The European Parliament During the 1970s and 1980s: An Institution on the Rise? – Introduction

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In September 1978, French Health Minister Simone Veil accompanied President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing on a trip to Brazil, where he suggested she stand as candidate in the 1979 European Parliament (EP) elections. According to her memoirs, Veil accepted immediately. On election day, her list came first in France, securing her a seat and – at the EP's first session – the position of its first female President. Looking back from the 2000s, she characterized the period as "une époque heureuse dans le processus de la construction européenne", with great hopes for the future – now that the Parliament had been elected directly for the first time. Soon however, "les faits devaient malheureusement nous montrer les limites de ce rêve", starting with her narrow election as President, soon to be followed by in-fighting, particularly with "les survivants du régime antérieur" from the time before direct elections. Further problems quickly became evident, such as the challenges of an institution meeting in no less than three different locations – a situation she deemed "digne de Kafka". Moreover, unpleasant debates about the budget and global relations, for instance towards the United States and Japan, made the epoch less "heureuse" than she had anticipated.[1]

Veil's account of the first phase after the introduction of direct elections in 1979 tends to contradict both narratives we have about the EP's role at the time. For most, the institution was simply irrelevant until it gained new powers with the 1992 Maastricht Treaty.[2] Yet Veil lays out the everyday travails of a working parliament, with the usual squabbles between political groups, the key role of budgetary debates, and other issues. Prior to being elected, she had campaigned all over France, stressing the need to create a freer and more social Europe.[3] In fact, it appears that the EP already had many of the characteristics of a "normal" parliament by the time Veil joined it.

Others have argued that the introduction of direct elections in 1979 was a crucial turning point.[4] In this interpretation, 1979 decisively boosted the EP's legitimacy by enhancing its standing within the European Community (EC) and vis-à-vis the member states. Veil does not confirm this view either, stressing how high hopes were crushed and how veterans from the pre-1979 period and others complicated the new start that she, along with likeminded colleagues, had envisaged.

1. S. VEIL, *Une vie*, Stock, Paris, 2007, quotes pp.210, 211, 213 and 214.
2. This has recently changed, as reflected in the surge of historical research on the matter. As an overview and assessment of the state of the art, see Desmond Dinan's contribution to this special issue.
3. See, e.g., her campaign speech in Nancy: "L'Europe doit être le carrefour de la liberté et de la solidarité", printed in: S. VEIL, *Mes Combats*, Bayard, Montrouge, 2016, pp.137-147.
4. E.g. G. BRUNN, *Das Europäische Parlament auf dem Weg zur ersten Direktwahl 1979*, in: F. KNIPPING, M. SCHÖNWALD (eds), *Aufbruch zum Europa der zweiten Generation: Die europäische Einigung 1968-1984*, Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, Trier, 2004, pp.47-72, here p.72.

These two narratives and Veil's own assessment of the EP's situation around and after 1979 leave us with a puzzle. It deserves close analysis given that today the EP is indeed a crucial political and policy-making forum at the European level, and thus of European integration. In its early iterations, it was far from preordained to play such a role – even if some of its members pushed for expansive powers right from the beginning. The oldest antecedent of today's EP was established in 1952, making it an inherent component of the nascent governance system that ultimately grew into today's European Union (EU). The Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community consisted of persons seconded from the member states' national parliaments, who therefore held a dual mandate. Its powers were very limited, as symbolized by its need to borrow the building of another International Organization for its meetings: the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly. This did not even change when, after the 1957 Treaties of Rome, the Assembly also came to represent the two newly added communities, the European Economic Community and Euratom. Even now, besides its purely advisory and controlling functions, the Assembly only gained a very general right to censure the European Commission and to participate in legislative and budgetary matters through the weak consolidation procedure. Its formal powers therefore remained very restricted, even if parliamentarians continuously pushed for their expansion.

Words mattered in this context: When the assembly of the three communities first met in March 1958, the original name was changed to "European Parliamentary Assembly", overcoming the earlier, very technical connotations and instead reflecting its aspiration to resemble a national parliament with all concomitant rights. A next step was taken in March 1962, a mere four years later, when it adopted the title of "European Parliament". The institution thus claimed a larger role for itself, even if the new name was not officially recognized by the other institutions until the Single European Act (SEA) of 1986, as the first official document referring to "the European Parliament".[5] Its very name reveals the hopes associated with it, and reflect a certain gain in importance over time.

Despite this remarkable history, we still lack systematic historical research on the EP's past and its impact on various dimensions of European integration. Especially the 1970s and 1980s, starting with the lead-up to the first direct elections and ending with the Maastricht Treaty, have not attracted much historiographical attention until recently. This JEIH special issue contributes to filling this gap by examining the EP's role during the last two decades of the Cold War. All its contributions build on fresh primary research from the EP's historical archives as well as other hitherto untapped archival sources. They discuss the EP's role in policy- and rule-making. They all go beyond the analysis of a single case or issue and instead cover the whole period under study. This makes their findings more representative. In general, all the texts examine the EP's contribution to advancing debates about transnational issues, which at the time aimed to produce new powers and policies. Simultaneously, they assess the long

5. *Official Journal of the European Communities*, L 169, 29.06.1987.

list of defeats, failures and problems that the institution, and the EC at large, encountered at the time.

At the most general level, and contrary to the prevailing view, this special issue argues that the EP already mattered a lot, as parliaments do in general, long before the Maastricht Treaty. The main functions of parliaments include checking and challenging the work of government, making and changing laws, and debating important issues of the day. They thus influence politics and policy-making. Obviously, the EP is a very special creature and should not be assumed to share all the main functions most national parliaments fulfil in today's liberal democracies. Having said this, research on the history of parliamentarism demonstrates that the past has seen more than one form of parliamentarism at the (sub-)national level too. Functions and powers have always been subject to change; parliaments are institutions on flux.[6] Hence, it would be simplistic to compare the EP only with "the" national model – even if this juxtaposition has always played a central role in public discourse and good parts of the literature.[7] This is an issue to which we shall return again later in this text.

The following contributions enable a thorough assessment of the EP's development. They are less interested in the conflicts between various political groups in the EP, or the history of such groups *per se*. Instead, they focus primarily on the EP's role and impact on the development of various policy fields, including economic, social, environmental, institutional, enlargement policy and foreign policy coordination. Hence, we include all policy domains that were instrumental in debates about deepening European integration at the time. Economic, social, environmental and institutional policies clearly defined the EC's internal policy-making dimension. Enlargement policy and foreign policy coordination did so for the external dimension. While economic and institutional policy were decisively advanced, social, environmental, enlargement policy and foreign policy coordination were newly developing fields at the EC level during the 1970s and 1980s. Taken together, our case studies thus produce a multi-faceted and balanced view of the EP's trajectory.

Besides assessing the EP's role in and contributions to such policy developments, we are interested in the implications of these policy changes for the EP itself; in the impact on its very nature and the kind of integration it contributed to. The following articles examine whether the two decades under study were a take-off period for a

6. See, e.g., R. AERTS, C. van BAALEN, H. te VELDE, M. van der STEEN, M.-L. RECKER (eds), *The Ideal of Parliament in Europe since 1800*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2020; P. Ihalainen, C. Ilie, K. Palonen (eds), *Parliament and Parliamentarism: A Comparative History of a European Concept*, Berghahn, New York, 2016.
7. From the older literature, see, e.g., V. HERMAN, J. LODGE, *The European Parliament and the European Community*, Macmillan Press, London, 1978, who explicitly dismiss the idea of a comparison to any other body than the national parliaments of the member states. In addition, more recent approaches explain the EP's development with the strong influence by the systems and features of the national parliamentary systems, with which MEPs were familiar, see, e.g., A. KREPPEL, *The European Parliament and Supranational Party-System: A Study in Institutional Development*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002; B. RITTBERGER, *Building Europe's Parliament: Democratic Representation Beyond the Nation State*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005.

greater role of the EP and re-examine the significance of various potential turning points. They all scrutinize the magnitude of change triggered by the introduction of direct elections in 1979. But they also consider alternative dates such as the budget treaties of 1970 and 1975, 1976 (when the decision to hold direct elections was taken), and 1986 as the moment the SEA was signed. Against this backdrop, the contributions to this special issue also shed new light on the role of the Maastricht Treaty for the EP and its politicization. Looking in the other chronological direction, they also take stock of continuities in EP policies and policy-making tools and their roots in earlier decades.

While existing research on the EP often focuses on formal powers and the question of legitimacy, our approach allows us to cover new empirical ground and to assess its role during a phase of its history that we consider to be crucial for building the matrix of today's EU. Besides six empirical articles on the EP and economic policy (Laurent Warlouzet), social policy (Mechthild Roos), environmental policy (Jan-Henrik Meyer), institutional policy (Wolfram Kaiser), enlargement policy (Christian Salm) and foreign policy coordination (Umberto Tulli), a text by Desmond Dinan on the EP's historiography examines the various facets of academic writing on the history of the EP since its origins in the early 1950s.[8]

Each of the papers contributes to critically advancing knowledge about the EP and its role in European integration more generally, reconstructing its interaction with the Commission, the Council, the member states, and other European assemblies (for example the aforementioned Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe). This strikes us as particularly important: Like other recent contributions on the EP's history, we are not interested in studying this institution in isolation, but endeavour to place it firmly in the context of the wider history of European integration and co-operation since 1945.[9]

Instead of detailing the foci and findings of the individual papers, we will use the remainder of this introduction to summarize some general findings. There are five points that we find striking with regard to the EP's history and role during the last two decades of the Cold War.

De-emphasizing 1979

Firstly, the various papers de-emphasize the role that others in the literature have attributed to 1979 as a game-changer for the EP's trajectory. The contribution by Mechthild Roos on European Community social policy, for instance, underpins this argument by examining earlier expansions of the EP's formal powers to influence legislative processes since the early 1970s. The budgetary decisions of 1970 and 1975

8. This also explains why we keep our footnotes short.
9. For details, see the contribution of Desmond Dinan in this collection.

are probably most striking, as they have remained largely ignored in this field to date. They confirm the centrality of the power of the purse – an argument often advanced in the history of parliamentarism that also holds true for the EP at the time, despite its limited overall powers. The 1975 Budgetary Powers Treaty gave the EP the right to reject the EC budget in total and thus substantially increased its say. Beyond the role of the EP, this also confirms the centrality of the EC's substantial budget and considerable leeway to deploy it for the way in which the EC's importance grew at the time.[10]

Returning to the issue of 1979 as a landmark: Umberto Tulli in his article on foreign policy and Wolfram Kaiser in his contribution on institutional reform also demonstrate that 1979 was less of a triumph for the EP than normally assumed. For example, the decoupling of EP and national mandates, often perceived as the EP's greatest success in its quest for a greater role, had a clear downside. As Tulli describes, this decision meant that MEPs no longer had the opportunity to question Foreign Ministers on external issues in their respective national parliaments. Until 1979, they had routinely used this option to reroute questions for which the EP did not appear the appropriate forum. In this sense, the EP's increased autonomy reduced the leverage of its members on core political issues. Kaiser underlines that after 1979, MEPs from certain member states, such as Italy and Ireland, were no longer allowed to attend national parliamentary party meetings. They sometimes felt disconnected from the power centres of national policy-making and found it harder to synchronize national and European agendas. Both papers thus underscore the findings of other recent publications that demonstrate the disadvantages for the EP and its members created by its unmooring from national parliamentary political systems and cultures.[11] Put differently: greater autonomy came at a clear price that most of the existing research has tended to overlook. Instead, most existing studies reproduce the mainstream of contemporary sources, which glosses over these problems.

While Tulli and Kaiser demonstrate the problems that direct elections entailed, Roos highlights the incremental character of the EP's expansion of legislative powers. Jan-Henrik Meyer's article on the EP's role in environmental issues and Christian Salm's contribution on the EP's engagement in Southern enlargement policy also paint a picture of gradual competence creep in the period prior to 1979. Meyer and Salm both demonstrate how the EP succeeded in defining and shaping policy issues, despite lacking wide-ranging formal powers, by developing policy instruments that were decisive for influencing the crucial informal dimension of EC politics. Setting out from a different vantage point, Laurent Warlouzet's article on the Single Market

10. On this latter point, see K.K. PATEL, *Project Europe: A History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2020, pp.40-41.
11. See W. KAISER, K.K. PATEL, *Multiple Connections in European Co-operation: International Organizations, Policy Ideas, Practices and Transfers 1967-1992*, in: *European Review of History*, 24(2017), pp.337-357, as well as the other contributions of that special issue; now also see P.L. HÄHNEL, *Parlamentarier für Europa. Die Vernetzung des Bundestags mit europäischen interparlamentarischen Körperschaften durch Doppelmandate (1950-1969/70)*, in: *Journal of European Integration History*, 2(2020), pp.325-344.

Programme can be read in the same way, too. He underscores the EP's role in economic policy during the period before it formally became a full-fledged co-legislator with the Maastricht Treaty. So the turning points – in this case with regard to the end of the period under investigation – are not as clear-cut as generally assumed.

Obviously, such claims are not meant to downplay the significance of the introduction of direct elections in 1979. But seen from the angle of policy fields, rather than institutional changes *per se*, 1979 stands out less in comparison to other moments, and the rise of the EP appears more like a cumulative process with many twists and turns. 1979 did change important institutional parameters, but it also had a downside when it came to informal networking and the smoothness of policy flow – an experience reflected in Veil's memoirs. Direct elections also raised the bar of expectations in ways that sometimes proved to be unrealistic – and led to new anxieties. Sources from the run-up to the second direct elections in 1984 provide good examples, with fears that the high turnout of some 63 percent in 1979 could not be replicated.[12] This apprehension proved correct, with turnout falling continuously until the election of 2019. And this is just one further example demonstrating that 1979 was not the unequivocal starting point for an ever-expanding role. Hence our attempt to put 1979 in perspective and see it more as part of a wider process than a game-changing event. Having said this, our findings also underscore that it was exactly the 1970s and 1980s when the EP started acquiring a considerable role in the machinery of EC policy-making – even if many citizens remained largely unaware of this development at the time.

Beyond the EP itself, this finding reflects and confirms a more general argument that it was exactly these two last decades of the Cold War when the EC as a whole became a creature that stood out from other International Organizations in Western Europe and beyond. It now turned into the foremost forum of Western European cooperation with clear primacy over organizations such as the Council of Europe and the OECD – as another process that took place mostly beyond the public eye and debate. In this respect, our findings on the EP's role fit very clearly into this general picture.[13]

Disaggregating the EP

Secondly, much of the literature approaches the EP as a unitary actor, consistently fighting to expand its powers and dominated by pro-integrationist notions of an ever closer union. Veil's memoirs already point in a different direction with her discussion of the cleavages between the "old" guard and a "new" esprit. She describes the work of the EP as conflictual, absorbing a lot of her energy and impacting her ambitions.

12. See, e.g., Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Munich, MBE VN 120, Paul Wünsche, member of the Bavarian parliament, Europa-Interpellation, 23.03.1983.
13. K.K. PATEL, *Project Europe…*, op.cit.

As Kaiser's contribution in particular demonstrates, institutional reform of the EP and the EC in general were not just impeded by the Council of Ministers and other EC bodies. Challenges also came from within the EP itself. Cross-party cooperation on issues such as the Draft Treaty on European Union (DTEU) went hand in hand with fierce competition, for instance around key posts like the EP presidency. Against this backdrop, it seems even more important that after the DTEU debates the EP appeared as a collective actor in the constitutional politics of European integration. This is all the more important given that a further deepening of European integration was not supported in all quarters, particularly on the left and right fringes of the EP. Italian far-right MEPs from the Movimento Sociale Italiano for instance did not agree with the shape the EC was taking and rejected the SEA, not least on the grounds that it was "accettata dai socialisti europei"; right-wing Euroscepticism was coalescing transnationally at the time.[14] Pretty much at the opposite end of the political spectrum, the German Greens also staunchly opposed institutional reform, for instance voting against Spinelli's Draft Treaty in February 1984.[15] Questions of power always impacted the debate. For these reasons, it is surprising that the literature has to date paid so little attention to conflicts and the fragility of cross-party cooperation.

Party politics and ideological conflicts sometimes translated into cleavages between political groups; sometimes they became more visible in other forms and impacted the EP's machinery in other ways. Jan-Henrik Meyer's article on environmental policy addresses this latter point: He stresses the conflicting views between the EP's various committees, challenging the simplistic conception of the EP as a unitary actor. While various parliamentary committees, including the Committee on Public Health and Environment, pushed for environmental issues to be included in the EC's policy portfolio, others, such as the Economic Committee, proved more reluctant. It is therefore important to consider not just party positions, as Kaiser does, but also the various committees – which sometimes tended to replicate party-political cleavages but in other cases followed their own logics.

Having said this, the EP did often succeed in forging a consensus around positions seeking to expand its weight and influence. Christian Salm shows how the EP's Political Affairs Committee sought to maintain a common position across the political groups on the observance of democratic principles as a formal requirement for EC membership, thereby obtaining the EP's participation in enlargement policy. In that sense, the EP emerged as a unitary actor, as Mechthild Roos also demonstrates in her piece on social policy. This invites the question of how this was possible particularly in matters where member states insisted on their prerogative. In a similar vein, Umberto Tulli's paper on the European Political Cooperation (EPC), and hence the realm

14. Quoted in S. BERARDI, *The Italian Social Movement in the Institutions of the European Community: From the Euro-Right Wing Alliance to the Group of the European Right Wing Parties (1978–1989)*, in: G. LEVI, D. PREDA (eds), *Euroscepticisms: Resistance and Opposition to the European Community/European Union*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2019, pp.185-196, here p.194.
15. G. GRIMALDI, *The German Green's Long March from the Opposition to the European Communities to a Struggle for a More Democratic, Federal and Ecological European Union (1979–2016)*, in: LEVI, PREDA, *Euroscepticisms…*, op.cit., pp.333-349.

of foreign policy-making, demonstrates that the EP was not equally successful across all the fields in which it endeavoured to expand its powers. Tulli argues that the debate over the EPC never became a priority for MEPs, not least because they were very aware of the resistance to any substantial increase in their own role. In other words, those who pushed for an enhanced role frequently prioritized fields in which the resistance was comparatively weak, or chose moments when it appeared propitious to forge a cross-party consensus and pitch an argument to other parts of the EU machinery.

All in all, the papers demonstrate that a consistent EP stance was often much more hard-fought than we had thought, and potentially also more fragile. If the EP did emerge as a unitary actor of sorts, this should not be taken for granted but rather as the starting point for more research on how this was possible.

Sources of EP Competence Creep

Thirdly, the various contributions shed new light on the reasons of why the European Parliament gained in power. Obviously, the pro-integrationist commitment of individuals such as Altiero Spinelli and Simone Veil clearly mattered, as did the power of the purse, as mentioned above. Another facilitating factor was the general rise of the EC from the 1970s onwards, which many recent studies have underlined.[16] So what were the fundamental factors that helped the EP to expand its role over the course of those two decades?

Beyond the dimensions mentioned above, we find two others particularly important. The first is very simple and has to do with institutional self-interest. Next to the idealistic ideas associated with actors such as Spinelli and Veil, a bigger say for the EP was always also meant to secure its institutional remit. On this issue existed a broad consensus. During this period there was no highly prominent and vocal politician and political group criticizing the European Parliament from within or specifically using it to campaign for her or his country to leave the European project, even though the Danish People's Movement against the EU had been represented under its previous name Folkebevægelsen mod EF since 1979 and as such advocated a withdrawal from the EC. Leaving the Folkebevægelsen mod EF aside, institutional self-interest loomed large. The US-inspired annual reports on human rights that the EP urged Foreign Ministers to submit were certainly driven by substantive reasons. But, as Tulli convincingly argues, they were also meant to undermine the intergovernmental nature of the EPC and secure a bigger role for the EP. The examples are

16. See, e.g., J. LAURSEN (ed.), *The Institutions and Dynamics of the European Community, 1973–83*, Nomos, Baden-Baden, 2014; C. HIEPEL (ed.), *Europe in a Globalising World: Global Challenges and European Responses in the "Long" 1970s*, Nomos, Baden-Baden, 2014; M. GEHLER, W. LOTH (eds), *Reshaping Europe: Towards a Political, Economic and Monetary Union, 1984–1989*, Nomos, Baden-Baden, 2020.

legion and together demonstrate that the EP endeavoured to carve out a larger role for itself by making inroads into fields as diverse as monetary, environmental, and cultural policy, while attempting to expand existing areas such as the Common Market.

All this had a massive effect on the EP's self-image and role. Particularly the fear of being sidelined by an intergovernmental approach triggered EP action to protect and, in fact ever more often, create a larger role for itself. Hence, these dynamics can partly be explained by general characteristics of institutions and social systems as described by organizational sociologists such as Niklas Luhmann;[17] partly by the specific nature of the European integration process.

The other argument is slightly more complex. The general push to expand the remit of EC policy-making raised new questions concerning its legitimacy. We contend that MEPs very often made a case that seemed compelling at the time, and proved particularly persuasive in their advance for new powers: They argued that policy progress was needed, but that the EP was the only forum entitled to legitimize such a step. In the MEPs' self-image as representatives of the people, it was the EP more than any other EC body that could supply democratic legitimacy to EC policy-making.

Such a claim, it should be added, hinged very much on a specific understanding of politics, which differed from the scientific and public debates during earlier and later periods. For one, it digressed from the technocratic notion of European governance that had dominated during the early stages of European integration. In Jean Monnet's original plans for what became the European Coal and Steel Community, there was no need for a parliamentary representation.[18] The idea of the Common Assembly only entered the debate later. And even though the Assembly found its way into the Paris Treaty of 1951, the original construction depended little on democratic legitimacy provided by supranational parliamentary representation. For various reasons, this older model had come under increasing pressure by the 1970s, not least due to cultural changes in European societies that reduced the acceptance of elite-driven, technocratic models of political legitimacy. Hence, the period in question saw new challenges with regard to European integration which, paradoxically, helped the EP further its specific claims.

For another, more recent ideas of hybrid forms of democratic legitimacy were not yet strong. They have only gained traction since the 1990s. This explains why today's debates look different to those in the period under discussion. For instance, national parliaments and civil society actors seen as part of complex multi-level governance arrangements have only been given a greater role in legitimizing the European polity since the 1990s. Differentiation between input, throughput, and output legitimacy has

17. See, as still one of the most stimulating attempts to do so with the concept of autopoiesis, N. LUHMANN, *Soziale Systeme. Grundriss einer allgemeinen Theorie*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/Main, 1984.
18. See, e.g., A. COHEN, *Why Call it a "European Community"? Ideological Continuities and Institutional Design of Nascent European Organisations*, in: *Contemporary European History*, 27(2018), pp.326-344.

also tended to de-emphasize the idea of the EP as the solitary or main source of democratic legitimacy.

The period under consideration therefore stands out as one in which the argument about the EP's role was not new, but as powerful as never before in its history. Intellectually, it built on a specific, federalist understanding of European integration: In an "ever closer union", the EP was the only force that could replicate the role that national parliaments played in post-1945 liberal democracies. This idea rested on a form of methodological nationalism that equated the European polity with a nation-state (in the making) and sidelined the much more complex realities of European integration; in that sense, "the EP majority continuously and quite dramatically talked up" the EC's democratic deficit, as Kaiser puts it. While there were substantive reasons to rub shoulders with the US Congress, it also implied a claim to be on a par (and comparable) with one of the world's most powerful parliamentary representations. This normative argument, put forward by MEPs and others at the time, was quite effective. Time and again, it persuaded member states and other EC institutions to accept the EP's demands. The analogy to the national level thus proved a powerful argument, despite the problematic intellectual construction it built on.

Discursive Power and Agenda-Setter

Fourthly, the analyses across different policy fields reveal the EP's notable roles as discursive power and agenda-setter in the 1970s and 1980s. Obviously, it was much more than that at the time, but maybe most dynamic and effective in those two roles. Both stemmed from the EP's self-perception as the political authority representing the citizens at the European level.

Words mattered, not just with regard to the institution's very name. Claiming to speak for the citizens of the EC member states helped the EP to contribute to shaping the policy-making discourses and controversies that unfolded between the Council, the Commission and the member states. This argument naturally gained in importance and strength after the first direct elections in 1979.[19] Nevertheless, as the special issue's papers show, the EP was successful in introducing, amplifying, framing and maintaining topics in debates at the European level long before that. To name just one example, in the field of environmental policy the Commission took up the EP's concerns and proposals for an EC environmental policy in its First Environmental Action Program of 1973. Clearly, as an institution on the rise, the way the EP expressed itself helped to determine its relationship with the Commission and the Council and thus its leeway to influence policy-making. One basic element of the EP's communication with the other institutions was to send a constant stream of

19. A. HÉRITIER, K.L. MEISSNER, C. MOURY, M.G. SCHOELLER, *European Parliament Ascendant: Parliamentary Strategies of Self-Empowerment in the EU*, Palgrave MacMillan, Basingstoke, 2019, p.182.

messages about its political mission. For example, regularly referring to missions such as speaking for the European people and defending democracy boosted its discursive power within the EC's system of governance.

Like its discursive power, the EP's role as a policy-making agenda-setter at the European level has been widely neglected in EU historiography. This can partly be explained in terms of a long-standing research focus on decision-making moments and the EC's intergovernmental dimension, along with a general neglect of the European Parliament. For the EP, agenda-setting was an important part of its parliamentary work in all policy fields, because getting an issue on the EC agenda was (and is) a precondition for policy-making. As political scientist Sebastiaan Princen has argued, "only when an issue is being considered is there a chance that some decision on that issue will be taken".[20] Throughout its history, the EP has frequently been an agenda-setter. For example, it placed and kept the issue of further economic integration on the Community's agenda basically from the very start of its existence in the 1950s. As new policy fields emerged at the European level in the 1970s, the EP expanded its agenda-setting initiatives. Actually, the EP often pushed for debates and put issues on the EC agenda in fields that were new both for the EP and for the EC as a whole, as in the case of monetary and social policy, or only recently "invented" at the level of international organization altogether, such as environmental policy. By placing issues far from its official remit on its agenda, the EP often managed to expand the realm of policy fields it covered, particularly by stressing its role for the EC's very legitimacy as a political order. As described above, it pursued particularly vigorously topics that promised prestige, even where it had very limited powers. Human rights is probably the best example, as a topic that gained great attention at the time anyway and was therefore an obvious playground for an institution in search of a (larger) policy mission.[21]

Crucially, the EP was able to perform its roles as discursive power and agenda-setter successfully only as long as it took a clear position in its political communication. As mentioned above, cross-party cooperation and consistent views on various issues of further European integration did not automatically exist across the EP's political groups. Nevertheless, the EP managed to agree on common positions more often than not. In fact, the lack of crucial competences and effective formal powers made it easier for the EP's political groups to find common ground on parliamentary practice and adopt resolutions. Occasionally, one of the larger political groups abstained from a vote to allow a resolution to be adopted, despite not agreeing with its

20. S. PRINCEN, *Agenda-Setting Strategies in EU Policy Processes*, in: *Journal of European Public Policy*, 18(2011), pp.927-943, here p.927.
21. See, e.g., S. MOYN, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 2010; J. ECKEL, S. MOYN (eds), *The Breakthrough: Human Rights in the 1970s*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2015; S.-L. HOFFMANN, *Geschichte der Menschenrechte – ein Rückblick*, Suhrkamp, Berlin, 2020; on the EP's involvement in human rights in the 1970s and 1980s see especially A.E. GFELLER, *Champion of Human Rights: The European Parliament and the Helsinki Process*, in: *Journal of Contemporary History*, 49(2014), pp.390-409.

content.[22] More commonly, the political groups agreed to common positions on the basis of consensus. Substantive differences were obscured by compromises. Overall, forging common positions by consensus was one of the EP's principal characteristics during the period under consideration.

Furthermore, discursive power and agenda-setting belong to the informal dimension of policy-making. Although there is wide agreement that the informal dimension is highly relevant for understanding the EC/EU governance system, EU historians and political scientists still somehow manage to avoid adequately analysing and describing this crucial dimension of EC/EU policy-making processes.[23] Lacking more extensive formal powers until the SEA, the informal dimension of policy-making was all the more important for the EP. In that respect, discursive power and agenda-setting helped the EP to expand its role and powers. As the special issue demonstrates, more historical research on such means is needed. This would help us to better understand the EP's functioning and role in policy-making not only in the past, but also today. Informal means of policy-making, such as discursive power and agenda-setting, matter today as much as they did during earlier decades.

Impacting Policies Long Before Maastricht

Fifthly, the EP impacted policy development, although its precise influence is sometimes difficult to discern. The reason for this is that it operated and exerted influence, as indicated above, especially via the informal dimension of policy-making. This is by nature less well documented than the formal policy-making channels with codified procedures, which also tended to attract more public attention. Beyond the actual policy outcomes, we would argue that the EP's success in inserting itself into and shaping EC discourses as well as placing and keeping issues on the EC agenda also demonstrate its impact on policy- and law-making, despite lacking the formal right to initiate legislation (which was still the Commission's prerogative). In that respect, the EP left its footprints in EC policies, as the contributions demonstrate.

Of course the nature of the EP's links to the Commission was a significant factor for its ability to influence policy- (and law-)making more directly, especially as the cooperation procedure of the SEA and the co-decision procedure of the Maastricht Treaty were not yet in place. As well as high-ranking Commission representatives regularly participating in EP plenary debates and committee meetings and answering questions, various informal networks existed on different levels between the two

22. See as an example in Christian Salm's contribution the case when the Socialist Group abstained in January 1979 from voting on most of the paragraphs of the EP's adopted resolution on the prospects of enlargement.
23. For one of the few recent exceptions looking at the importance of the informal dimension of European integration, see L. v. HEUMEN, M. ROOS (eds), *The Informal Construction of Europe*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2019.

institutions. Even if the contributions cannot always elaborate extensively on these informal networks, they provide sufficient grounds to conclude that such links differed in form and strength from policy field to policy field, as well as over the course of time. As a consequence, the EP's policy-making influence was historically contingent. Moreover, in the 1970s and 1980s, more and more MEPs continued their career as European politicians in high-ranking positions in the Commission. Jacques Delors served as a MEP from 1979 to 1981 before becoming the President of the European Commission in 1985, to name just one of the most prominent examples. Without doubt, his earlier career – and those of figures such as Pierre Lardinois and Carlo Scarascia-Mugnozza, who also moved from stints as MEPs to becoming members of the Commission – contributed to making the Commission more open and sensitive to the EP's policy demands. Obviously, the same dynamics could work the other way around, too. For instance Franco Malfatti, Commission President from 1970 to 1972, went on to serve as head of the Italian delegation in the EP, while Jean-François Deniau, Trade Commissioner from 1967 to 1972, joined the European Parliament in 1984. Finally, Altiero Spinelli became a MEP in 1979 after having been Commissioner for Industry and Entrepreneurship from 1970 to 1976.

Speaking of prominent European politicians, the EP welcomed some big names as MEPs in the 1970s and 1980s. As well as Veil and Spinelli, former German Chancellor Willy Brandt (MEP from 1979 to 1983) and former Italian Prime Minister Emilio Colombo (MEP from 1976 to 1980 and EP President from 1977 to 1979) certainly deserve mention. With their reputation and standing, these politicians were able to forcefully pitch EP policy issues and ideas. Their membership of the EP also contradicts the view that member states only sent minor politicians approaching retirement age to the EP, to paraphrase a famous German saying ("hast Du einen Opa, schick ihn nach Europa").[24] In some cases these MEPs might have been grandparents – but they were grandparents with clout. Others, such as Jacques Chirac, moved in the opposite direction: A member of the EP in 1979/80, he ultimately chose to pursue a career at the national level which he eventually crowned with the position of French President. More recent examples of such trajectories include Alexander Stubb (MEP 2004–2008; Finnish Prime Minister 2014–2015) and Borut Pahor (MEP 2004–2008, Prime Minister of Slovenia 2008–2012).

To understand the EP's impact on policy-making, it is important to consider the long-term effects of its parliamentary work and initiatives. For example, Kaiser demonstrates that the EP's 1984 DTEU included ideas and concepts for institutionalizing the EC that were incorporated into institutional reforms by the 1992 Maastricht Treaty and the 2007 Lisbon Treaty. The EP's DTEU is thus a particularly good example of how policies developed by the EP in the 1970s and 1980s were formally implemented some time later. These long-term effects are an area of the EP's history

24. As an early text refuting this derogatory assessment of MEPs and their careers, see P. REICHEL, *Bundestagsabgeordnete in europäischen Parlamenten. Zur Soziologie des europäischen Parlamentariers*, Westdeutscher Verlag, Opladen, 1974.

that needs further research in order to reconstruct its historical relevance beyond the 1970s and 1980s.

Finally, contrary to the widespread assumption that the EP did not matter in policy-making before the introduction of the co-decision procedure with the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, the contributions in this special issue show that the EP certainly mattered long before that. During the 1970s and 1980s its sphere of influence lay primarily in the informal dimension of policy-making. The SEA and the Maastricht Treaty granted it new formal powers to contribute to policy-making. And the first direct elections in 1979 increased is assertiveness. But by 1979 the EP had already developed crucial means for playing its part in the EC governance system. For all the various twists and turns in its remarkable history, the continuity of these policy-making means are what helped to transform it into the crucial shaper of EU politics and policies it is today.

Conclusion

This special issue demonstrates what robust empirical research has to offer on the history of the European Parliament. It underscores the EP's important role in European policy-making and institution-building during the last two decades of the Cold War. In this context, 1979 was less of a turning point than is often argued; in fact the EP fought for and acquired its position incrementally. The internal consensus was less firm than it appeared, and the quest for greater overall legitimacy for the European project was an important source of competence creep. In this and other contexts, the EP often proved as agenda-setter with impressive discursive power; taken together, these factors explain its considerable impact on EC policies in the period before the Maastricht Treaty.

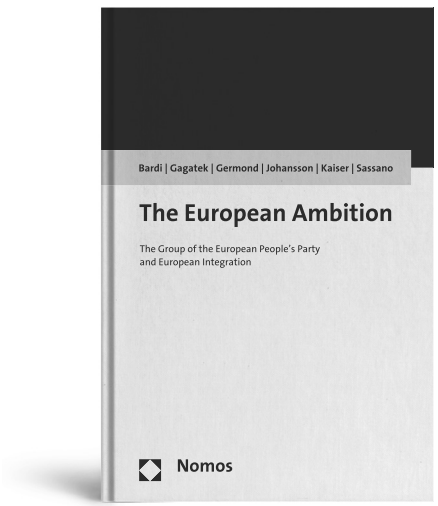
The contributions also demonstrate that the EP's strategies did not always succeed. Some policy fields remained beyond its powers, and in many others, words did not suffice to change the acquis communautaire or to push member state governments to accept the EP having a greater role. Members of the European Parliament often pursued different goals and strategies; one should not overemphasize the consistency of its position. Detailed historical research is needed to investigate in greater detail the conditions and circumstances under which it had an impact, and when it did not.

Simone Veil, with whom we started this introduction, ended her stint as EP President in 1982, but remained a MEP until 1993. Then in her mid-60s, she did not retire but became again the French Minister of Social and Health affairs under President François Mitterrand for some two years, and then joined France's Constitutional Council for almost another decade. Her years at the EP thus did no harm to her national career. As a MEP, Veil was very active; she contributed to many plenary debates on various topics such as human rights, health policy and the future of European integration. On the latter point, she once emphasized in a plenary debate in June 1988 that "union will not be achieved unless progress is also made in relation to the Euro-

pean Monetary System".[25] Today, Veil is remembered as a French and European politician, exemplified by various honours – including a 2018 two-euro commemorative coin displaying her portrait with the European Parliament as background.

25. *Official Journal of the European Communities*, Debates of the European Parliament, No 2-366, 16.06.1988, p.271.

A Comprehensive Academic Study on the European Parliament's Largest Political Group



The European Ambition

The Group of the European People's Party and European Integration

By Prof. Dr. Luciano Bardi, Prof. Dr. Wojciech Gagatek, Prof. Carine Germond, Prof. Karl Magnus Johansson, Prof. Wolfram Kaiser and Dr. Silvia Sassano

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This book traces the EPP Group's institutional, organisational and political trajectory in the European Parliament, focusing on the period after the first direct elections in 1979. In doing so, it sheds light on the functioning of parliamentary party groups, while at the same time creating the conditions for a better understanding of their role in the process of European integration and in the EU's political system.

Based on the conceptual framework of different disciplines—history, political science, European studies and political sociology—this book is the outcome of a research project involving scholars with diverse academic backgrounds and from different EU countries.