thus limiting the value of what can be inferred from the groups' "official stories"'. One crucial issue that cannot be addressed through formal rules is how group cohesion is achieved. Moreover, despite the increasingly detailed formal rules that have empowered supranational bodies over national party delegations, the power to sanction members remains within delegations.

The interplay between formal and informal institutions and its significance for intra-group dynamics and democracy is also at the centre of the chapters by Ahrens and Kantola and by Elomäki, Gaweda and Berthet. Ahrens and Kantola found that there are surprisingly few formal institutions to ensure transparency and participation in the different layers of political group formation; for example, the formal criteria about 'political affinity' leave ample room for interpretation and political struggle. Instead, informal norms and values that were often applied flexibly, such as maximising group size, played a significant role. Similarly, Elomäki, Gaweda and Berthet emphasised the importance of informal everyday practices and norms in groups' internal policy-making processes. For instance, although most groups had a formal rule about deciding on policy issues through majority voting, in practice, the groups differed significantly in terms of how often issues were put on vote, what kind of role was given to deliberation, and what kind of role the group leader took in brokering an agreement.

It is clear, therefore, that scholars should pay more attention to informal institutions within the political groups, as well as in intra-group and inter-institutional processes, in order to better understand how the political groups respond to the turbulent times and how they function as democratic actors. Miller's chapter provides some concrete tools for EP scholars interested in analysing both formal and informal institutions. Ethnographic practices—such as shadowing, meeting ethnography and hanging out—utilised in Miller's parliamentary ethnography of the EP conducted in the context of the EUGenDem project are effective ways to 'get underneath the skin' of political groups and shed light on informal dynamics.

Political Groups, European Integration and New Research Avenues

Although the EP political groups stand out as unique organisations, they hold importance beyond their function, their internal practices and their role in parliamentary policy-making. They are core actors of European integration, and understanding their role in supranational politics beyond the EP will certainly become of growing interest. All three aspects discussed above—Euroscepticism, democracy and democratic practices and formal and informal institutions—are also relevant in regard to inter-institutional politics and relationships with member states.

By forming the EP positions through consensus-seeking negotiations, political groups constitute a cornerstone of EU decision-making vis-à-vis other EU institutions and can also offer inroads for other (transnational) stakeholders, such as business interests and civil society organisations, to express their political positions. The inter-institutional agreement from April 2021 between the Commission, the Council and the EP on a mandatory transparency register, which was supported by an overwhelming EP majority (645 votes in favour, five votes against, 49 abstentions), speaks to the democratic difficulties with transparency thus far encountered in organised interest representation. Negotiated under the lead of the two biggest political groups (Danuta Hübner for EPP and Katarina Barley for S&D), the EP also included indirect lobbying activities, which increased in importance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Likewise, the COVID-19 pandemic considerably changed the supranational parliamentary as well as the inter-institutional setting and deserves sufficient attention regarding its impact on democracy, democratic practices and the formal and informal institutions that have thus far shaped policy- and decision-making. Early analyses illustrate the impact of sudden digitalisation and different treatment of committees, but also of different opportunities for political groups to participate in the established procedures (Braghiroli, 2021; Elomäki & Kantola, 2022; Ripoll Servent, 2021). How this will affect the relationship between the political groups and their formal and informal working procedures is an open question.

More generally, the crucial back-office of the EP with its Bureau, administration, committee secretariats and political group staff is still understudied regarding its facilitating role for negotiations and policy-making. How exactly is each political group supported? Supranational

administration is ascribed to neutrality, yet it still needs to deal with political positioning of political groups, not least the Eurosceptic ones. Similarly, multilingual and multicultural aspects of political group organisation have barely been explored, and with them, potential institutional racism and other exclusionary practices originating from stereotyping countries or national party delegations.

Then again, by constituting the building block of transnational party politics, political groups uphold important connections with their national (or sometimes regional) parties and thus play an important role in EU multilevel governance next to member states' governments represented in the Council. With parties considered essential for democracy and 'partyness', the formal and informal relationship between Europarties and political groups is still under-researched (but see Almeida, 2012; Calossi & Cicchi, 2019). Yet, deciphering the black box of Europarties and political groups and their role in supranational governance can provide important insights into supranational party politics and the future of supranational democracy. Equally under-researched are the relationships between the EP and national parliaments and the role political groups play therein, and vice-versa, how EU politics are debated in national parliaments (see, for an exception, Wendler, 2016). If we then add to the picture the Council of the European Union with the member states' governing parties represented, the connections become even more complicated; another constellation as of yet unaddressed from a party politics angle.

Finally, given the strong commitment of the European Commission and its president, Ursula von der Leyen, on rule of law conditionality, sustainability and combating climate change, and protecting fundamental norms and values, research on the EP's political groups will probably become even more exciting. These topics will most likely divide political groups along various axes: geographical location, left–right and pro- and anti-EU integration, as well as along the GAL-TAN spectrum. Whether each political group will be able to close its rank and forge consensus within the EP and towards the other EU institutions is a subject all authors of this edited volume certainly have a vested interest in.

References

Ahrens, P., Gaweda, B., & Kantola, J. (2022). Reframing the language of human rights? Political group contestations on women's and LGBTQI rights in European Parliament debates. *Journal of European Integration*. https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2021.2001647

Almeida, D. (2012). *The impact of European integration on political parties*. Routledge.

Brack, N. (2018). *Opposing Europe in the European Parliament: Rebels and radicals in the chamber*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Braghiroli, S. (2021). The European Parliament put to the test by COVID-19: Voting dynamics and coalition patterns of the EP's first response to the global pandemic. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2021.1934421

Bressanelli, E. (2014). Necessary deepening? How political groups in the European Parliament adapt to enlargement. *Journal of European Public Policy, 21*(5), 776–792.

Bressanelli, E., & Chelotti, N. (2016). The shadow of the European Council. Understanding legislation on economic governance. *Journal of European Integration, 38*(5), 511–525.

Bressanelli, E., Chelotti, N., & Lehmann, W. (2021). Managing disintegration: How the European Parliament responded and adapted to Brexit. *Politics & Governance, 9*(1), 16–26.

Calossi, E., & Cicchi, L. (2019). European Parliament political groups and European political parties: Development and relationship between two faces of the EU political system. In S. Giusti (Ed.), *Idee per l'Europa* (pp. 15–31). Quaderni del Circolo Rosselli no. 2/2019, XXXIX: 135.

Cavallaro, M., Flacher, D., & Zanetti, M. A. (2018). Radical right parties and European economic integration: Evidence from the seventh European Parliament. *European Union Politics, 19*(2), 321–343.

Costa, O. (Ed.). (2019). *The European Parliament in times of EU crisis*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Crum, B. (2018). Parliamentary accountability in multilevel governance: What role for parliaments in post-crisis EU economic governance? *Journal of European Public Policy, 25*(2), 268–286.

Elomäki, A. (2021). 'It's a total no-no': The strategic silence about gender in the European Parliament's economic governance policies. *International Political Science Review*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512120978329

Elomäki, A., & Kantola, J. (2022). Feminist governance in the European Parliament: The political struggle over the inclusion of gender in the EU's COVID-19 response. *Politics & Gender*. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X21000544

Gains, F., & Lowndes, V. (2021). Identifying the institutional micro-foundations of gender policy change: A case study of police governance and violence against women and girls. *Politics & Gender, 18*(2), 394–421.

Galston, W. (2018). The populist challenge to liberal democracy. *Journal of Democracy, 29*(2), 5–19.

Gora, A., & de Wilde, P. (2020). The essence of democratic backsliding in the European Union: Deliberation and rule of law. *Journal of European Public Policy*, *29*(3), 342–362.

Hix, S., Noury, A. G., & Roland, G. (2007). *Democratic politics in the European Parliament*. Cambridge University Press.

Hooghe, L., Marks, G., & Wilson, C. J. (2002). Does left/right structure party positions on European integration? *Comparative Political Studies, 35*(8), 956–989.

Kantola, J., & Lombardo, E. (2021a). Strategies of right populists in opposing gender equality in a polarized European Parliament. *International Political Science Review, 42*(5), 565–579.

Kantola, J., & Lombardo, E. (2021b). Challenges to democratic practices and discourses in the European Parliament: Feminist perspectives on the politics of political groups. *Social Politics*, *28*(3), 579–603.

Kantola, J., & Miller, C. (2021). Party politics and radical right populism in the European Parliament: Analysing political groups as democratic actors. *Journal of Common Market Studies, 59*(4), 782–801.

Kelemen, D. (2020). The European Union's authoritarian equilibrium. *Journal of European Public Policy, 27*(3), 481–499.

Kreppel, A. (2002). *The European Parliament and supranational party system: A study in institutional development*. Cambridge University Press.

Lefkofridi, Z., & Katsanidou, A. (2018). A step closer to a transnational party system? Competition and coherence in the 2009 and 2014 European Parliament. *Journal of Common Market Studies, 56*(6), 1462–1482.

McDonnell, D., & Werner, A. (2019). *International populism: The radical right in the European Parliament*. Hurst Publishers.

Meissner, K. L., & Schoeller, M. G. (2019). Rising despite the polycrisis? The European Parliament's strategies of self-empowerment after Lisbon. *Journal of European Public Policy, 26*(7), 1075–1093.

Mondo, E., & Close, C. (2018). Morality politics in the European parliament a qualitative insight into MEPs' voting behaviour on abortion and human embryonic stem cell research. *Journal of European Integration, 40*(7), 1001–1018.

Morijn, J. (2019). Responding to the "populist" politics at EU level: Regulation 1141/2014 and beyond. *International Journal of Constitutional Law, 17*(2), 617–664.

Otjes, S., & van der Veer, H. (2016). The Eurozone crisis and the European Parliament's changing lines of conflict. *European Union Politics, 17*(2), 242–261.

Rasmussen, M. K. (2008). Another side of the story: A qualitative case study of voting behaviour in the European Parliament. *Politics, 28*(1), 11–18.

Ripoll Servent, A. (2015). *Institutional and policy change in the European Parliament*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Ripoll Servent, A. (2019). The European Parliament after the 2019 elections: Testing the boundaries of the cordon sanitaire. *Journal of Contemporary European Research, 15*(4), 331–342.

Ripoll Servent, A. (2021). Democracy in lockdown: What role for the European Parliament in the Covid-19 crisis? Paper presented at the virtual ECPR General Conference 2021.

Ripoll Servent, A., & Panning, L. (2019). Eurosceptics in trilogue settings: Interest formation and contestation in the European Parliament. *West European Politics, 42*(4), 755–775.

Roger, L. (2016). *Voice(s) in the European Parliament. Deliberation and negotiation in EP committees*. Nomos.

Schmidt, V. A. (2020). *Europe's crisis of legitimacy. Governing by rules and ruling by numbers in the Eurozone*. Oxford University Press.

Vesan, P., & Corti, F. (2019). New tensions over social Europe? The European pillar of social rights and the debate within the European Parliament. *Journal of Common Market Studies, 57*(5), 977–994.

Warasin, M., Kantola, J., Rolandsen Agustín, L., & Coughlan C. (2019). Politicisation of gender equality in the European Parliament: Cohesion and inter-group coalitions in plenary and committees. In P. Ahrens, & L. Rolandsen Agustín (Eds.), *Gendering the European Parliament. Structures, policies and practices* (pp. 141–158). ECPR Press/Rowman & Littlefield.

Wendler, F. (2016). *Debating Europe in national parliaments: Public justification and political polarization*. Springer.

Whitaker, R., & Lynch, P. (2014). Understanding the formation and actions of Eurosceptic groups in the European Parliament: Pragmatism, principles and publicity. *Government and Opposition, 49*(2), 232–263.

Zeitlin, J., Nicoli, F., & Laffan, B. (2019). Introduction: The European Union beyond the Polycrisis: Integration and politicization in an age of shifting cleavages. *Journal of European Public Policy, 26*(7), 963–976.

Index