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The diplomatic role of the European Parliament's parliamentary groups

Abstract

The political groups of the European Parliament (EP) play a diplomatic role in terms of the EP's legislative powers, their rhetorical role in European Union (EU) foreign policy, and through direct diplomatic action in third countries. It is therefore surprising to observe that the parliamentary diplomacy of the political groups – conceived as diplomatic activities that are conducted by parliamentarians – is an under-researched area of study on parliamentary diplomacy and the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). This paper therefore seeks to better understand the diplomatic role of the EP's political groups. To this end, this paper seeks to answer two over-arching questions: first, what diplomatic role/s do the political groups play in the parliamentary diplomacy of the Parliament? Second, what overall impact do these diplomatic role/s have on the EU's CFSP? Based on these questions, this paper provides an analysis of the weaknesses and strengths of the political groups when engaged in diplomacy, and it outlines the benefits and drawbacks of having the political groups engage in international affairs.

1 Introduction

Of all the regional and transnational parliamentary bodies, 'only the European Parliament has developed a truly supranational character and has real effective powers' (Malamud and Stavridis 2011: 113). Indeed, the European Parliament (EP) exercises a far greater degree of legislative power than its other regional counterparts in other parts of the world and it is therefore arguably more than just a "ceremonial" body (Maurer 2003: 244). Since the 1950s, and following successive European Union (EU) treaty changes, the EP has developed into an institution with ever-increasing powers and growing confidence. Specifically, since 2009 the EP has utilised the Lisbon Treaty to wield its "co-decision" powers along with the Council of the EU in over forty new policy fields such as energy security[1] and immigration. When compared with the pre-Lisbon Treaty era, the Parliament now also co-decides, again together with the Council, on the EU budget and it has increased its powers of scrutiny over the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), and the EU's High Representative/Vice President (HR/VP) for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (Barbé and Herranz-Surrallés 2008).

While it is true that the EP helps frame the debate on EU foreign policy, one needs to recognise the specific role that the Parliament plays in parliamentary diplomacy. As

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[1] http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?language=EN&reference=A6-0312/2007, accessed 4 February 2015.

a general definition, parliamentary diplomacy has come to mean the activities of parliamentarians that are aimed at increasing 'mutual understanding between countries, to assist each other in improving the control of governments and the representation of a people' (Weisglas and de Boer 2007: 94). While studies exist on the EP and parliamentary diplomacy (see for example Raube 2014), there has been less focus on the diplomatic role of the political groups in the EP. Some have argued that the ability of the political groups to influence EU policy should not be overestimated (Lightfoot 2003), but while there have been substantive investigations of the broader role of the political groups in EU foreign policy (see Lindberg, Rasmussen and Warntjen 2009), it is important to understand the specific diplomatic contribution of the groups (Viola 2000). Quite apart from the fact that the parliamentary groups have evolved 'into highly developed organisations with their own budgets, leadership structures, administrative support staff, rules of procedure, offices, committees and working groups' (Hix 1999: 173), they have also started to engage in parliamentary diplomacy both through the auspices of the EP and in their own right.

The aim of this paper is provide a better understanding of the diplomatic role of the EP party groups. Indeed, what international role do the political groups play in concrete terms? Is this role mainly legislative, rhetorical, or is it characterised by substantive action? To put it another way, are the EP groups substantive or simply marginal in EU foreign policy-making (Diedrichs 2004)? Furthermore, what are the weaknesses and strengths of the groups when engaged in external action? What are the benefits of having the political groups engage in international affairs and what are the drawbacks? How does the parliamentary diplomacy of the EP groups affect the EU's CFSP? The CFSP is a commitment by EU member states to support stability and prosperity and promote human rights, the rule of law, and good governance internationally and to do so through a "comprehensive approach" that brings together a range of policies and tools (i.e. diplomacy, civil-military operations, finance, trade, development, and humanitarian aid). Can the political groups play a fruitful role in the development and implementation of this "comprehensive approach"?

2 What are the political groups?
The political groups form the backbone of the Parliament and it is through the groups that policy is deliberated and legislation passed. Serving as a home for the 751 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), there are presently seven political groups which themselves reflect a broad spectrum of political ideology: 221 MEPs belong to the European People's Party (EPP Group), 191 to the Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats (S&D), 70 to the European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR), 67 to the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), 52 to the European United Left/Nordic Green Left Group (GUE/NGL), 50 to the Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA) and 48 to the Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy group (EFDD). The remaining 52 MEPs are not attached to any political group and sit in the EP as non-attached (NI) members. Only 25 MEPs are required to form a political group in the EP, but the group must contain MEPs from at least one-quarter of the EU Member States.

Since 1958 – when the EP was established – the 'groups in the EP have become increasingly cohesive and powerful over time' (McElroy and Benoit 2007). The EP groups have their own policy preferences and are highly organised in order to achieve them. A chair (or co-chairs) heads each political group in the Parliament, and day-to-day work is carried out by an autonomous secretariat. Each secretariat contains a number of advisors that feed information into the group apparatus for each of the relevant committee areas (see below). The group secretariats are home to a number of departments and units focused on international affairs. Working with the secretariats are the MEPs, who will ensure that policy coordination and political objectives are raised within each parliamentary committee and delegation. The groups also conduct and contract studies on specific areas of interest of foreign affairs.

Quite apart from raising questions in the Parliament's plenary sessions and speaking out on affairs in public through the media, however, the political groups conduct most of their work on a weekly basis through intra-group meetings and the Parliament's committees and sub-committees. Intra-group meetings facilitate the discussion of positions adopted by the groups. Ahead of plenary sessions the political groups analyse the reports drawn up by the committees and table amendments to them. During 'group weeks',[2] which are generally the week

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[2] See here for the European Parliament calendar for 2015, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/plenary/en/meetings-search.html.

before plenary sessions, the political group formulates its respective positions on the subjects on the agenda for the plenary session.[3]

The main avenue for intra-group discussions are the political group Bureau meetings, which give the groups strategic and political direction and help to formulate the questions the groups will ask in plenary. The Bureaus normally consist of the group president, the national delegation leaders, the group-affiliated chairs of the EP committees, and selected MEPs, but they differ in size depending on the group (e.g. there are 38 members in the ALDE Bureau, but only 11 in the S&D group). The Bureau meetings take place regularly (i.e. sometimes 2–3 times per month) and sometimes in different European cities. Once group positions have been formulated at the Bureau level, the groups then deliberate external action issues with the other political groups in the EP Committees. Many of the Committees encompass an international dimension. The Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) – and its Security and Defence (SEDE) and Human Rights (DROI) sub-committees – the International Trade (INTA) Committee, and the Development (DEVE) Committee are the most important in this regard. The committees are the institutional bodies where MEPs from the political groups co-draft legislation, draft reports and opinions, and conduct and hear studies by experts and the results of fact-finding missions from delegation visits.

The delegation visits are another important part of the political groups' diplomatic role. In essence, the EP delegations serve as an important diplomatic channel and an opportunity for dialogue with counterparts and for undertaking fact-finding operations, the results of which are then fed into the institutional processes of the Parliament, Council, Commission, and the European External Action Service (EEAS) (Herranz 2005: 103). While the delegations are 'often considered of little use, as being nothing more than "political tourism" or a costly "cheap talk"' (Herranz 2005: 78–80), there are presently a total of 48 EP delegations. This number includes 15 to Europe (non-EU), 3 to North America, 9 to South America, 10 to Africa and the Middle East, and 11 to Asia. They include joint parliamentary committees with Turkey and Chile and delegations to the Union for the Mediterranean, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Iraq, China, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations

(ASEAN). While each EP delegation differs in size according to the third country or region in question, all of the political groups are represented.

3 Conceptualising parliamentary diplomacy

In order to understand the international role of the EP groups, it is first necessary to conceptualise what one means by the term "parliamentary diplomacy". As was mentioned earlier, parliamentary diplomacy can be defined in its most basic sense as the conduct of diplomacy by parliamentarians (Weisglas and de Boer 2007: 94). Yet parliamentary diplomacy should be distinguished from traditional diplomacy based on the objectives it seeks to achieve, as parliaments only have limited resources with which to conduct diplomacy. Indeed, the EP's international role is distinctive and not to be confused with traditional methods of diplomacy (Stavridis 2006: 8). For example, parliamentary actors 'can use political camaraderie and affiliations to reach-out to interlocutors when traditional channels are strained' (Fiott 2011: 4). In other words, the EP does not and indeed cannot act like a state. It has neither a dedicated foreign service nor the resources of a state, so it has to largely make do with approaches such as dialogue, mediation, and persuasion. The EP cannot consider itself on a par with a ministry of foreign affairs, yet it brings to bear its own experience and methods in its international dealings.

Indeed, analysing the EP's international role creates problems for any traditional definition of diplomacy. Berridge, for example, concludes that diplomacy is essentially about the need for negotiation – in times of war and peace – as a way to deal with the fact that 'power continues to be dispersed among a plurality of states' (2001: 1). Diplomacy, argues Berridge, 'is the term given to the official channels of communication employed by members of a system of states' (2001: 1). Sharp refines this definition by arguing that diplomacy, when stripped of its mystery and traditions, may consist merely of 'normal things like bargaining, representing, lobbying and, of course, communicating' which 'we find in all walks of life' (2009: 3). Despite such definitions, it should be noted that theorising diplomacy is not an easy task, as it has long been seen as largely the domain of practitioners. Where scholars have attempted to give theoretical expression to diplomacy, they have largely followed a philosophical or historical approach that has

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[3]   European Parliament, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/oppd/Page_1/OPPD_EP_GUIDE_for_webFINAL_
       EN.pdf, accessed 24 February 2015.

led to numerous prescriptive and descriptive accounts. As Jönsson rightly points out, '[t]heories of diplomacy are less abundant' than in other areas of political science (2012: 15).

There are a number of problems associated with these definitions of diplomacy, although two stand out in particular. First, diplomatic theory tends to be too state-centric and it discounts the role that non-state actors such as the EP or political groups can play in international affairs. Second, the theory of diplomacy put forth by Berridge and others focuses on why diplomacy matters or exists in the first place. It does not, however, really tell us much about the many forms of diplomatic conduct. Yet the phrase "conduct" also poses a challenge. Does conduct just refer to releasing statements or are their other avenues for action? Is the diplomatic conduct of the EP groups simply restricted to their scrutiny of the HR/VP and the CFSP?

Indeed, the degree of influence that the political groups have on the EU decision-making process is an under-developed area of study (Marschall 2008: 130; Malamud and Stavridis 2011). While there is empirical evidence to suggest that the political groups in the Parliament are growing more cohesive despite increasing national and ideological diversity within the parties, questions remain about the effectiveness of political groups in concretely influencing EU foreign policy (Hix, Noury and Roland 2005). Indeed, one needs to ask whether the political groups do have a positive influence on EU foreign policy-making or whether efforts remain largely superficial (Holmes and Lightfoot 2011: 33–34).

To answer such questions, there is a need to unpack the meaning of words such as "conduct" and "influence". Therefore, in this paper I make a distinction between three types of diplomatic conduct: "legislative diplomacy", "rhetorical diplomacy", and "active diplomacy". In this context, *legislative diplomacy* refers to the actions taken by the EP groups to influence the conduct of EU foreign policy through institutional and legislative mechanisms. *Rhetorical diplomacy* relates to the release of statements and opinions, petitions, parliamentary committee meetings, the delegation and interparliamentary meetings, etc. – i.e. any action with an international dimension that involves debate and dialogue. Lastly, *active diplomacy* would involve parliamentarians being sent on missions

to third countries to meet with interlocutors and counterparts, to partake in election observation missions (EOMs), etc. – i.e. action that involves active involvement in the politics of a third country and/or making a material difference to the situation (e.g. establishing parliaments, training, election monitoring, etc.). In the sections that follow, the paper will investigate whether the EP parties are "legislative", "rhetorical", or "active" actors.

4 Legislative diplomacy

The first conceptualisation of diplomatic conduct in this paper is that of "legislative diplomacy". This form of diplomacy relates to the ability of the EP political parties to influence the direction and shape of the CFSP/CSDP by utilising institutional mechanisms and the provisions of the EU treaties. The main avenue for the conduct of legislative diplomacy is through the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty. Indeed, since the ratification of the Treaty the EP has had the right to be consulted by the Council on decisions to be taken and the HR/VP, who is also a Vice-President of the European Commission, now reports to the Parliament bi-annually on policies agreed and approaches taken and produces a report on CFSP/CSDP for the Parliament on a yearly basis. The HR/VP is expected to regularly consult the Parliament on CFSP and CSDP decisions in line with Article 36 of the Lisbon Treaty.[4] Furthermore, working under Protocol 1 of the Lisbon Treaty on the role of national parliaments in the EU, the Presidencies of the Council of the EU organise inter-parliamentary conferences to discuss the CFSP/CSDP.

Despite these advances, this form of diplomacy is challenging for the EP groups. Indeed, the CFSP/CSDP still remains overwhelmingly intergovernmental in nature and the EP groups have 'been unable to gather any influence in the CFSP beyond [the] formal right to remain regularly informed', to agree on the EU budget – which impacts the level of CFSP financing and the level of funds allocated to civilian missions under the CSDP – and to consent or not to the proposed Commission every five years – which now includes the HR/VP (Crum 2006: 399; Lord 2008). It is for this reason that some have argued that the Parliament is not taken seriously by the Council, and indeed there have been important instances where MEPs and political groups have diverged with the Council. For example, the EP still cannot easily access CFSP/CSDP-related documents from the Council despite

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4   http://eeas.europa.eu/cfsp/docs/2009_annualreport_en.pdf, accessed 4 July 2012.

an agreement allowing the Parliament president, the chair of the EP's AFET, and four deputies to see the documents. The Council can veto the viewing of CFSP/CSDP-related documents at any time it chooses (Maurer, Kietz and Völkel 2005; Peters, Wagner and Deitelhoff 2008: 15; Rosén 2011).

This does not imply that the EP groups are not increasingly vocal on issues such as energy security, defence policy, or trade protection issues (Zanon 2005). For the EP groups ideological or ideational arguments are critical, and the focus on ideological and political principles instead of reasons of state is seen as a factor that sets the Parliament apart from institutions such as the Council. Nevertheless, the European Parliament's legislative diplomacy – however restricted – can be said to generally complement the work of the EU under the CFSP. The Parliament has also been known to push policy preferences and initiatives onto the Council and the EEAS, as it did in 2012 by calling for and securing the appointment of an EU Special Representative for Human Rights – a position that eventually went to Stavros Lambrinidis, a former Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs and Vice-President of the European Parliament.

5 Rhetorical diplomacy

The second form of diplomatic action under investigation in this paper is rhetorical diplomacy. This form of diplomacy relates to debate and dialogue. Indeed, even without formal powers over the Council's decisions, the EP groups can raise issues of concern in the public domain, which serves as a form of democratic oversight in spite of the overall democratic deficit in the domain of EU foreign policy (see Hilger 2002; Koenig-Archibugi 2002; Gourlay 2004; Bono 2006). In this regard, and interestingly, a major obstacle for the EP groups when conducting rhetorical diplomacy is maintaining a common message. Indeed, the political groups are hardly homogenous entities but rather broad "churches of opinion" within a particular political ideology, which underlies the direction of groups. Individual MEPs can and do dissent from their own party groups on matters that involve individual political interests, constituent concerns, or issues of moral conscience, even though one must realise that MEPs have been more likely to vote on party rather than national lines for external action issues (Viola 2000).

For example, the cohesion of the party groups can be challenged 'when questions relating to more or less European integration emerge; it is difficult for party families to remain internally cohesive, as divisions will emerge from within each party family' (Hix 1999: 169). While it was stated earlier that there is growing group cohesion, it is true that instances of low group cohesion over a particular external action issue could impact a group's international voice and ability to influence policy (Raunio 2002). For example, a number of socialist and social democrat MEPs find it difficult to support Turkey's EU accession for domestic political reasons (Soler i Lecha 2005: 77), even though the Socialists and Democrats (S&D) are generally in favour of Turkish entry. Such differences of opinion, and indeed the full gamut of rhetorical diplomacy, are expressed through media appearances, campaigns, public statements, committee work, and the intergroups[5] and EP resolutions on international affairs.

Nevertheless, the groups extend their rhetorical diplomacy beyond the work conducted inside the EP and in the wider European public sphere. Indeed, for the groups the EP delegations are crucial to fostering dialogue and debate with third countries. The EP's delegations play a role in the international activities of the EP groups, as they allow MEPs to help 'improve the legitimacy of a government in a third-country, and they may also play a role in developing the representation of the people' in these countries (Fiott 2011: 2). There are currently 41 delegations ranging from relations with South Africa to relations with Japan, and the delegations are the principle vehicle through which the MEPs from each political group – though not all MEPs are part of the delegations – meet with counterparts from third countries outside the EU. Indeed, the delegation visits and meetings facilitate an exchange of views between MEPs and their political groups with political representatives and parties (particularly sister parties), academics and think tank representatives, non-Governmental Organisation advocates and campaigners, EU Ambassadors in their capacity as heads of the EU delegations (EUDEL) in third countries, officials of the EEAS, ambassadors and officials from third country representations to the EU, and prominent personalities. When the Delegation for Relations with Belarus met on the 29 June 2011 in Brussels, for example, MEPs did so with a campaigner against political prisoners in

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[5]   The intergroups are an informal setting for MEPs to discuss particular subjects. Intergroups in the current legislature (2014–2019) with an international focus include: climate change, biodiversity and sustainable development, extreme poverty and human rights, and the Western Sahara.

the country and a family member of a victim of alleged human rights abuses in Belarus.[6]

Finally, the EP groups are interested in fostering interparliamentary relations through the bi-annual meetings of 1) the Transatlantic Legislators' Dialogue, which brings together MEPs and the political groups with members of the United States Congress; 2) the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean; 3) the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly; 4) the Africa, Caribbean, Pacific – EU Parliamentary Assembly; and 5) the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly, which brings together the EP with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. Furthermore, one must not overlook the importance of the interparliamentary work between the EP's political groups and the national parliaments and sister parties of the EU member states, which has not only intensified under the Lisbon Treaty, but has seen parliamentary experimentation with the introduction of joint committee hearings and the conference of speakers of the EU parliaments.[7] Again, in each of the interparliamentary meetings each political group is represented by the delegated MEPs.

6 Active diplomacy

The third conceptualisation of diplomacy is that of active diplomacy. This form of diplomacy relates to the ability of the political groups to engage in activities in third countries beyond debate and parliamentary contact. Unlike the delegation visits to third countries, which have been classed here as instances of rhetorical diplomacy, active diplomacy is about making a material difference (e.g. establishing parliaments, training, election monitoring, etc.) in third countries. For example, since 2008 political groups have worked to support the initiatives of the EP's Office for Promotion of Parliamentary Democracy (OPPD) – which is located in the EP's Directorate for Democracy Support along with the Election Observation Unit – by helping to support parliaments in new and emerging democracies. Part

of this work includes assisting in the establishment of parliaments where they have not existed before and/or to reform parliaments by strengthening their legislative and oversight capacities. The OPPD has already worked with a number of parliaments in the Middle East and North Africa. The parliamentarians of each political group support the OPPD by building long-term relationships with these parliaments and with parliamentarians by providing training, tailor-made assistance, strategic counselling, studies and benchmarks for democratic practices, the provision of administrative and institutional capacities, and the organisation and hosting of study visits to Brussels and Strasbourg.[8]

Such work is also buttressed by the political groups' engagement in the EP's EOMs. The missions are deployed upon invitation from the third country where elections are to be held, and the European Parliament either coordinates through its own EOM structures, such as the Democracy Support and Election Coordination Group (DEG) – which consists of 15 MEPs from across the political groups[9] – or through the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe's (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).[10] By harnessing the skills and resources of the political groups, the EOMs aim to increase the legitimacy of elections and/or referendums in third countries and by deploying MEPs from the political groups to help combat fraud and to increase public confidence. EOMs are deployed for general, presidential, parliamentary, municipal, and regional elections as part of the EU's conflict prevention work (Stapenhurst, O'Brien and Johnston 2008: 2).

Since the EP started to deploy MEPs on EOMs in 1994, there have been a total of 201 missions to date (not including the missions conducted so far over the 2014–2019 legislature) including 65 presidential elections, 77 parliamentary elections, 21 legislative elections, 21 general elections, 7 referenda, and 10 regional and local elections. Over the 1994 to 1999 legislature the EP deployed 41 EOMs, 43 over the 1999–2004 legislature, 73 from 2004

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[6]   www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/d-by/dv/d-by_20110629_01_/d-by_20110629_01_
        en.pdf, accessed 13 July 2012.

[7]   www.europarl.europa.eu/webnp/webdav/site/myjahiasite/users/emartinezdealosmoner/public/Yearbook%20
        2011.pdf, accessed 23 July 2012.

[8]   http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/displayFtu.html?ftuId=FTU_6.4.2.html, accessed 4
        February 2015.

[9]   The DEG is co-chaired by the chairs of the Parliament's AFET and DEVE Committees. The 15 members
        of the DEG include 4 MEPs from the EPP group, S&D (5), ALDE (2), ECR (1), Greens/EFA (1),
        GUE/NGL (1), and EFDD (1). See: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/displayFtu.
        html?ftuId=FTU_6.4.2.html, accessed 4 February 2015.

[10]   http://www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/election_observation/default_en.htm, accessed 4 February 2015.

to 2009, and 44 from 2009 to 2014.[11] The EOMs have been deployed to 74 countries in Europe, Africa, Latin America, Central America and the Caribbean, Russia and Central Asia, North Africa and the Middle East, and the Asia Pacific. As detected by Carothers (1997), this increased use of election monitoring fits in with the broader global trend of a proliferation of EOMs. EOMs have become a crucial element of the EP's parliamentary diplomacy, not just because of the missions themselves but because they allow MEPs to maintain third country contacts and to maintain pressure on those states where human rights, democracy and rule of law concerns exist.

7 Analysis

This paper has already shown how the groups play a legislative, rhetorical, and active role in the EP's diplomacy, which has an important – if differentiated – impact on the CFSP. Primarily, most of the EP groups give unanimous support to the overarching objectives of the CFSP: promoting human rights, the rule of law, and democracy ("rhetorical diplomacy"). Indeed, the majority of groups (with the exception of the EFDD and the ECR in some areas) take a pro-EU stance and actively work for closer EU integration. The EPP, S&D, ECR, ALDE, GUE/NGL, and Greens/EFA all unambiguously refer to human rights, democracy, and the rule of law as key elements of their own international policies and they call for the EU to do the same.[12] In this sense, most of the EP groups are simultaneously acting out of their own political convictions and the broader goal of closer EU integration in foreign affairs. With the exception of the ECR and EFDD groups, a number of EP groups are more ambitious about the role of the CFSP than a lot of the EU member states. Calls by many of the EP groups to increase the international role and presence of the EU through the CFSP are an important political element in ensuring the continued necessity of the CFSP. Without the involvement of the political groups, questions could be raised about the democratic nature of the CFSP; this is important when one considers that the Policy is funded out of the EU budget and thus the pockets of taxpayers.

Yet while a majority of the groups agree on the CFSP's overall objectives (the *why*), there are a number of differences over *how* the EU should conduct its CFSP. The EP groups are far less cohesive when it comes to particular policy areas or crisis response initiatives. For example, while the EPP, S&D, and ALDE broadly agree on the need for EU defence, the ECR, GUE/NGL, and Greens/EFA are against an enhanced EU defence policy. The ECR stress the need for CSDP to not duplicate NATO efforts, whereas the GUE/NGL and Greens/EFA are opposed to any form of militarisation as a matter of political ideology. Furthermore, while the EPP group is in favour of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) the S&D, GUE/NGL, and the Greens/EFA have called for further reflection. The EPP and the S&D also stress the importance of achieving the Millennium Development Goals and eradicating poverty, but the S&D place greater importance on issues such as relations with Latin America and social rights in China. For its part, the GUE/NGL focus a lot of energy on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. For the ALDE, the present focus is on the promotion of a coherent EU strategy on external relations, humanitarian relief, a common defence market, and the further development of the EEAS.[13]

Despite these differences, however, the bulk of MEPs support EU action in a rhetorical sense. Yet one must be precise about the way the groups affect CFSP outcomes and directions. It is not easy to measure the impact of the EP groups on the CFSP. Indeed, it is not uncommon for the EP groups to call for a particular type of EU CFSP action only for the member states and the HR/VP to agree on a similar course. For example, during the "Euromaidan" protests in Ukraine during 2013 the EP showed unanimous support for the protestors during a plenary session in December 2013, and, following calls for greater EU action, Catherine Ashton soon after travelled to Kiev to speak to the protestors. Was the EP the reason why Ashton travelled to Kiev? Similarly, in its resolution[14] on the Ukraine crisis on 5 February 2014 the EP called for targeted sanctions to be imposed on

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11   http://www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/election_observation/default_en.htm, accessed 4 February 2015.

12   See http://www.eppgroup.eu/menu/on-foreign-affairs; http://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/policies/eu-world-stage-0; http://ecrgroup.eu/policy/afet/; http://www.alde.eu/key-priorities/eu-in-the-world/; http://www.guengl.eu/policy; http://www.greens-efa.eu/international-9.html; http://www.efdgroup.eu, accessed 10 February 2015.

13   See http://www.eppgroup.eu/menu/on-foreign-affairs; http://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/policies/eu-world-stage-0; http://ecrgroup.eu/policy/afet/; http://www.alde.eu/key-priorities/eu-in-the-world/; http://www.guengl.eu/policy; http://www.greens-efa.eu/international-9.html; http://www.efdgroup.eu, accessed 10 February 2015.

14   http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=MOTION&reference=P7-RC-2014-0138&language=EN, accessed 11 February 2015.

Ukrainian officials, legislators, and oligarchs and the EU did indeed impose measures on 20 February. Again, was it the EP's pressure that led to this policy decision?

In reality, it is perhaps fair to say that a number of actors, principally the Council of the EU, control the direction of the CFSP. Indeed, if the Council do not want to pursue a particular course of action it seems unlikely that the EP can exert pressure beyond a rhetorical role. For example, in the same resolution passed on 5 February 2014 the EP called for a permanent EP mission in Ukraine based on 'numerous requests by ordinary Ukrainian citizens, activists, and politicians', and it pushed for the EU to commit to 'a swift agreement on a cost-free visa regime' for Ukrainians, but neither materialised.[15] While the EU is working on a visa-free system (to be launched in May 2015) and the EP has sent regular delegation visits to Ukraine, it was unable to get the immediate backing of the Council and the HR/VP for its plans. It is also unclear what impact a permanent EP mission to Ukraine would have had if the plan had been successful. Accordingly, the "active diplomacy" of the EP groups must be viewed on a case-by-case basis and this implies that the EP will not be always able to translate its CFSP ambitions into reality.

However, this is just to write about the difficulties associated with measuring the impact of the EP's rhetorical and active diplomacy on the CFSP. It becomes easier to measure the EP's impact when it comes to legislative diplomacy. Take, for example, the EP's role in the establishment (in 2010) and review (in 2013) of the EEAS. Indeed, prior to the establishment of the EEAS, MEPs Elmar Brok (EPP) and Guy Verhofstadt (ALDE) drafted a report[16] on how the EP would expect the EEAS to function, be organised (indeed the report even includes the EP's own EEAS organigramme), and relate to the EP. Brok's and Verhofstadt's main goal was to make plain to the Council and Commission that the EP had a right to be involved in the functioning of the EEAS, and that the establishment of the EEAS should not be used as a means to exclude the EP from the CFSP. The report made clear the EP's powers over the administrative budget of the EEAS and the annual CFSP budget. When it became

clear that the EU member states were attempting to crowd out the EP, the Parliament, under the authority of MEP Ingeborg Grässle (EPP), threatened to slow down the budgetary approval of the EEAS in the Parliament until its interests were taken into account.[17] In the end, the Council made a number of concessions to the EP, including agreeing to a bi-annual debate between the HR/VP and EP on the CFSP/CSDP.

Thus, the EP used its available powers to ensure that the EEAS would, albeit through its oversight of the Commission, be made more accountable to the EP. MEP Brok and his S&D counterpart, Roberto Gualtieri, would then use the 2013 EEAS review to push for the EP's ambitions for the EEAS. Indeed, in a resolution passed in June 2013 with 501 votes to 96 against and 13 abstentions, Brok and Gualtieri called for a simpler EEAS management chain, that the HR/VP should regularly chair the group of external relations commissioners, and that political deputies should replace the HR/VP on specific work areas in order to lighten the workload on one individual. The report also called for defence attachés to be based in the EUDELs and for the pooling of consular services at the EU level. Finally, the EP report called for heads of EUDELs to have a hearing with the EP before they take up their duties.[18]

Interestingly, a lot of the EP's proposals found their way into the EEAS review that was published by Catherine Ashton in July 2013. Not only did Ashton agree with the EP that some senior posts should be merged (i.e. a single Secretary General post), but that an overall reduction of 11 senior posts by 2014 and an overall reduction of Managing Directorates was needed in order to streamline the EEAS' reporting lines. Furthermore, Ashton agreed to a pilot programme of detaching security and military experts to EUDELs. She also saw the merit of deputising for specific work areas to heads of EUDELs, EU Special Representatives (EUSRs), fellow Commissioners, ministers from the rotating presidency and EU member state foreign ministers. Additionally, while the report fell short of agreeing that the heads of EUDELs should obligatorily appear before the EP before

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15   http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=MOTION&reference=P7-RC-2014-
       0138&language=EN, accessed 11 February 2015.
16   http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/afet/dv/201/201006/20100602_
       finalproposal_en.pdf, accessed 11 February 2015.
17   http://www.europeanvoice.com/article/staffing-rows-threaten-to-delay-eeas-launch/, accessed 7 February
       2015.
18   http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/content/20130607IPR11368/html/EEAS-two-years-on-
       MEPs-call-for-more-ambitious-diplomatic-corps, accessed 11 February 2015.

taking up postings and an enhanced consular role for the delegations, Ashton stated that EEAS officials and heads of EUDELs and EUSRs should be able to take the floor in EP plenary debates (whereas at the time they were not).[19] Finally, the review also called for greater information exchanges between the Service and the AFET/SEDE, that the Chairman of AFET would be invited to parts of the Foreign Affairs Council meetings, and that the HR/VP would cooperate with the EP on identifying and planning EOMs.[20]

Therefore, it seems that the EP was able to impact the organisation of the EEAS through a mixture of its 2013 report (*rhetorical*) and budgetary (*legislative*) powers. While there is still no mention of the EP as a diplomatic actor in the European Commission's Communication on the Comprehensive Approach (2013),[21] it is clear that the EP was clearly able to impact one element, albeit institutional, of the EU's CFSP architecture. It was certainly not sidelined from the EEAS' work. Indeed, HR/VP Federica Mogherini codified the EP's growing legislative power during her hearing (on 6 October 2014) when she stated that she would consult the Parliament on crucial decisions and documents that have budgetary implications. Mogherini also agreed to hold meetings with the EP prior to or after the Foreign Affairs Council meetings.[22] All of these examples show that, while the EP is still not a major actor in the CFSP, it is skilfully utilising its treaty powers to ensure it is heard on matters related to EU external action.

8 Conclusions

Let us return to the initial definitions of diplomacy outlined at the start of this paper. Reading the preceding analysis it is clear that the EP groups do continuously negotiate and maintain open communication channels with groups and individuals in third countries. In this sense, the groups appear to "do" traditional diplomacy even though they do not represent a state or have at their disposal the resources available to foreign ministries. Indeed, the resources that are available to parliamentarians generally come in the form of knowledge. One must not overlook the fact that many MEPs are former prime ministers, former foreign ministers, and high-ranking civil servants such as secretaries of state. Dividing between "legislative diplomacy", "rhetorical diplomacy", and "active diplomacy", this paper has shown how the groups and parties play a wide-ranging, if differentiated, role in the EU's CFSP. While much of the parliamentary diplomacy of the EP groups remains rhetorical, this paper has shown that these actors do make use of legislative mechanisms in order to influence the CFSP and they participate in delegation visits, interparliamentary meetings, and EOMs.

In the overall context of the EU's CFSP it remains clear that the EP groups play a marginal role, yet this is only when compared to what governments and EU institutions can achieve. This may be a false comparison, as parliamentary diplomacy perhaps should not be seen as a replacement for traditional diplomacy, but rather as a complement to it. The diplomatic weaknesses associated with the groups – a lack of resources, being ideologically driven, and not being a state – may actually transpire to be their ultimate strength. Indeed, the added value of the groups and parties is that they are not closely associated with governments, which may well increase their legitimacy in the eyes of third parties in crisis situations. Indeed, parliamentarians may be able to communicate through channels and with groups and individuals that are simply not open to diplomats. In this sense it is striking that when the EU mentions the "comprehensive approach", it does so mainly with national diplomats, EEAS officials, and development assistance specialists in mind. Perhaps it is time for parliamentarians to play a greater role in the EU's CFSP.

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[19] http://eeas.europa.eu/library/publications/2013/3/2013_eeas_review_en.pdf, accessed 11 February 2015.
[20] See page 9: http://eeas.europa.eu/library/publications/2013/3/2013_eeas_review_en.pdf, accessed 7 February 2015.
[21] http://www.eeas.europa.eu/statements/docs/2013/131211_03_en.pdf, accessed 7 February 2015.
[22] http://www.elections2014.eu/en/new-commission/hearing/20140918HEA65218, accessed 8 February 2015.

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