

Chapter 8

How Does the European Parliament Contribute to the Construction of the EU's Interregional Dialogue?

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8.1 Introduction

In the decade to come we may expect to see continuing tension in interregional relations. The crisis of regionalism that began in the early 2000s was exacerbated by the financial strain on the global economy that occurred in 2008. Individual states responded by trying to protect their own interests rather than collaborating to find common solutions that seemed more risky. However, these unilateral solutions did not yield the results that leaders had hoped for and we may therefore now witness the evolution of a new kind of regionalism and, correspondingly, interregionalism. Future interregionalism is going to require new flexibility in order to allow for participation by a plethora of regional organisations around the world and to enable these to communicate with alliances of 'emerging powers'. Today's national and regional parliaments, although they played little role in the interregional negotiations of the past, are well aware of the changes that are taking place. There are several cases of parliamentary assemblies adapting to the needs of these new and complex forms of regionalism more constructively than have their executive bodies.

This chapter focuses on the role of the European Parliament (EP) in the evolution of the interregional relations of the European Union (EU). The aim is to explain how the EP has contributed to the conception and implementation of the EU's interregional strategies. This is crucial in order to understand how the EU's behaviour in

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interregional relations is evolving and to consider its democratic dimension. National parliaments are not traditionally associated with the management of foreign affairs. Many researchers have noted a similar weakness of the EP in this regard although this conceals the fact that in both national and the European systems foreign policy is the responsibility of the executive arm of government. Parliaments may be called upon to scrutinise actions of the Head of state such as the ratification of international agreements or approval of the budget, but the major decision-making power rests with the executive.

There are many historical reasons and contemporary motivations behind this asymmetry between executive and legislative powers: monarchical heritage; the need to have a leader who is able to represent the nation internationally; the poor capacity of an inherently divided assembly to react quickly and decisively to international events; the problems of ensuring confidentiality within the assembly; the preference of representatives for handling domestic legislative and accountability issues because of electoral interests.

The growing presence in contemporary democracies of international, transnational and non-governmental actors who claim to represent the citizens, have also altered the role of parliaments in democratic systems; this has also impacted on the very concept of representation (Castiglione and Warren 2005). The organisations aim to express popular will alongside elected bodies. The status of elected representatives, and parliaments in particular, have also been encroached upon by regional and international organisations, which are becoming increasingly powerful. National legislative elections, which have for so long been the centre of political life in advanced democracies, are now simply one of many factors involved in the policy process. This means that legislative accountability is weakened as the range of actors from organisations that do not work according to the logic of democracy become participant in policy making (Grant and Keohane 2005).

This crisis of democracy has had two consequences. The first is that parliaments are regaining interest in becoming involved in foreign policy. This may be through new forms of inter-parliamentary cooperation or by creating organs devoted to it, such as committees in the national parliament that are specialised in EU affairs. The second is that parliamentary assemblies are being created within regional integration systems (the EP, the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) Parliament (Parlasur), the Pan-African Parliament) in response to concerns about 'democratic deficit'. Contemporary analyses of interregional relations therefore cannot neglect the increasing activity of parliaments in matters of foreign policy.

There has been a growing interest in the involvement of parliamentary bodies in foreign policy. However, the role of the EP in the development of the EU's interregional dialogue is not yet clear. The EP may be considered an example of the 'parliamentarisation' of regional integration, which is distinguished by the creation of regional parliamentary assemblies within established blocs (Malamud and Sousa 2005). The role played by regional parliaments in foreign affairs thus differs from that played by national parliaments in that they develop functions suited to establishing supranational institutions (Malamud and Stavridis 2011). Regional parliaments, which are defined as parliamentary associations among more than three

states and are based on individual membership, may be considered one type of international parliamentary institution (Šabič 2008; Cutler 2001). Although regional parliaments currently contribute only marginally to democratic legitimation beyond the nation-state (Kraft-Kasack 2008), they are able to deliberate about and exchange information on issues of common interest and to act as normative entrepreneurs (Šabič 2013). Not only regional and international but also national and sub-national parliaments are increasingly practising a kind of para-diplomacy or 'parliamentary diplomacy' by engaging in international dialogue alongside the executive authorities (Stavridis 2002; Weisglas and de Boer 2007). The EP is special since it is by far the most powerful regional parliament in existence and it actively promotes regional integration and parliamentary democracy both inside and outside Europe.

Building on the above, this chapter aims to analyse the role of the EP in the EU's foreign policy and in particular in its interregional dialogue. On the one hand, just like national parliaments, the EP is weak in this area. However, while national chambers have traditionally only handled foreign policy issues that challenged their domestic political system (internationalisation, Europeanisation, regional integration), the EP has taken a clear stance on broader foreign policy issues, in part because of its limited legislative and accountability powers. In their pursuit of internal and external legitimacy, the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) have actively promoted regional integration on other continents and have advocated for interregional dialogue by means of various declarations and institutional adaptation. This was particularly marked in the Latin American case. The EP was in fact the first European institution to establish regular contact with the Latin American continent and this took place at a time at which the Commission and the Council of the European Union were mainly concerned with former African colonies. The recent parliamentarisation in MERCOSUR results partly from the institutionalised relations that evolved between Members of the Parliament (MPs) from both regions.

8.2 The European Parliament: The Passion for Foreign Affairs

Despite the traditional weakness of parliaments in foreign affairs, the competence of the EP in this area has increased over time. This is due to the activity of its members, who have shown themselves able to use the EP's deliberative mechanisms in such a way as to strengthen its constitutional, functional and rhetorical resources for foreign affairs. This means that the EP's participation in the EU's foreign policy results from pressure exerted by MEPs rather than from a decision reached by the authorities of member states or by treaty. Although the EP is now active in the field of foreign affairs, parliamentary activities are poorly coordinated with the other involved EU institutions and actors, such as the Commission, the Council of the EU, the European Council, the High Representative, the Court of Justice and the EU member states.

8.2.1 A Weak but Mobilised Institution

Research on the EP or on the institutional system of the European Union rarely mentions the EP's primary function, which is still that of deliberation. Until the mid-1980s, this enabled the EP to overcome its lack of real legislative powers since declarative resolutions on all issues relating to the activities and missions of the Communities could be made by majority rule (Costa 2001). These resolutions confirmed the EP's status as one of the major institutions of the Communities. Formally, the EP's non-legislative resolutions lack juridical impact and only express the parliament's point of view; they are directed to the general public and to other institutions and member states. Despite the strengthening of the EP's legislative powers and accountability, MEPs continue to use non-legislative resolutions, particularly in the field of foreign affairs.

MEPs have consistently used this mechanism to develop a dialogue with other institutions and to enhance their competence. This has also become the major instrument through which MEPs have developed a kind of para-diplomacy by establishing direct contact with third countries and creating inter-parliamentary delegations, joint commissions and a parliamentary assembly with the African, Caribbean and Pacific group of states (ACP). In the 1980s, the EP was caught up in a frenzy of deliberation on foreign policy issues: MEPs were intent on discussing the political situations in various parts of the world, promoting democracy and human rights, denouncing violations and calling for the establishment of multilateral dialogue.

The Commission, the permanent representatives of states and some of the MEPs, have often opposed the EP's efforts to meddle in the political situation of third countries and larger issues (world hunger, prevention and resolution of armed conflicts, gender issues and so on). Nevertheless, the EP's interventions have contributed to democratic transitions and to the solution of national and international crises, though their endeavours are generally better known in third countries than they are within the EU. Some resolutions have also had a direct effect upon EU foreign policy. This has been particularly evident when MEPs have managed to articulate them using the EP's formal powers in international agreements or in the budgetary procedure. Over time, these resolutions have enabled the EP to develop a relatively coherent discourse that has mainly concerned human rights and the promotion of democracy, and they have given the EP a privileged position as interlocutor for minorities and political opponents worldwide (Zanon 2005). The EP may therefore be considered the main source of inspiration for the conditionality principle that today underlies European development cooperation policies and some aspects of trade policy.

Some of the EP's actors (the President, Presidents of the committees on Foreign Affairs and Development) are also active on the international scene and they increase the number of visits to and contacts with third countries. Although the EP has only limited formal powers in the field of foreign policy, the committee on Foreign Affairs has always been one of the most important committees in the EP in terms of number of members and resources.

Because of the increase of its legislative functions, the EP's activities in international relations are less visible now than they were in the past but they remain important for the processes of deliberation that go on in the hemicycle. The limitations of the EP's powers within the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) did not discourage the MEPs; on the contrary, they sought ways to overcome them and in response, the Lisbon Treaty in 2007 granted the EP new powers of consultation in the field of CFSP.

Over the years, MEPs have developed an ambitious discourse on the role the EP, as the 'largest democratic assembly of the world', ought to play, particularly in promoting human rights, democracy, development and peace in former colonies and globally. The EP has thus fashioned itself into something of a proselyser for a method of achieving regional integration that differs from that of creating free trade areas. Historically, MEPs seem to share a conviction that the EP has a mission to perform in which interregionalism plays a central role.

Unlike the Council of the EU and the Commission, which were explicitly awarded foreign policy responsibilities from the start, the EP has had to decide what role to play in this field. Still today, the EP's powers in EU foreign policy are limited and reliant upon a complex set of resources, which will be discussed in the next section.

8.2.2 Means and Resources

When seeking to make an impact on the EU's foreign policy, MEPs usually draw upon three kinds of resources: constitutional, functional and rhetorical. The EP's constitutional competences in foreign policy are limited. Its role in interregional cooperation is shaped by the political guidelines that are articulated by the Council and then embodied in the Commission's proposals. Broad interregional strategies defined under the CFSP framework are given form in the international policies of the old first pillar: development, cooperation, commercial policy and trade, international or association agreements. The legislative influence that the EP is able to exert upon interregional policies depends on the topic. The attributes of each EU institution may be summarised as follows (Table 8.1):

The co-decision procedure used to apply only in development cooperation matters, but with the Lisbon Treaty it was expanded to include economic cooperation and a common commercial policy and this represented an important new area of influence for the EP. The EP must be consulted in the ratification of international agreements. In the case of accession and association treaties, trade agreements and other international agreements that establish a specific institutional framework, have budgetary implications or entail amendment to an act adopted by co-decision, the EP may either approve or reject the agreement. However, the EP has no formal role in negotiations and it cannot propose amendments to the agreements. The EP therefore tries constantly to compensate for this legislative weakness by using alternative instruments related to its budgetary, accountability and deliberative functions.

Table 8.1 Decision-making procedures in interregional cooperation (after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty)

	Competence	Commission	Council	European Parliament
Development cooperation	Complementary	Proposal	Qualified majority vote (QMV)	Ordinary legislative procedure (co-decision)
Economic, financial and technical cooperation				
Commercial policy	Exclusive			
Trade agreements		Recommendation to open negotiation;	QMV (with exceptions)	Assent
International agreements	Complementary	proposal for signing and concluding an agreement		Consultation or assent
Association agreements	Exclusive		Unanimity	Assent

Source: Adapted and updated by the authors from Keukeleire and MacNaughtan (2008: 105)

Before the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty (which abolishes the distinction between compulsory and non-compulsory expenditures), the EU's expenses for external relations and development fell under the category of non-compulsory expenditures, on which the EP had the final word. The EP used this competence to prompt the Commission to follow EP recommendations and to prioritise democracy and human rights. At the initiative of the Parliament in 1994, a chapter entitled *European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights* was created within the EU budget. Its objective was to promote human rights, democracy and conflict prevention in third countries by providing financial aid for specific projects. The CFSP budget has also been seen by the EP as an opportunity for self-empowerment in foreign policy because it is subject to the general budgetary procedures of the EU. In 1997, the EP agreed not to modify details of CFSP expenses in exchange for better information from the Council about activities in this policy field, and recognition of the principle of parliamentary scrutiny. However, member states often avoid parliamentary interference on this topic by opting for *ad hoc* solutions to financial programmes or by launching projects with insufficient funding (Keukeleire and MacNaughtan 2008: 120).

Still within the ambit of the CFSP, the EP may present questions in writing to the Council or invite the presidency to explain the nomination of the EU High Representative as additional ways of enhancing the parliamentary role (Crum 2006). The Lisbon Treaty also meant that the High Representative became the vice-president of the Commission and this made appointment to this post subject to the approval of the EP.

The EP also makes use of some resources that go beyond the text of the treaties. Over the years, various inter-institutional agreements have increased the EP's access to information and *droit de regard* over the EU's external activities in relation to the Council—the *Luns procedure* of 1964 and the *Luns–Westerterp procedure* of

1973—or to the Commission—the *Framework agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the Commission* (European Parliament and Commission of the European Communities 2005). The EP has also taken advantage of its organisational autonomy to maximise its influence, mainly using its rules of procedure to broaden its space for manoeuvre. MEPs have additionally demanded scrutiny rights over foreign policy by arguing that they already have legislative and budgetary competences related to the EU's external actions. More specifically, MEPs claim, in certain areas covered by the assent procedure, the right of elaborating real negotiation mandates mainly in commercial matters.

MEPs also lean on their accountability functions, particularly in relation to supervising international negotiations by means of hearings, committees of enquiry, questions, reporting and debates. Depending on the agreement under discussion and the third countries involved, the EP may opt for an intervention before, during or at the end of the negotiation (Di Paola 2003). On completion of negotiations, the EP may only approve or reject a treaty but its report will usually refer to conditions that should be fulfilled when the agreement is implemented. During negotiations, the EP may send signals to the parties in the form of legislative resolutions, recommendations to the Council within the framework of CFSP and urgent debates. If the EP wishes to try and exert influence before the negotiation mandate is given to the Commission, it may appoint a *rapporteur* to follow the discussions and then indicate political guidelines for the negotiations. The increasing participation of MEPs in summits organised between the EU and third countries or regions also reflects this 'anticipation strategy'.

However, the EP's interventions may be ineffective unless MEPs are capable of acting, which means obtaining and handling information. In order to do this, they must search for information in other institutions (mainly the European Commission, but also the Council and permanent representations), in third countries' institutions and from experts and interest groups (non-governmental organisations (NGOs), political opposition in exile). This is no easy task since EU institutions tend to interact minimally with the EP and generally only fulfil their formal obligations to deliver information (Diedrichs 2004: 35). Once they have received information, MEPs will consult experts such as specialised civil servants of parliamentary committees and political groups for analysis.

In 2008, the EP launched a new initiative in the international field: the Office for Promotion of Parliamentary Democracy. This is intended to provide technical assistance to parliamentary institutions in new and emerging democracies that are not part of the EU. This organ is innovative for two reasons. First, it constitutes an exclusively EP initiative that bears no intrinsic relation to earlier EU actions or agreements. Second, the financial support for the activities of the Office is provided entirely by the EP's budget and this had not previously been common practice. The Office may give the EP relative autonomy to act externally, at least in relation to strengthening the role of parliaments in developing countries.

To these legal and functional resources, MEPs have added rhetorical instruments. They must not only adopt a position but must also prove their usefulness in order to quell the scepticism of other EU actors. MEPs must therefore try to maintain their

credibility by reconciling contradictory qualities: on the one hand, determination and engagement and, on the other, moderation and realism. They must also position themselves collectively and this is problematic since the EP suffers from numerous internal divisions. Since the assembly makes decisions about external relations on the basis of simple majority and usually votes on declarative resolutions at the end of the monthly session, when attendance is low, the results of votes are unpredictable. The EP also has to present a coherent position over time in order to be listened to and this position needs to be in harmony with its other activities (legislative and budgetary).

If they want their colleagues in the Commission, the Council and the European Council to listen to what they have to say, the MEPs need to persuade them of possible benefits. In the first place, the MEPs have called attention to the need to reduce the democratic deficit that is affecting the EU and its international policies. They have argued that EU negotiators should combine two simultaneous mandates: one from the Council, in the name of member states, and another from the EP, representing Europe's citizens. This follows the logic of double representation mentioned in Article 10 of the Treaty on European Union.¹

More broadly, MEPs claim that they mediate between citizens and governments: they want to bring the citizens' point of view to government attention and, conversely, to explain to voters the EU's external policy. MEPs maintain that parliamentary implication in the management of international negotiations enhances EU efficiency and they refer to the 'capacity of constraint' (Meunier 2005: 74) and the 'strategy of tied hands' (Orbie 2008: 41) that North American negotiators have commonly referred to. Their argument is that a political body may exploit its institutional deficiencies in negotiations in order to win concessions from the other parties: citing internal inflexibility may earn concessions from the outside. It may thus be to the advantage of EU negotiators to mention a mandate given by the EP, risks of parliamentary veto (through the assent procedure) or other sanctions.

The EP still has few formal powers in the field of foreign policy and this suggests that the European level reflects the constitutional arrangements of the national level (Thym 2006). Declaration 14, annexed to the Lisbon Treaty, explicitly states that 'the provisions covering the Common Foreign and Security Policy do not give new powers to the Commission to initiate decisions nor do they increase the role of the European Parliament'. The EP's influence in the field of external relations thus depends largely on the ability of its members to mobilise functional and rhetorical resources in order to exert pressure on the Commission and the Council to deliver information and to take the EP's position into account. These informal strategies are applied mainly in interregional negotiations.

¹Article 10: 1. The functioning of the Union shall be founded on representative democracy. 2. Citizens are directly represented at Union level in the European Parliament. Member States are represented in the European Council by their Heads of state or government and in the Council by their governments, themselves democratically accountable either to their national Parliaments, or to their citizens.

The following section presents the way in which the EP incorporates these mechanisms into the legal framework of the EU and it discusses their implementation through parliamentary resolutions concerning regional integration worldwide.

8.3 The European Parliament and Interregionalism

One of the European Community's first initiatives in the international field was to foster regional cooperation in other regions (Smith 2008: 76). Ironically, critique of the ambiguities and weaknesses of European integration has always been accompanied by optimism about the benefits of integration for other regions of the world (Costa and Foret 2005: 507–508). The European Community's institutions therefore gradually developed a policy of exporting their own concepts and mechanisms by offering technical and financial support to states that showed interest in developing regional organisations. From the 1990s, this strategy was elaborated with trade agreements, partly in response to the United States' (US) moves towards regionalism (Meunier and Nicolaidis 2005: 265).

In the 1960s and 1970s, preferential agreements were signed with the immediate neighbours and former colonies of France, Belgium and the United Kingdom. In the 1980s, Latin America was included on account of its ties to Portugal and Spain. In all of these regions, interregionalism played a fundamental role in EU foreign policy. By institutionalising economic relations with these hitherto non-formalised regional zones, the EU became an external catalyser of regional dynamics (Petiteville 2006: 119). Regionalism therefore not only spurs interregionalism but may also be influenced by it.

This section aims to assess the instruments and positions adopted by the EP concerning EU's interregional relations. The first part analyses how the MEPs have shaped the internal structure of the EP in order to be able to act effectively in this field. The second part provides a qualitative analysis of texts adopted by the EP from 1994 to 2009 concerning regional integration in the world.

8.3.1 *Committees and Delegations*

Interregional issues used to fall under the competence of the following parliamentary committees: Foreign Affairs, Development and International Trade. However, because of the EP's formal weakness in the field of foreign affairs, inter-parliamentary delegations and joint parliamentary committees are useful tools for the development of 'para-diplomacy'. The committees are the most important actors for legislative work while parliamentary delegations (from the EP), joint or cooperation committees (that gather representatives from the EP and other regional or national parliaments) and inter-parliamentary assemblies play a particular role in political relations with different regions. These committees and assemblies try to bring the EP's

perspectives to the attention of parliamentarians from third countries/regions and also to inform the EP's dialogue with the Council and the Commission (Keukeleire and MacNaughtan 2008: 96). These organs therefore have a dual function; they help supplement the EP's information about the EU's external relations and execution of agreements and also keep the EP abreast of the foreign policy process. Indeed, the exclusion of MEPs from formal negotiations enables them to take positions that are not possible for EU's officials (Weiler 1980: 181). This explains the central role that the EP plays, along with the Council, in regular political dialogue in interregional relations. The Commission is also involved in these dialogues but its role is often more bureaucratic than political and this tends to result in discussion about formalities rather than genuine dialogue. Because of their democratic legitimacy and political skills, MEPs are often able to smooth the way towards the conclusion of negotiations.

Parliamentary dynamics reveal two main movements. Firstly, MEPs have gradually achieved a degree of autonomy from the EU in the international forum. While the first delegations were organised to follow international agreements signed by the EU, in the 1970s MEPs began building delegations without waiting for special legal steps from the Community. This was the case, for instance, with the delegations for the United States (1972) and for Japan (1978). Secondly, the MEPs took account of the fact that regional organisations were gaining strength around the world; exclusive delegations were created for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1999, the Andean Community (CAN) and MERCOSUR in 2004, and the Pan-African Parliament in 2009. It therefore seems that the EP's delegations are particularly sensitive to the promotion of regionalism. As one MEP put it, 'our task is to spread the value of the new multilateralism, the need and advantages of supranationalism' (Herranz 2005). The effect of social interaction in inter-parliamentary encounters is also significant: parliamentarians from third countries are exposed to the EP's regional experience and MEPs strengthen their involvement in regionalism and international relations. In this sense, delegations contribute to the parliamentarisation of EU's interregional dialogue.

8.3.2 Resolutions

With the enlargement of the Community in the 1970s and 1980s, and especially after the direct elections, the EP gradually acquired the status of a forum for discussion of international challenges—a kind of 'United Nations bis' (Mammonas 1999: 583). In the period covered in our analysis (from the 4th to the 6th legislatures; 1994–2009), the place of regional integration is visible in the approved documents, mainly regarding Latin America, Africa and, to a lesser extent, Asia. Whenever possible, the EP connects the subject of the resolution to the role of regionalism in the corresponding country or region. A clear example is a resolution on MERCOSUR from 2002, in which the EP calls for a rapid resolution of the Argentinian crisis, strengthening of integration within the bloc and a satisfactory

conclusion of the EU–MERCOSUR Association Agreement (European Parliament 2002a). In its efforts to strengthen relations between the EU and Eastern Europe, the EP also highlights the benefits of greater cooperation between the countries of the Baltic Sea (European Parliament 1996b) and even argues that an increased effort to achieve regional cooperation is what is required to put a stop to Israeli blockage of goods from reaching Palestine and to bring peaceful integration instead (European Parliament 1995d, e).

These arguments correspond rhetorically with the perspective that claims that ‘there is no development without integration nor integration without development. The entire integration process revolves around the benefits of peace, democracy and economic well-being’ (Barón 1992). It may also be argued that the EP’s emphasis on regionalism is also part of an effort to increase EU influence in the world, analogously to the way the EP stressed the importance of European integration in order to increase its own influence (Costa 2001: 25). The Parliament recognises:

[the] Union’s goal of creating a global network of cooperation and understanding, the European Council’s aim being both to establish closer relations between the EU and the various regions at bi- and multilateral level and to promote regional integration. Nor is cooperation at the various levels to be confined to the economic sphere: it is also to embrace political and social exchanges. This multifaceted cooperation is intended to increase the European Union’s influence on the various regions so that the overriding objectives may be pursued.

(European Parliament 1996a: 7).

This explains the large number of resolutions that focus on interregional relations. The support to EU–ACP cooperation is frequently mentioned in EP resolutions (European Parliament 1997, 1998). A recent text on EU–Africa relations calls for a continent-to-continent approach to political dialogue and suggests ways of achieving this that stress the role of the African Union (European Parliament 2007d). In a resolution on the EU–South Africa Strategic Partnership, the EP points out that this partnership should complement the EU–Africa strategy and requests that South Africa clarify its relationship with the various regional integration projects on the continent so that a more comprehensive regional development policy might be devised (European Parliament 2006b). In the context of the Euro–Mediterranean Conference of 1995, the EP highlights the importance of founding a new framework for closer cooperation with Maghreb countries (European Parliament 1995a, c). Latin America and Asia have also been the subjects of numerous resolutions in which the EP reiterates its belief in the usefulness of regional approaches to strategic issues and expresses support for elaboration of EU policies for these regions, and for greater mutual economic cooperation (European Parliament 1995b, 2002b, 2005, 2006a, 2008a, b, c). With regard to MERCOSUR, the EP explicitly states its agreement with the Commission’s policies of technical and financial support to this regional integration project and it suggests economic priorities (European Parliament 1994).

The EP not only offers institutional support to the EU by defending regionalism, but its resolutions on the issue stress its own role *vis-à-vis* the other institutions. This is evident in two resolutions on regional strategy papers: the EP argues that the Commission goes beyond its implementation powers by including policies designed

to strengthen regional integration and the EU's relations with other regions and it requests that the Commission adhere to its primary task, which is the eradication of poverty (European Parliament 2007b, c). Because MEPs attach such value to their institutional autonomy, they end up counteracting the EP's traditional position on interregionalism though this may also reflect the lack of internal agreement on some issues; the EP is a heterogeneous organisation and differences between the stances of its national delegations and political groupings have to be reconciled before a common position can be presented (Viola 2000).

The resolutions in which the EP most vigorously supports interregionalism also include a bid for more power, as a challenge to both the Commission and the Council. If greater European integration benefits the EP, then an increase in regional integration initiatives around the world that spur the development of other regional assemblies may help legitimise the EP and enhance its role both internally and externally. The EP has therefore repeatedly requested greater parliamentary input into the EU's interregional activities. For instance, in its annual resolutions on the ACP–EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly, the EP highlights the importance of the Assembly's input into negotiations about agreements and into the normalisation of conflict situations.² These arguments are put forward even when no other regional parliament or joint parliamentary assembly is involved in interregional negotiations; the EP then calls for 'a parliamentary branch' to be developed and for regular exchange visits of parliamentary delegations that 'are essential if there is to be greater mutual understanding of matters of common interest' (European Parliament 2006b, 2007a). More explicitly, the EP has requested the prompt establishment of a regional parliament in partner regions that would enable inter-parliamentary delegations to be formed from both regional assemblies and this would ultimately award the EP a stronger role in driving the negotiations (European Parliament 2006c).

The EP's resolutions on interregional relations show a parliamentary interest in an issue that does not usually fall within the remit of national parliaments. EP debates mean that resolutions are taken seriously and have a political impact both in the EU and in the target countries. However, surmounting democratic deficit is not the primary motivation for the EP's interest in regionalism. Promoting regionalism is understood within the EP largely as a way to optimise the EU's global position and to affirm its status both internally and externally as a parliamentary institution. Both of these goals may be achieved if the EP is able to prompt regional organisations to become key actors in international relations.

8.4 Promoting Cooperation with MERCOSUR

The relations between the EP and MERCOSUR reflect the EP's support for interregionalism and its use of a combination of formal, functional and rhetorical instruments. Indeed, the creation of the MERCOSUR Parliament in 2006 is closely

²Resolutions on the results of the work of the ACP–EU Joint Assembly from 1994 to 2003.

related to the policies carried out not only by the Commission but also by the EP. The EP's interest in MERCOSUR as a bloc has two origins. Firstly, the EP supports the Commission's pursuit of trade partners through the use of parliamentary diplomacy. Although the Commission is pragmatic and simultaneously develops bilateral and multilateral agreements, interregional contacts make negotiations more efficient for the EU and in the case of MERCOSUR they have the added advantage of excluding the United States (see Santander in this volume). Secondly, bloc-to-bloc relations allow the EP to establish relations with other regional assemblies—something that is not possible in bilateral relations. MERCOSUR proved to provide fertile soil for developing these kinds of relations, particularly after 2005.

The EP first mentioned Latin America in a 1963 resolution on the commercial relations between the two regions (European Parliament 1963). In 1974, dialogue between the EP and the Latin American Parliament (Parlatino)³ was formally established through biannual inter-parliamentary conferences between the European Community and Latin America. These were intended to provide a forum for analysis and discussion of matters of mutual concern. When military dictatorships dominated in Latin America, Europe had problems approaching them for discussions and so this parliamentary forum provided the main instrument for contact with Europe (Dabène 2009: 137). This gave EC–Latin America relations a political dimension that has no equivalent in other geographic areas (Celare 1996: 45). The conferences have helped strengthen historical, economic and cultural ties between the two regions and to increase deputies' knowledge about foreign political systems. For the Latin American parliaments, it was chiefly the innovative features of a supranational parliament that were brought to their attention every 2 years. Support for regional integration was regularly reiterated at these conferences and was usually included in final declarations and other legal acts (Irela 1993: 33).

After the creation of MERCOSUR in 1991, the EP followed the developments of its Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) closely. In 1996, the EP's Delegation for relations with South America became the 'Delegation for relations with South America and MERCOSUR'. A special Delegation for relations with MERCOSUR was created in 2004 and this consolidated relations and the regularity of visits of MEPs to the Southern Cone. Although its competences regarding inter-parliamentary delegations are yet to be defined, the recently created Euro–Latin American Parliamentary Assembly (Eurolat) within the Committee on Foreign Affairs should help consolidate parliamentary exchanges between the regions. Eurolat follows the model of the ACP–EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly that was created with the Lomé Convention (1975). However, the establishment of Eurolat also springs from the ambitions of some right-wing Spanish MEPs who wanted to increase their influence and counterbalance the left-wing majority in the EP's Delegations for Latin

³Parlatino was created in 1964 in Lima, Peru, but its Treaty of Institutionalisation was only signed in 1987. This was partly because of the dictatorial regimes that governed several member states at the time. Parlatino is formed from the national elected parliaments of Latin America and it is intended to promote political dialogue and exchange of parliamentary experience and is to bring the parliaments of the region together in the creation of democracy and integration.

America during the 6th legislature. This strategy was well understood by left-wing MERCOSUR MPs, who then agreed to participate in Eurolat in order to counterbalance the 'strong right-wing character' it has acquired.⁴

Since the beginning of the JPC, parliamentarians from MERCOSUR also pursued closer relations with the EP and received a ready response. In 1996, both institutions agreed to hold regular meetings and to strengthen their cooperation in accordance with the 1995 Interregional Agreement EU–MERCOSUR. Subsequent exchanges, technical assistance, instruction courses for JPC staff and financial cooperation from the European Commission resulted largely from this parliamentary contact. An intention to build a parliament in MERCOSUR was also often reiterated in the final declarations of these meetings.

Inter-parliamentary conferences between the EU and Latin America were also carried out in this period. Their agendas included the growing number of integration initiatives and consequent sub-regional inter-parliamentary dialogue. These conferences played an important role in guiding the EP's legislative acts and political initiatives with regard to Latin America. However, EP members recognised that the final documents resulting from the conferences had little influence over parliamentary activity (European Parliament 1999: 32). This is the reason that from 1993 onwards, participants began trying to 'leave the utopias behind' by reducing the number of topics for discussion at the meetings and instead increasing the depth of discussion about each one (Parlatino 1993: 7). The quality of debate was thus improved and the Commission began to show greater interest in their conclusions and resulting recommendations. Nevertheless, their importance is related more to political dialogue about relations between the regions and to exchange of viewpoints through deliberation than to practical issues or policy-making. 'Efforts in the name of regional integration' were often singled out as a major political achievement in Latin America and EU support to such initiatives was considered to be the main axle of relations between the regions (Parlatino 1993: 26). The potential benefits for Latin America of strengthened democracy and integration were also noted: 'it is clear that integration is not a panacea, a solution for all situations. But it is a method of civic work, often efficient, which must evidence in the next years its capacity to contribute to the growing of the economies of this side of the ocean as well and to create a fairer society' (Parlatino 1993: 43).

This international legislative network (Slaughter 2004: 104) helped MERCOSUR MPs to act as catalysts for the institutional development of regional integration. It also helped legislators to do their work better (Slaughter 2004: 125) since it provided participants—both from the EU and MERCOSUR—with technical support, advice and resources that have influenced their level of professionalism and the establishment of a common language for parliamentary work. Consequently, this network favoured institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 151): the reference to the European experience became central for JPC members.

⁴ Authors' interview, member of the MERCOSUR Parliament, Montevideo, March 2009.

MPs explicitly mentioned the EP as a model for MERCOSUR in meetings and written documents.⁵ The impact of the EP on the imagination of MERCOSUR MPs continued after the establishment of the Parliament. A survey of 24 members of the *Parlasur* from all member states show that around 90 % believed that the EU is an important or very important source of inspiration for MERCOSUR and that the EU has had an important or very important influence in the evolution of the institutional system of MERCOSUR. Many MEPs think in the same way (Sierens 2009: 69). Overall, MERCOSUR parliamentarians affirm that 'the European Parliament has been a model for the MERCOSUR Parliament'⁶ and 'it is even superior to national parliaments in some areas, we have to work responsibly to get there, not hurriedly, but we have to walk in this direction'.⁷

There are several reasons for the interest of MEPs in the MERCOSUR region. Firstly, there is the economic significance of the region. Parliamentarians generally follow economic agreements that have been negotiated by the Commission as part of their accountability powers. In the case of MERCOSUR, negotiations progressed to bring about an association agreement; this is still rare for the EU and it deserves particular attention. According to one MEP, the agreement between the EU and MERCOSUR would create 'the most important association and free trade area on the planet, in political, commercial and economic terms'.⁸ Moreover, as Santander points out in this volume, some European countries have historically had special economic interests in and commercial relations with Latin America.

The second reason for MEP interest in the MERCOSUR region is related to the consensus among European institutions on the need for stronger regional integration within Latin America, because 'it is easier to cooperate with regions than with each country separately'.⁹ EP powers have historically grown stronger in tandem with the deepening of the European integration process; similarly, a parliament in MERCOSUR would enhance integration within the bloc and then increase the possibilities for the EU to develop a privileged partnership in South America. According to one MEP, 'MERCOSUR has to advance in the integration of markets as a priority, to build a communitarian law, to move forward, to do more in the sense of integration. [...] I think the creation of *Parlasur* is a decisive step'.¹⁰

⁵For instance, Brazilian proposal to an agenda for the institutionalisation of the MERCOSUR Parliament, Porto Alegre, 9 November 2000; Ney Lopes, Brazilian Deputy, Partido da Frente Liberal, open meeting about the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and MERCOSUR, Brasília, 9 September 2001; Confucio Moura, Brazilian Deputy, Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro, ordinary meeting of the Brazilian section of JPC, Brasília, 18 September 2001; Dr. Rosinha, Brazilian Deputy, Partido dos Trabalhadores, Workshop 'Parlamento do Mercosul e Integração Fronteiriça', Foz do Iguaçu, 3–4 November 2003. The reference to the European Union when MERCOSUR is mentioned is also usual in academic sectors and media of all member states.

⁶Authors' interview, member of the Brazilian National Congress, Brasília, April 2009.

⁷Authors' interview, member of the Brazilian National Congress, Brasília, April 2009.

⁸Authors' interview, member of the European Parliament, Brussels, October 2008.

⁹Authors' interview, member of the European Parliament, Brussels, October 2008.

¹⁰Authors' interview, member of the European Parliament, Brussels, October 2008.

The third reason is that many MEPs believe that the EU is an exportable model.

The European model is a global model. [...] there is nothing like it in history. Twenty-seven states have given up their sovereignty to constitute a supranational organisation that has a real parliament, for the citizens, elected by universal suffrage. There is nothing like this in the world, so our example is for the whole world. [...] We have good experience of integration and we have seen its benefits. We strongly believe that if other regions integrate themselves it will be beneficial for them.¹¹

By stimulating the creation of new regional parliaments, the EP increases its own chances of gaining double legitimisation and institutional reinforcement. MERCOSUR is widely understood among European deputies as the most important example of integration in the Americas and as the one in the world that is most similar to the EU.

The fourth reason is the cultural and historical links between parts of Europe and Latin America. Some MEPs, mainly those from Spain or Portugal, claim that ‘they carry Latin America in their hearts’.¹² They also say,

That the European Union and Latin America have a natural inclination to get along well due to the political, historical and cultural affinities. This does not exist between the EU and other blocs, such as Southeast Asia, which may be very important blocs but they do not have the deep affinities that exist between Latin America and Europe.¹³

As Santander argues in this volume, this corresponds with the desire of Spanish and, to a lesser extent, Portuguese leaders to maintain their position *vis-à-vis* their former colonies. Since joining the Community, Spain has pushed for the development of relations between Europe and Latin America as part of a political strategy for its own international projection.

The interest displayed by the EP has had considerable influence upon deputies from MERCOSUR countries (Dri 2010). No other assembly or organisation in the world has kept such close parliamentary relations with MERCOSUR (more than 50 meetings of various kinds in 18 years). Nor has the JPC received any greater financial, technical and ideological support than that given by the EU. The JPC considered the EP an important ally in the struggle for power within MERCOSUR and the European model was the only example of regional integration readily available to the parliamentary actors of the bloc. Of course, most insisted that MERCOSUR must find its own way to create a regional assembly in a way that responded to the region’s needs at that time but ideas taken from the European model were always in the background. When Parlasur held its first plenary session in May 2007 it therefore copied several features of its European counterpart: political groups, direct elections and demographic representation. By thus helping to strengthen regional integration, the EP has contributed to the ‘capacity-building interregionalism’ carried out by the EU (see Doidge in this volume; also see Doidge 2007: 242).

¹¹ Authors’ interview, members of the European Parliament, Brussels, October 2008.

¹² Authors’ interview, members of the European Parliament, Brussels, October 2008.

¹³ Authors’ interview, members of the European Parliament, Brussels, October 2008.

8.5 Conclusion

According to the institutional design and treaties of the EU, the EP is not supposed to be an important actor in interregional dialogue. However, in reality it plays a key role in EU contacts with other regional organisations for many reasons. Firstly, in the 1970s and 1980s, external relations became a concern for MEPs as an area of influence that could compensate for the EP's lack of legislative powers. Secondly, MEPs have tended to export the principle of 'political' regional integration to other continents on ideological grounds (federalism) and as a means to support human rights and democracy. The promotion of proto-federalism could help legitimise the EP's own claims to be playing an indispensable role in European integration. The EP has therefore actively supported the development of other regional organisations and the formalisation of interregional dialogue with them. This is most evident in the case of Latin America in general and in MERCOSUR in particular. The EP has not only pioneered and encouraged interregional contacts with Latin American partners but has also promoted and inspired the creation of new regional parliaments. The Latin American case illustrates the EP's ability to contribute, through interregional dialogue, to regionalisation outside the EU and to the parliamentarisation of regional integration.

EP activities in this field are problematic for the EU and raise the question of the coherence of its external action. The EP has consistently upheld an idealistic approach to international relations that is grounded in European values (human rights, democracy and peace) and notions of federalism. The EP's position on interregional dialogue is more idealistic than that of the Commission or the member states. Since MEPs hold direct responsibility for neither negotiations nor their immediate consequences, they enjoy relative freedom in their approach to foreign affairs and are less constrained by *realpolitik* considerations than are the members and agents of the Commission and Council. If focus is put solely upon the actions of the EP then the EU's relationship with MERCOSUR may seem to be a form of pure interregionalism but the strategic partnership between EU and Brazil promoted by the Commission and member states in fact give it a more 'hybrid' nature.

The divergence between the visions of the EP, the Commission and the Council regarding interregional relations begs questions about the EP's impact on EU foreign policy. The EP clearly has an impact through its activities in interregional relations, but this also reveals some of the EU's foreign policy coordination problems. The discrepancies between the Commission and the intergovernmental organs (Council of Foreign Affairs, European Council) are well-known but further research is required to analyse the new tensions that have been growing since the creation of a permanent President of the European Council and of a High Representative for Foreign Affairs, who are at the same time members of the Commission and the European Council/the Council. The EP is also part of this story and scholars will eventually need to examine its impact on the coherence of EU external action, particularly in the field of interregional dialogue, in which the EP has always been active.

We should not simply consider that the EP is doing the ‘right’ thing by advocating a supranational vision of interregional relations. The precise effect of its actions on EU relations with other regions remains uncertain. It is not yet clear whether the EP is rigidifying or softening power relations between the EU and other regions. MEPs have traditionally advocated for ‘pure’ interregionalism that is guided by European values and principles, but is this really what EU partners want? International relations literature has shown that, although interregional relations are conducted on the pretext of yielding win-win solutions, real power differentials mean that the EU is often able to impose its vision upon its partners. By the same token, it is more difficult for the EU to impose its vision on the relatively more powerful East Asian region than on the relatively weak African region, while Latin America lies somewhere between these two (Söderbaum et al. 2005: 377). It is thus important to acknowledge the resistance among some of the EU’s counterparts of the idealistic views promoted by MEPs, especially in the current context of emerging powers and crisis of traditional regionalism.

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Members of the MERCOSUR Parliament

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