4. The European Parliament: a strong internal actor with external ambitions

Franziska Petri, Veronika Zapletalová and Katja Biedenkopf

1. INTRODUCTION

The European Parliament (EP) is the European Union's (EU) directly elected parliamentary chamber. It consists of 705 Members of European Parliament (MEPs) from all 27 EU Member States, grouped according to their political ideologies. While at the inception of the European integration project, the Common Assembly – as the EP was initially called – was equipped with very limited powers, with successive treaty changes over the course of EU history, its role and formal competences have substantially increased, to the point where the Parliament now exercises a key role in influencing EU policies and politics. Today, the EP is a key actor in internal EU climate policy, often portrayed as an environmental or climate 'champion' (Burns, 2019; 2021), which also strives to increase its international role (Biedenkopf, 2019).

The EP's formal competences and informal roles in internal and external climate politics and policymaking have evolved over recent decades. Overall, today's EP fulfils four broad roles in EU (climate) policymaking: (1) shaping EU legislation through, *inter alia*, the ordinary legislative procedure, in which it stands on equal footing with the Council of the EU; (2) shaping and controlling the EU budget; (3) exercising control over other EU institutions, for example influencing the composition of the European Commission; and (4) representing EU citizens. As such, the EP and in particular its 'Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety' (ENVI), have carved out an influential role among the other EU institutions – most notably the Council of the EU and the European Commission – in determining the EU's climate policy, making it a central actor for studying the complexities of EU climate policymaking (Judge, 1992).

The diversity of positions and priorities of its Members, each with their own national citizenship and political affiliation with one of the various political groups, shapes the EP's role and influence. Delving into its internal dynamics helps nuance the notion of the EP's climate 'championship'. We show that policy positions on climate issues vary significantly across political groups, with left-wing and centre-left groups taking more ambitious positions in this domain, while conservative and Eurosceptic groups hold more critical and even, at the extreme right end of the spectrum, unsupportive or overtly hostile positions towards climate policies (Buzogány & Ćetković, 2021; Huber et al., 2021). Overall, we detect an increasing importance of ideology in EP climate politics.

The EP engages in international climate politics through formal and informal involvement in the UN climate negotiations, in addition to some direct interactions with other international actors. Formally, the EP's competences in the external realm are not equal to its influence in internal EU climate policymaking, but recent academic research has underlined the various channels through which it can exert influence on international climate politics (Biedenkopf, 2019; Delreux & Burns, 2019; Wendler, 2019; Petri & Biedenkopf, 2021). Based on the anal-

ysis of EP reports on its participation in international negotiations and interviews with MEPs and their staff, we show that the EP has consolidated its performance over time, but that its *de facto* involvement does not match the extent of its ambitions. The rest of the chapter proceeds as follows. The next section (section 2) explores the EP's role in the EU's internal climate policymaking. This is followed by a discussion of dynamics within the Parliament itself (section 3). Section four focuses on the EP's international engagement, while a final section summarizes the factors that condition the EP's role in shaping the EU's internal and external climate policy.

2. THE EP'S ROLE WITHIN THE EU'S POLITICAL SYSTEM AND CLIMATE POLICIES

What started off as a mere assembly of delegates from national parliaments without legislative competences in the 1950s has become 'one of the world's most powerful elected chambers' (Hix, Raunio, & Scully, 2003, p. 192) and 'one of the most researched parliaments in the world' (Raunio, 2012, p. 366). Even more relevant for climate policy, the EP has established a reputation as an 'environmental champion' (Burns, 2005; Burns, Carter, Davies, & Worsfold, 2013; Judge, 1992) and a 'strategic environmental advocate' (Burns, 2019, p. 324) among the EU institutions. This section traces the historical development of its role, and discusses the various tools that the EP can use within EU policymaking, to shape climate policies.

2.1 Historical Evolution

The EP's history goes back to the very origins of European integration, namely to the creation of the Common Assembly within the 1951 European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). Its creation was, however, not intended as a significant step towards parliamentary power at the European level, but rather 'an afterthought, perceived as the least imperfect way in which to address the issue of accountability' towards the newly created institutions (Shackleton, 2012, p. 126). According to the ECSC founding treaty, the 78 delegates from the six ECSC Member States were to meet on an annual basis (with the possibility of additional sessions) and the Assembly had the right to question and dismiss the High Authority (the European Commission's predecessor). However, it held no explicit legislative or other competences (Arts. 20–25, Treaty of Paris 1951). As such, equipped with limited powers and limited links to ECSC citizens, the Common Assembly is retrospectively often called a mere 'fig leaf' (Shackleton 2012, p. 126) for democratic standards at the supranational level.

   With subsequent steps of European integration and respective treaty changes, the EP's institutional characteristics and role among the EU institutions changed significantly. First, the Common Assembly was renamed the European Parliamentary Assembly (1958) and then the European Parliament (1962). Second, in an effort to increase the EP's link with European citizens, direct elections of its Members were established in 1979 and have been conducted every five years ever since. European elections turnout started at 61.99 per cent in 1979 with a decreasing trend (e.g. 58.41 per cent in 1989, 45.47 per cent in 2004) up until 2019, when it increased to 50.66 per cent (up from 42.61 per cent in 2014) (European Parliament, 2019a). Third, in line with EU enlargement over time, the EP grew to reach 751 MEPs representing 28 EU Member States between 2014 and 2020. On 1 February 2020, with the United Kingdom's

EU exit, the EP shrank to 705 MEPs. Fourth, the EP's competences increased significantly with every treaty change, affording MEPs an ever-more influential role in shaping EU (climate) policies and politics. Significant milestones included the introduction of the assent procedure for international agreements and enlargement (1985) and the co-decision procedure (1992), granting the EP the right to shape concrete (climate) legislation. The next section explains the EP's various roles and competences according to the 2007 Lisbon Treaty in more detail.

2.2   Roles and Competences in EU Climate Policy, Post-2007

The EP's main roles following the Lisbon Treaty are fourfold: shaping EU legislation, shaping the EU budget (both together with the Council of the EU), exercising control over other EU institutions, such as the European Commission, and representing EU citizens (Burns, 2021; Nugent, 2017; Raunio, 2012; Ripoll & Servent, 2018; Schmidt & Schünemann, 2014; Shackleton, 2012).

First, the EP has multiple ways to influence climate policies through its various legislative roles. Particularly significant among these, the EP plays a considerable role in all legislation passed through the Ordinary Legislative Procedure (OLP) – formerly known as the co-decision procedure – standing on equal footing with the Council of the EU. Commission proposals, Parliament's amendments and the Council's common position are subject to interinstitutional negotiations, which generally occur in so-called 'trilogue' meetings, where representatives from each institution negotiate an agreed text.[1] The OLP is the standard legislative procedure for most EU policy areas, including climate policies. Environmental policies (of which climate policies typically form part) were a priority among adopted OLP acts during the EP's 2014–2019 legislative term, with the ENVI Committee being one of the most active committees (41 out of a total of 401 adopted OLP acts) (European Parliament, 2020a). Academic research has also confirmed ENVI's influential role in broader environmental policymaking (Judge, 1992; Kaeding, 2004; Hurka, 2013).

The equality of the Council and the EP in shaping the large bulk of EU legislation gives Parliament a significant role in climate policymaking. Studies of EP amendments to Commission legislative proposals on the environment consistently show that the EP has overall proposed ambitious amendments, though interestingly they also find that their content has become less radical over time (Burns, 2019; Burns et al., 2013). An example of the EP's influence through the OLP has been the process surrounding the revision of the Renewable Energy Directive (2018/2001), originally adopted in 2012, where a key issue was the headline target for 2030. Here, the EP continued to push for higher targets than the Council, and only after five trilogue meetings was a figure agreed of 32 per cent energy from renewable sources at EU level by 2030 (CAN Europe, 2018; Consilium, 2018). Another example was the process of negotiation of the EU Climate Law (Regulation (EU) 2021/1119), which entered into force in July 2021 and in which the EP – among other aspects – successfully included a proposal to set up a European Scientific Advisory Board on Climate Change (European Parliament, 2021).

Another legislative role is based on the 'consent procedure' – previously known as the assent procedure – which requires the EP's consent for international agreements concluded by the EU. This concerns bilateral as well as multilateral agreements, such as the 2015 Paris Agreement, to which the EP gave its consent on 4 October 2016. A third legislative role stems from the 'consultation procedure', which applies to policy areas such as internal market

exemptions and competition law. Here, the EP is consulted but cannot formally reject or approve a policy proposal. This links to the fourth legislative role, the informal ways of influencing EU policies through, *inter alia*, resolutions, own-initiative reports, informal coordination and preparatory inter-institutional talks on legislative initiatives (informal trilogues). Even when the EP is not formally or directly involved in all steps of policymaking, for example in external climate policies, it can use these mechanisms to set the agenda, frame the political debate and thereby indirectly shape policymaking. An illustration is provided by the 2018 EP report on climate diplomacy which called on the EU 'to step up its climate diplomacy efforts' and formulated issue-area and regional priorities (European Parliament, 2018), aiming to influence the Council's climate diplomacy.

The EP's second major role, in the wake of the Lisbon Treaty, has been budgetary, using new competences that see it share responsibility with the Council in giving approval to the EU's annual budget. Separately, the EP also must approve, via the consent procedure, the EU's multiannual financial framework – the EU's seven-year financial umbrella and budgetary planning (Rietig and Dupont, Chapter 17 in this volume). These rights give the EP the direct or indirect possibility to push for certain priorities in the EU's budgetary planning. For example, in the discussions on the 2021 EU budget, MEPs explicitly inserted the 'objective of achieving climate neutrality by 2050' as a key priority for the annual budget (European Parliament, 2020c). In a similar vein, the EP used the negotiations on approving the EU's 2021–2027 multiannual financial framework (see Rietig and Dupont, Chapter 17 in this volume) to increase funding for causes it deemed important, including the European Green Deal and the Erasmus+ programme (European Parliament, 2020b).

Third, the EP holds various control and supervisory powers towards other EU institutions, including the European Commission, which translate into influence on climate policies and politics. Among them, the competence to approve the College of Commissioners – i.e. elect the Commission President and approve the entire College (see Bürgin, Chapter 2 in this volume) – can be a powerful tool to influence the future work of the European Commission (Biedenkopf et al., 2023). While in the past, this approval was considered a standard procedure and largely a formality, confirmation hearings have become more politicized – in some cases including the rejection of candidates. In the nomination process of Ursula von der Leyen as Commission President, discussions between political groups and the designated President were held in July 2019 that resembled negotiations about the Commission's priorities and work programme. Ambitious climate action was one of the central topics of concern to many political groups, most notably the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA) and the Confederal Group of European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL), who eventually voted against her arguing that 'We did not hear any concrete proposals, be it on rule of law or on climate' (Greens/EFA, 2019) and that her plans were 'amounting to a cynical greenwashing of climate policy' (GUE/NGL, 2019). During the EP debate that preceded von der Leyen's election (European Parliament, 2019b), most political groups either mentioned (European People's Party (EPP), Renew Europe (Renew), European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR)) or stressed (Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D), Greens/EFA, GUE/NGL) the need for ambitions climate action. Taken together, this push was considered one of the reasons von der Leyen placed plans for a European Green Deal centre stage for her candidacy and subsequent mandate (Farand, 2019). Furthermore, the EP has the right to dismiss the College of Commissioners, which – despite the very demanding legal requirement of a two-thirds majority – gives MEPs considerable

power. Further ways to influence other EU institutions take place through the EP President's participation in European Council meetings, regular debates between the EP and the Council's rotating Presidencies, reporting by the High Representative to the EP, as well as addressing oral and written questions to the Council and Commission. The variety of channels can be used to push for certain climate policies within all EU institutions and at the highest political levels. One example is the speech by then-EP President Sassoli at the December 2020 European Council meeting, which endorsed the EU's climate neutrality target (European Council, 2020), and in which he stressed the need for the EU to 'continu[e] to be a pioneer in the fight against climate change' (Sassoli, 2020).

Fourth, the EP has a representative role as the only directly elected EU institution. The principle of representative democracy is enshrined in the Treaty on European Union (TEU), affirming that '[c]itizens are directly represented at Union level in the European Parliament' (Art. 10). In theory, EU citizens elect direct representatives through European elections and determine the composition of the EP and the majorities among the various political groups. In practice, the often-evoked democratic deficit – a notion based, among others, on arguments of overly limited parliamentary powers, the lack of a European *demos* and low turnout at European elections – to some extent hinders the EP's representative function (Follesdal & Hix, 2006; Murdoch et al., 2018; Sorace, 2018). Nevertheless, the EP, its political groups and MEPs actively and rhetorically appeal to citizens, in the climate realm as elsewhere. For example, in March 2019, the EP held a general debate on climate change – with Fridays for Future activists present – during which EP Vice-President Pavel Telička suggested that 'once the next Parliament is sitting we can have a special event here in the Chamber, with young people, on climate change issues' (European Parliament, 2019c). Furthermore, interest groups representing citizens gain access to EU policymaking primarily through the EP, including environmental and climate non-governmental organizations that actively lobby the EP's ENVI Committee (Gullberg, 2008; Judge, 1992; Rasmussen, 2012; for more on the evolving role of civil society groups, see Parks et al., Chapter 7 in this volume).

3.   INTERNAL EU CLIMATE POLICY: EP AMBITIONS, POLARIZATION AND FRAGMENTATION

In recent decades, legislative activity and the decision-making process in the EP have evolved mostly around political groups; partisan entities which perform most of the same functions at the EU level that parties in national parliaments do (McElroy & Benoit, 2007). They control the elections of the EP's President and committee chairpersons, decide who writes which legislative report, who may speak in plenary debates and for how long, etc. (Hix, Noury & Roland, 2007). Despite these similarities with national parliaments, politics in the EP do not have an explicit government–opposition character, since there is no clearly defined relationship between the executive and the legislative branches (Kroh, 2016; Corbett, Jacobs & Shackleton, 2011). Coalitions are instead formed differently from one policy area to another, and at times even from a single proposal to the next (Rose & Borz, 2013). The never-ending bargaining is supported by the growing competition among political groups, which is seen as the consequence of increasing legislative powers of the EP.

Table 4.1   *Arrangement of European Parliament political groups during the ninth EP after Brexit*

Political group	Number of members
European People's Party (EPP)	175
Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D)	145
Renew Europe (Renew)	98
Identity and Democracy (ID)	74
Group of the Greens and European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA)	73
European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR)	63
Confederal Group of European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL)	39
Non-Affiliated Members (NI)	38
Total	705

Source: Authors based on VoteWatch (2021).

3.1   Changing Majorities over Time

Formally, at least 23 MEPs are required to form a political group, and at least one quarter of the Member States must be represented. Membership in more than one political group is forbidden. An MEP may be registered as a 'non-affiliated member' (NI), which means without affiliation to a political group. However, the EP system incentivizes affiliation, mainly because groups receive funding for collective staff and parliamentary activities, to which non-affiliated MEPs do not have access. The general rule is that the largest political group receives the most important posts, but there still remains an opportunity for small groups to obtain some of them.

As Table 4.1 shows, no single political group enjoys the kind of majority necessary for the approval of new legislation. Therefore, in order to adopt amendments to the legislative proposals presented by the Commission, cooperation between political groups is necessary (Burns, 2021). Historically, the EP political system has been dominated by a 'grand coalition' of two main groups (the European People's Party (EPP) and the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D)) which seeks support from the smaller parties. During the ninth parliament (which sat from 2019 to 2024), Renew Europe, associated with/aligned with the party of French President Emmanuel Macron, was the smaller party which lent its support to secure adoption of amendments (Bowler & McElroy, 2015, Brack, 2018).

The continuous seeking of inter-group consensus is not the only challenge the EP faces. Since political groups incorporate many national delegations from all EU Member States, and defections from group positions based on perceived national interest are relatively common, obtaining intra-group agreement can at times be challenging (Burns, 2021). These so-called geographical cleavages play a role when it comes to climate policy, as national differences lead to a decrease in the cohesion of European groups (Hix et al., 2005). For instance, Renew Europe ended up in the minority on some of the key votes concerning the carbon border adjustment mechanism (CBAM) due to divisions in its own camp (VoteWatch, 2021). Generally, MEPs from Central and Eastern Europe are less supportive of a speedy climate transition, while the opposite can be said regarding MEPs from France and neighbouring countries (Buzogány & Ćetković, 2021).

The dominant position of the above-mentioned 'grand coalition' is not unshakeable. Both the centre-right EPP and centre-left S&D have been losing parliamentary seats and the dominance of the coalition is slowly decreasing. At the same time, the development of the EP can be

described as continuing fragmentation and polarization. After the election in May 2019, EPP and S&D each lost almost 20 per cent of their seats, while Eurosceptics and populists have made significant gains and strengthened their positions. This trend, of course, is influencing the development of EU climate policy.

MEPs with a Eurosceptic affiliation also tend to adopt climate-sceptical positions. Eurosceptics view the development of EU climate policy as another step towards a single centralized European government, which would exacerbate the perceived existing democratic deficit. Thus, from their point of view, issues such as climate change mitigation should only be handled by sovereign states, singly or through more ad hoc cooperation. They therefore reject policy designed to create any supranational policy on the EU level (Zapletalová & Komínková, 2020). Representative of this tendency is a plenary speech from MEP de Graaff (4 October 2016), in which he argued: '[T]here are happy faces in this room because of this so-called historical landmark [the Paris Agreement], and I understand that as the influence of the EU in this agreement is again evident ... At the moment that the EU is proudly ratifying this agreement, I see only one bright spot and that is that the Member States are free to fulfil or not fulfil this agreement any way they like, and that is a good thing' (European Parliament, 2016).

Fragmentation and polarization are not the only trends which can be observed during the ninth EP. Based on VoteWatch data, we may claim that coalitions are still mostly formed on an *ad-hoc* basis and attempts to form a 'grand coalition' can still be detected, especially when a united position against Eurosceptics is needed (e.g. when debating the extension of the Emission Trading Scheme to sectors such as building and road transport). Nevertheless, it has become less usual that even the pivotal members of the 'grand coalition' (EPP and S&D) end up in the minority. An analysis of the voting behaviour inside the EP also shows that a coalition between progressive forces (S&D, Greens/EFA and the Left) and Renew is most common on climate topics (VoteWatch, 2021).

Occasional disagreements between the pivotal centrist forces (EPP and S&D) on climate issues play to the advantage of the smaller forces, especially Emmanuel Macron's Renew Europe group. Importantly, as Renew tends to be 'greener' than its predecessor ALDE (The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe), the liberal group is much more likely to form alliances with S&D and the Greens than with the EPP and ECR on climate votes. This represents an interesting change in behaviour because during the EP's eighth term, ALDE was much closer to the right-conservative ECR on climate policy than to the Greens/EFA. Of course, there are instances when Renew sides with EPP. In reaction to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, for example, when a large majority of MEPs called for the legally binding target share for renewables for 2030 in the EU energy mix to rise from 32 per cent to at least 45 per cent, EPP and Renew Europe were both vocal proponents of the increased ambition. Preliminary trends also indicate that the Greens/EFA group is increasingly part of majority-building in the EP, showing that the overall balance of power may be shifting towards the left, as the right-wing fringes become more isolated. The most unsupportive groups are ECR and ID, which tend to be sceptical about the order of priorities set by the European Green Deal (VoteWatch, 2021).

Table 4.2   Means of EP influence on international climate negotiations

	Means of EP influence
Internal EU processes	Consent procedure
	Formal and informal information exchanges with the European Commission and the Council
	EP resolutions
International climate negotiations	EP participation in the EU delegation to Conferences of the Parties
	Formal and informal cooperation with non-EU parliamentarians and other stakeholders

Source: Biedenkopf (2019).

4.   EXTERNAL CLIMATE POLICY: STRIVING FOR MORE INFLUENCE

Alongside its strong role in internal climate policymaking, the EP has also attempted to strengthen its role externally. While the Lisbon Treaty enhanced the EP's role in ratifying international (climate) agreements through introducing the consent procedure, the only options are to accept or reject the respective treaty in its entirety. Thus it lacks the capacity to shape external climate policy in the way that the OLP allows in internal policy. Nonetheless, the EP uses several formal and informal means to influence EU external climate policy, often based on its power to adopt or reject international agreements. Generally, two means of influencing international negotiations can be differentiated: via internal processes influencing the EU position for the negotiations and via direct EP engagement at the negotiations. Table 4.2 provides an overview of these two means of EP influence and the activities they include.

4.1   External Influence via Internal Processes

As noted above, the consent procedure requires that the EP gives approval before an international treaty or other type of agreement can enter into force. This *de facto* veto power has given the EP some leverage over the other EU institutions in international climate negotiations. It can create a great incentive for the European Commission and the Council to ensure that the EP's position is sufficiently included in the agreement's text. While officially the EP is not involved in the negotiation process and the formulation of the EU position for the negotiations, unofficially, it has some influence since the other EU institutions need the EP's consent for ratification.

Article 36 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and Article 218 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) require more than EP consent. They also aim to ensure that the EP is informed about the EU negotiators' activities. In climate negotiations, the European Commission and the Council Presidency jointly represent the EU and negotiate on its behalf. Yet, those provisions do not foresee any procedure through which the EP could officially feed its position into the negotiations. There is no procedure that would resemble EP amendments as they occur in the OLP for adopting internal climate policy. Nor is there any obligation for the EU negotiators to take into account the EP position during negotiations. Yet, as mentioned above, EU negotiators have an indirect incentive to keep the EP satisfied with the negotiation output, given the consent procedure. Article 218(10) TFEU stipulates that the EP must 'immediately and fully [be] informed at all stages of the procedure'.

Timely and comprehensive information is a prerequisite for enabling the EP to react to recent developments and make its position heard. The EP has had an agreement with the European Commission on the provision of information by the latter to the EP since 1995. In 2010 – following the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty – the EP and the Commission adopted a revised Framework Agreement on information provision to operationalize Article 218 in concrete rules and procedures. It specifies how information is communicated, what kind of information and when (EP & Commission, 2010). Yet it is not only the Commission but also the Council that negotiates on the EU's behalf in climate negotiations (Delreux, 2018; Vogler, Chapter 10 in this volume). This has implications for implementing Article 218 and the EP concluded a separate interinstitutional agreement with the Council in 2011. Its scope is, however, limited to how confidential information should be handled and only grants access to confidential Council documents to certain MEPs such as rapporteurs and committee chairs. It does not detail what kind of information should be shared with the EP. Both the above-mentioned agreements on information provision are unidirectional from the Commission/Council to the EP but there are no official and formalized procedures in the other direction, either in the form of amendments or otherwise. Moreover, the applicability of Art. 218(10) TFEU could be questioned in cases in which international negotiations do not aim to conclude a new international treaty such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations since the adoption of the Paris Agreement.

The EP uses parliamentary resolutions to officially voice its views on international negotiations, such as under the UNFCCC, to the other EU institutions and the wider public. Trying to harness its implicit power derived from the consent procedure, the EP adopts a resolution and organizes a plenary debate prior to all UNFCCC Conferences of the Parties (COPs). The European Commissioner for Climate Action and the Minister in charge of climate change from the Member State that holds the Council Presidency are generally invited to parliament prior to COPs. For example, then-Commissioner Miguel Arias Cañete spoke to MEPs three times in 2015, prior to the key COP in Paris.

MEPs actively use the EP plenary sessions in which the pre-COP resolutions are adopted, as well as the sessions following each UNFCCC summit, to give voice to the EP's vision on the climate negotiations. Common arguments in such plenary debates are calls for the EU to play an international leadership role (e.g. 'We have to use this conference to show both the EU is ready and willing to take the lead globally', Christel Schaldemose, S&D, 3 October 2017), calls to lead with ambitious policy commitments (e.g. 'The bottom line is that we have to make a considerable effort so that we can maintain our resolve to be the world leaders on climate change', Corinne Lepage, ALDE, 20 January 2010), as well as calls for unity among EU Member States (e.g. 'Europe is not as united as we are claiming here … there are some Member States that are not on track and we need to set them on the right track', Karl-Heinz Florenz, EPP, 21 November 2012). While few MEPs – most notably from the right end of the political spectrum (Forchtner, 2019; Lockwood, 2018) – question these ambitious foreign climate policy positions (e.g. 'climate-obsessive politicians have set various objectives towards establishing targets that would involve the final deindustrialisation of Europe', Julia Reid, EFDD, 3 October 2017), over the past decade (2009–2019), the majority of MEPs voiced relatively ambitious positions (Petri & Biedenkopf, 2021).

4.2   **Influence Through Direct Engagement**

Individual MEPs also try to influence the UNFCCC negotiations more directly by joining the EU delegation to the annual COPs, and by cooperating with external parliamentarians and other stakeholders. Several MEPs and EP staff join the official EU delegation as observers. However, they are not part of the negotiation team and do not have access to closed meetings. MEPs cannot join the internal EU coordination meetings during which Member State delegates, Council and Commission officials exchange views and discuss their strategy. MEPs have regularly – but so far unsuccessfully – repeated their request to be admitted to the coordination meetings. Instead, they are briefed separately by a Commission or a Council representative.

MEPs have attended all COPs – apart from COP2 in 1996 – in continuously growing numbers up until COP15 in 2009, which was attended by 72 MEPs. After this, the EP significantly curtailed the number of MEPs at COPs (see Figure 4.1). Although the number has been reduced, the EP participates in COPs with a sizeable group of representatives. Some MEPs have participated in several COPs and, through this, developed expertise and a sizable network. They can report back to the rest of the EP about their evaluation of the latest developments in international climate negotiations. At the COPs, they engage with other parliamentarians and other stakeholders from non-EU countries. Over time, MEPs have increasingly coordinated within the group of EP representatives. EP staff organize bilateral meetings between MEPs and non-EU actors, but individual MEPs also conduct their own meetings (Biedenkopf, 2019). Examples of joint meetings at COP24 include meetings with the Head of Delegation of the

number of EP delegates
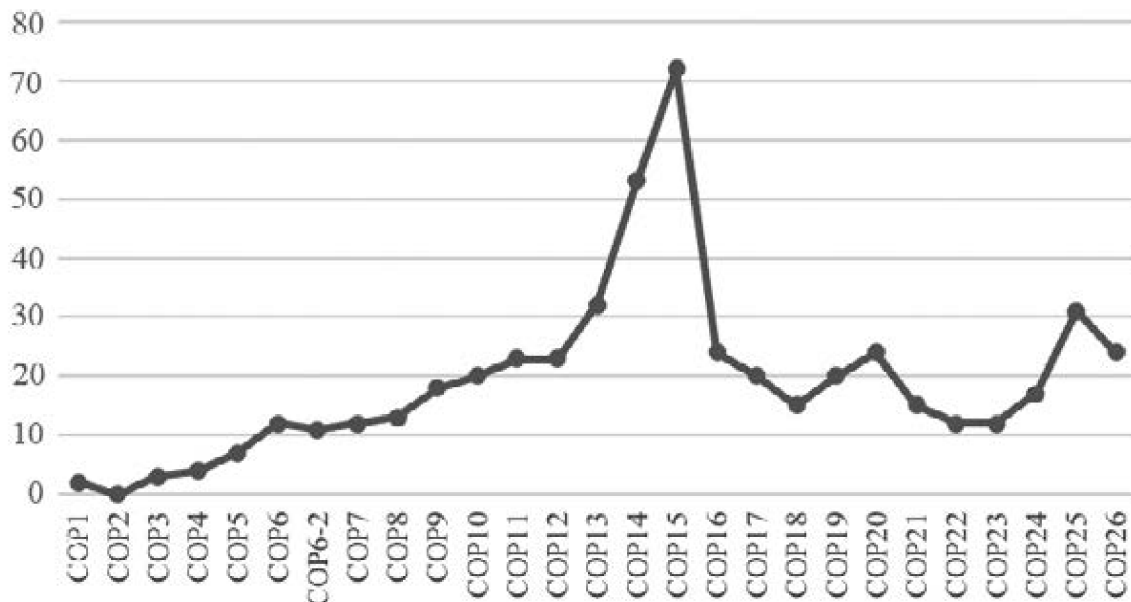
Source: Authors based on UNFCCC participants lists; updated version of Biedenkopf (2019).

Figure 4.1   Number of European Parliament delegates at UNFCCC COPs

Russian Federation, South African Members of Parliament, Polish COP24 President Michał Kurtyka, and the Brazilian Minister of the Environment (European Parliament, 2019d).

Ultimately, with the structure of the Paris Agreement, the lines between internal and external climate policy have been blurred. One crucial building block of the Paris Agreement is the requirement for Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) that every Party to the Agreement must submit in five-year intervals. The NDCs specify what a certain party will contribute to achieving the Paris Agreement's (mitigation) goals. As a co-legislator with the Council on internal climate policy, the EP has significant influence on the EU's NDC. This is, however, somewhat tempered by the tendency since about 2007/2008, for the EU's greenhouse gas (GHGs) emission reduction targets to be decided at the level of the European Council (see Wurzel et al., Chapter 3 in this volume), leaving less scope for influence for the EP. The broader set of ambitious EU climate policies – beyond setting the targets – does, however, also play a role in international politics, providing the EU credibility by showing how it practices what it preaches.

5.   CONCLUSIONS

The European Parliament is sometimes labelled as a 'winner' in European integration and a major beneficiary of treaty change. While it started life as an unelected Common Assembly to the ECSC with limited powers, it has become a key actor in the EU's institutional framework and an equal co-legislator with the Council, including in the realm of climate policy. Concerning EU environmental policy, the EP has been described as the 'greenest' and most ambitious EU institution. This description can also be used to define its position on climate policy. However, previous research has found that EP amendments have become less radical over time (Burns, 2019; Burns et al., 2013). Furthermore, 'recent changes, including enlargement and the rise of populist parties, have challenged [the] reputation' of the EP as a climate or environmental champion (Burns, 2021, p. 129). Yet, through its variety of informal and formal instruments to shape internal and external EU climate policies (see section 2.2), this chapter has highlighted how the EP continues to exert an influence on ambitious EU climate policy.

The internal dynamics within the EP are significantly shaped by a set of supranational political groups, that in most instances, apart from small and mostly hard Eurosceptic political groups, behave cohesively, including on climate policy. The assumption that the EP approves legislation through the largest possible majority to show unity, however, is not fully applicable when it comes to climate policy and suggests that seeking support for legislative approval in climate policy is more difficult in the EP than generally expected. With the growing fragmentation and polarization evident in the EP, the increasing importance of ideology can also be detected within EP climate policy.

The EP's mounting climate ambitions are also evident in the EU's external climate policy. Although the Lisbon Treaty has not granted the Parliament the same level of powers to shape the external dimension of climate policy as internal policy through the OLP, the EP can use internal processes such as the consent procedure, formal and informal exchanges with the Commission and the Council, and EP resolutions to influence the EU's position at international negotiations. Moreover, the EP supports its position via direct participation of the EU delegation at Conferences of the Parties and cooperation with non-EU parliamentarians and

other stakeholders. Such direct involvement gives the EP another channel in expressing and supporting its vision of climate change mitigation.

In sum, the EP's roles in EU climate policymaking are manifold and, despite changing majorities and the rising role of ideologies and political cleavages, the EP continues to be a strong internal actor with high external ambitions in climate policies. Visibly, through its 2019 announcement of a 'climate emergency', its continued push for increasing ambitions in climate legislation (such as the EU Climate Law), or its steady participation in the UNFCCC climate negotiations, the EP has built itself a place in EU politics to exert positive influence on the EU's climate agenda.

NOTE

1. Trilogues may be organized at any stage of the legislative procedure (first, second or third reading). Any provisional agreement reached in trilogues then has to be approved by the formal procedures applicable within Parliament and the Council. In Parliament, the text of the provisional agreement has to be approved by a vote in committee, after which it is confirmed in plenary (European Parliament, undated).

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