No group, not even the largest, holds a majority in the EP. Experience tells us that it is quite normal to seek out majorities in such a situation. In the last Parliament, we [the European People’s Party] came to an agreement with the Liberals [on the EP President] … Parliament would, however, be somewhat out of balance if … the second-largest group in this House [the Socialists] were to be kept out of the Presidential office for at least twelve-and-a-half years. For that reason, we have come to this agreement with the Socialist Group … We in this Parliament have a great interest in the stability of the European institutions … The issues will still be there, and will still be bones of contention, but it is important that the institutions be stable.


In making the above speech in 2004, Hans Gert Pöttering, the leader of the Group of the European People’s Party/European Democrats (EPP/ED), was reaffirming the politics of institutionalized consensus in the European Parliament (EP). In 1999 the centre-right won the EP elections. The EPP opted to use its position of increased strength to conclude an agreement with the smaller Liberal Group at the expense of the Socialists. The agreement covered the election of the EP’s President in 1999 and 2002, the logrolling of important committee chairmen between the two groups, and a new status for the Liberals as the preferred interlocutor of the EPP on policy matters.

Before 1999 this type of agreement had existed between the two largest groups, the EPP and the Socialists, for a decade. In 2004 the EPP opted to revert to it. Pöttering’s speech emphasized the importance of maintaining consensus between the large groups and allocating the presidency of the EP to the Socialists at some point in view of their status as one of the two largest groups. The need for ‘balance’ frequently cited by leading members of the main political groups underpins the institutionalization of consensus in the EP.

The EP elected in June 2009 contains 167 national parties from 27 member states, within seven political groups. As the Table 7.1 shows, in 2009 the parties of the centre and right had a clear majority in the EP, which had already moved further to the right in 1999 and 2004. A small gain in 2009 was made by the Greens, although insufficient to compensate a loss by the Socialist and the Left (ex-Communist) groups. The EPP also made a small loss, although if we...
take into account the defection of the British and Czech Conservatives into the new Conservative Group, the EPP made a significant gain. The Conservatives and the Eurosceptic EFD Group on the right replaced two similar groups in the previous Parliament. Fewer than half of the Members of the EP (MEPs) came from parties of government, meaning that the European Commission that took office in 2010 commands the direct, party-based support of less than half the EP.

The potential for fragmentation is obvious, but the system holds together. This matters because of the extent of the EP’s powers to amend, approve or reject 75% of the domestic regulation in the member states. The Lisbon Treaty has given the EP control over the European Union’s (EU) agriculture and trade policies. In any case, the power of the EP to set, with the agreement of the governments, standards within the world’s largest internal market has an indirect effect on the rest of the global economy.

In analysing the politics of consensus, this chapter explains why this grand coalition continues, even if a centre-right majority including the Conservatives is numerically possible. The chapter summarizes the history, development and powers of the EP. It provides an overview of the increases in its powers provided under the various treaties, before explaining the context of consensus that exists under the EU’s political system. Next, it returns to summarizing some of the existing literature that identifies the EP as an increasingly competitive institution and it presents a challenge to that assumption, namely how path dependence explains the continuity of consensus in the EP. Finally it focuses on the role of the EP in international politics.

The History and powers of the EP

The EP was first established as the Common Assembly (CA) of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1953. It was a consultative assembly composed of delegates sent by national parliaments, although its component party families organized themselves into ideological party groups and agreed to appoint key officers in the assembly by consensus and according to proportionality between the political tendencies.

What explains its creation? During the negotiations on the ECSC, the French Government wanted to establish a supranational executive to control German re-industrialization and guarantee prices for French industry. The delegation of sovereignty to the High Authority, which was the predecessor of the European Commission, triggered concern over a legitimacy deficit for which the creation of the CA was the eventual solution, despite initial French objections. It was felt that such supervisory functions, including censure, could not be exercised by the Council without endangering the supranational independence of the High Authority (Rittberger 2005). For this reason, the CA’s only real power was the power to remove the High Authority from office by a two-thirds majority. This was unlikely ever to occur before direct elections to the

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<td>194</td>
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<td>7.5</td>
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<td>3.7</td>
<td>735</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percentage change since 2004</td>
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<td>+1.8</td>
<td>-2.3</td>
<td>-0.6</td>
<td>-0.7</td>
<td>+3.7</td>
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Note: This takes into account the changes in the Government of Bulgaria resulting from national elections held one month after the European elections. One of the 736 seats was vacant.
EP, since the Assembly was composed of delegates drawn from national parliaments, where the governments that had appointed the Commissions had majorities. It was nevertheless a safeguard.

In 1958 the CA became the Parliamentary Assembly of the European Economic Community (EEC) and European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM). The ECSC, EEC and EURATOM were merged in 1966 while the EP gained its first powers over the budget in 1970. Besides censure, from 1958 to 1970, it was merely consulted on measures where the Council of Ministers decided on proposals made by the European Commission.

The 1970 budget treaty gave the EP the right to propose amendments to legislation, which might be easier for the Council to accept than reject. The context was the creation of a system of own resources to fund the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Anticipating the United Kingdom’s likely opposition to the CAP, the French Government was anxious to institutionalize agricultural funding before EEC enlargement to the United Kingdom in 1973. The French Government’s bargaining power in protecting intergovernmentalism was therefore weakened. For the federalist governments, budgetary own resources and the extension of qualified majority voting (QMV) created a legitimacy deficit that only an extension of budgetary powers to the EP could solve. This price was reluctantly accepted by France (Rittberger 2005).

Under the budgetary powers of 1970 parliamentary amendments that moved or reduced spending could only be overruled by QMV in the Council of Ministers (Benedetto and Hoyland 2007). Amendments to increase spending remained consultative. However, the treaty of 1970 also gave the EP the right to reject the budget, subject to a two-thirds’ majority. The important precedent was established allowing the EP some influence beyond the purely consultative on legislation, in this case budgetary outcomes. The credibility of the veto was to increase following the introduction of direct elections to the EP, since its composition would no longer reflect the government majorities of national parliaments.

The budget treaty of 1975 represented the next major step in increasing the powers of the EP. This divided EEC spending into what was considered compulsory (agriculture, fisheries, external relations and development) and non-compulsory, which consisted of the remaining expenditure headings, then accounting for 8% of EEC spending. Compulsory expenditure continued to be decided by the same procedure established in the treaty of 1970. Meanwhile, the 8% of spending considered non-compulsory was subject to the amendment of the EP, whether an increase or decrease, by an absolute majority of over 50% of MEPs. If the Council rejected amendments, the EP was empowered to force them past an unwilling Council subject to a majority of three-fifths (Benedetto and Hoyland 2007). Between 1975 and ratification of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, the proportion of spending considered non-compulsory rose from 8% to over 50%.

In 1975 the governments also agreed to permit direct elections to the EP from 1979. Direct election had the effect of creating full-time MEPs who did not reflect the membership of national parliaments. Despite low turn-out in EP elections, which has raised questions about its legitimacy and that of wider European integration, direct election provided the EP with a more stable base from which to bid for further powers. Although rates of continuity in parliamentary membership at elections are often below 50%, the membership is more stable for a complete five-year term than in a part-time assembly of delegates from national parliaments whose membership changed annually. In 1979 the newly elected institution asserted the few powers granted by the treaties by rejecting the draft budget of 1980.

The next change in the powers of the EP occurred due to the Single European Act (SEA) of 1987. This allowed for the creation of a single market by 1993, providing the institutions with the right to produce legislation to harmonize the more controversial areas of social, employment, environment and consumer standards. The new co-operation procedure allowed the EP to amend legislation by an absolute majority of over 50% of MEPs. If the European
Commission supported these amendments, the Council could accept them by QMV, only being able to reject by unanimity. Tsebelis (1994) and Tsebelis and Garrett (2000) refer to this as ‘conditional agenda-setting’, conditional because the view of the EP would prevail only in alliance with the Commission and at least one member government in order to prevent the Council from unanimously blocking an amendment, while enabling it to accept the amendment by the comparatively easier method of QMV.

How can we explain the accomplishment of the co-operation procedure? The British Government’s belief in a free trade area and acceptance of QMV to facilitate that weakened its bargaining powers to prevent extending the powers of the EP. As with the budget in 1970 and High Authority in 1953, other governments were concerned at the legitimacy implications of member states in a ‘losing minority’ being outvoted by QMV and obliged by a supranational authority to implement legislation, which they had opposed. Empowering the EP was the solution, though not for the British who succeeded in blocking the German and Italian preferences for co-decision that would re-emerge at Maastricht in 1991. The British Government downplayed its losses, reassuring the Westminster Parliament of its enduring sovereignty despite QMV and the new co-operation procedure. The Italians, committed to co-decision, were persuaded not to veto the treaty since a fully unanimous Council would be required to overturn EP amendments supported by the Commission—this was not the story repeated at Westminster (Rittberger 2005).

The SEA also created the assent procedure, allowing the EP to approve or veto non-legislative decisions, such as treaty ratification with third countries, or enlargement treaties.

The Maastricht Treaty on European Union, which entered into force in 1993, introduced the ‘unconditional veto power’ of the co-decision procedure (Tsebelis and Garrett 2000: 15) and extended the scope of the co-operation procedure. The co-decision procedure introduced by Maastricht provides an absolute majority in the EP with the power of definitive veto over legislation. A lively debate focusing on whether the powers of the EP were greater under the co-operation or co-decision procedures developed in the literature (Earnshaw and Judge 1996; Shackleton 2000; Tsebelis 1994; Tsebelis and Garrett 2000; Tsebelis et al. 2001).

The Treaty of Amsterdam in force from 1999 abolished the co-operation procedure in all areas other than implementation of Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). The other policy areas to which co-operation had applied were moved into the co-decision procedure. For the first time, the assent of the EP was required to approve the nomination of the President of the European Commission, in advance of the Commission as a whole. The EP would also be required to approve sanctions against a member state for breaches of fundamental rights. The most significant change at Amsterdam, however, was to modify the co-decision procedure. Council and EP would each have to agree actively for legislation to pass.

Coming into force in 2003, the main effect of the Treaty of Nice for the EP was a modest extension to co-decision to new policy areas. The Lisbon Treaty, which came into effect in December 2009, has, however, extended the powers of the EP to the Common Agricultural Policy and the Common Commercial Policy (or Trade). It has also changed the budgetary procedures allowing the EP an equal say with the Council on the budgets for the CFSP and Development. At the same time, the creation of the new High Representative for the CFSP, who is also a member of the Commission, extends the EP’s powers of scrutiny more effectively over both foreign and security policies.

**Competition, consensus and path dependence**

Unlike the political systems of its member states, the EU is subject to a separation of powers. In the areas where the EU has competence over regulation as well as spending, the Commission is
the executive, and the Council and EP are the co-equal parts of the legislature, with the European Court of Justice exercising judicial review. None of these four institutions have overlapping membership, and they are all appointed or elected separately from each other.

Much of the recent research on the EP has assessed the impact of its increasing institutional powers. Studies have focused, for example, on the success of the EP in having its amendments accepted by the Council in legislation (Kreppel 1999), or the use of its powers in the appointment process of the European Commission (Gabel and Hix 2002; Hix 2002; Hix and Lord 1996; Judge and Earnshaw 2002; Magnette 2001; Westlake 1998). However, there has been a recent emphasis on measuring party-based competition between left and right, which has concentrated on roll call votes taken during the parliamentary plenary sessions. As the EP has gained more powers, so the argument goes, it has become more like a ‘real’ parliament in which significant ideological divisions have increased (Hix and Kreppel 2003; Hix, Kreppel and Noury 2003; Hix, Noury and Roland 2007).

Hix, Kreppel and Noury (2003) boldly open their assessment of the collusive or competitive nature of the EP with the following statement: ‘We conclude that, contrary to what might be expected, the party system in the EP has become more consolidated and more competitive as the powers of the EP have increased.’ They argue that increased power is likely to undermine group cohesion and change the structure of competition, since governments and domestic party leaders will want intergovernmental alliances on Council to be replicated in the EP. A more polarized EP may make a collective gain for the EU from increased visibility and legitimacy, as well as providing increased power for those within a winning coalition at the expense of a ‘losing opposition’. Indeed, in a recent book, Simon Hix (2008) recommends this as a cure for the democratic deficit. However, the move to a more competitive system between left and right is loaded with the risk of losing influence by being on the losing side.

The EU meets nine of the 10 criteria of Lijphart (1999) for a consensus system, even if roll call voting were to evolve around consistent left-right divisions. Path dependence provides a theoretical explanation for the duration of this consensus. The principle of path dependence is that once an institution or practice is established, its initial patterns of behaviour are entrenched and become self-reinforcing. If a practice is path dependent, other more logical or cost-effective alternatives for organization have no chance of being adopted in view of the short-term costs (North 1990; Pierson 1993, 1996, 2000).

Why has the EP remained a consensual institution since the enlargement of 2004? The conditions that first led to the establishment of consensual norms have allowed them to become embedded and reinforced as successive enlargements to new member states have occurred and the institutional powers of the EP have increased. Path dependence explains the longevity of consensus whether it applies to the approach of parties to legislation in the EP, to accessing influential positions in the EP, to approving the appointment of the European Commission, or to preparing the EP’s position during the drafting of new treaties that are likely to further increase its powers. At the time of its foundation the EU adopted both intergovernmental and supranational characteristics, underpinned by a consensus system to reconcile the potential for conflict given the presence of multinational cleavages. These have persevered and increased in view of successive enlargements of the Union. External and internal institutional constraints have also contributed to the reinforcement of consensus in the EP.

Within the literature the case for consensus rather than competition in the EP is found primarily in work on the allocation of office (Benedetto 2005; Kreppel 2002; Mamadouh and Raunio 2003), the appointment of the Commission (Gabel and Hix 2002; Hix 2002; Judge and Earnshaw 2002; Magnette 2001; Westlake 1998) and the European Central Bank (Lord 2003), and the EP’s approach to constitutional policy (Benedetto and Hix 2007), as well as on levels of agreement across party divisions within committee (Settembri and Neuhold 2009).
The rest of this chapter introduces the theory to support the case for institutionalized consensus. It then analyses the development of Parliament’s committees and procedures in maximizing the institution’s global reach.

What makes the EP consensual?

The institutionalization of consensus in the EP is an example of what Paul Pierson (1993: 607) refers to as ‘technological lock-in’ applying to institutions. Despite an increase in its institutional powers and a changing partisan complexion, with increased representation for domestic opposition parties, the EP has not developed an antagonistic approach within the EU. Applying path dependence to institutions, Pierson (1996: 145) explains that even suboptimal, initial institutional, or policy decisions are self-reinforcing and encourage: ‘the emergence of elaborate social and economic networks, greatly increasing the cost of adopting once-possible alternatives and therefore inhibiting exit from a current policy path’. The law of unintended consequences (Pierson 1996: 137) is linked to path dependence, in that institutions can develop powers in a way not intended by their creators. Because of the self-reinforcing nature of these institutions, they cannot be easily curtailed once the unintended consequences are unleashed. An example of this would be the social regulation developed by the EP and European Commission, following the ratification of the SEA. Although the then governments of the EEC had unanimously accepted the SEA, only QMV would be necessary to accept legislation associated with it, while unanimity would be required for the institutional powers to be reined in.

Since its foundation, the EU has had multiple cleavages, in which the pressure from national governments, the Brussels bureaucracy, and industrial and agricultural interest groups exercised significant influence. This became self-reinforcing, for as the EU enlarged, both in terms of member states from six to 27, and official languages from four to 22, each of the major national and linguistic groups had to be accommodated in decision-making. As the institutional powers of the EU and its Parliament increased, so did the need for consensus, the role of which was to provide policy outputs that would be accepted as legitimate by as many of the national elites and organized interests as possible. Since the SEA, the agricultural and industrial interest groups have been joined by trade unions and other professional organizations, environmental interest groups, consumer organizations and regional government representations, many of which have significant power in the member states, as well as in Brussels where they provide an under-resourced Commission with information, allowing them the potential of multiple veto players. Where it exists, competition in the EP is organized around party cleavages that were formed long before the foundation of the EU and perhaps no longer reflect the divisions over the powers it possesses.

Although consensus may be suboptimal, it is highly stable because of the short-term incentives of the actors involved. Politicians and media commentators call for the EP to develop a ‘competitive two-party system’, believing that this would increase the connection between voters and politics in the EU and provide the EP with a collective gain from increased legitimacy. However, this majoritarian alternative would not be optimal for the EP’s groups in the short term. If one of the two largest groups were relegated to the status of a losing opposition party the short-term costs would outweigh the benefits for the new majority groups, despite controlling the chairmen and agendas of parliamentary committees and content of legislative proposals. In a system where it is necessary to avoid excluding relevant national and political elites, where the EP needs to compete against but eventually reach agreement with other multinational and multiparty institutions, and where reaching necessary internal majorities can be problematic outside coalitions, a move away from consensus would bring certain high short-term costs as opposed to uncertain long-term
benefits. Tables can also be turned and a winning majority may find that it becomes a losing opposition. Political leaders like Pöttering appear to understand this, which explains the absence of a ‘consensus’ in favour of creating a winners and losers system. The result is that the status quo persists.

Inter-institutional relations have been more harmonious following the elections of 2004 in view of the symmetrical centre-right majorities across all three institutions. Notwithstanding the overwhelming consensus, limited competition for office exists within the EP, although it is limited to the internal election for the President of the EP and a lack of willingness to logroll in the attribution of the chairmen of important committees. The European Commissions led by Jacques Santer, Romano Prodi and José Barroso were all approved by large majorities of each of the larger political groups.

A global role for the European Parliament?

In any system, foreign policy is a competence of the executive rather than legislative branch of government. The EP’s powers in foreign policy are comparable to a national parliament: control of budget, treaty ratification and appointment. This final section concentrates on the role of parliamentary committees and inter-parliamentary delegations in building an influence for the EP in global policy. While they contribute to the EP’s levels of information, are they any more than ‘talking shops’? Do they have influence?

Since 2004 the Foreign Affairs Committee has only had a role in ratifying one international treaty not concerned with the EU’s own enlargement. This was a treaty for a EURATOM agreement with Tajikistan about nuclear co-operation. The Development Committee took the lead in preparing the EP’s position on and eventual ratification of a new treaty amending the Cotonou agreement with ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific) countries. This extensive treaty covers trade, development and democratization in former European colonies. The Trade Committee has been most active during the parliamentary term of 2004–09 in preparing for the EP’s ratification of 11 treaties concerning United Nations (UN) agreements on the automobile industry. Although the cases were limited, the power of the EP potentially to say ‘no’ to the ratification of such treaties gives it global reach. The Lisbon Treaty extends the power of the EP’s Trade Committee into the field of Common Commercial Policy, empowering it to become an actor in global trade talks.

The Committees of the EP hold hearings on the nomination of incoming members of the European Commission. The Foreign Affairs and Trade Committees, respectively, held hearings for Catherine Ashton and Karel De Gucht in January 2010. The power of the EP to say ‘no’ to an incoming Commission is a nuclear option, but one that it successfully threatened to use in October 2004. Its committee hearings are therefore taken seriously. In the case of foreign affairs, they are a chance for the EP to extend its influence into an area where its power is limited. At her hearing Catherine Ashton, the EU’s new High Representative for CFSP, promised to be personally accountable for the management of her policy area. Her priorities were the construction of a European External Action Service or diplomatic core, and securing sufficient financing for it from future EU budgets. She also undertook to report to the EP on a full review of all EU external operations in the Middle East, Western Balkans, Caucasus and Africa. The incoming Trade Commissioner, Karel De Gucht, likewise made himself accountable to the EP’s committee. In view of EP empowerment under the Common Commercial Policy, he promised to increase the transparency of trade policy. His other commitments were to push for a new World Trade Organization (WTO) agreement at Doha on rules for more open trade even if it is not implemented by all WTO members. During their terms of office, Ashton and
De Gucht can be expected to explain any failure in their undertakings to the respective EP committee.

Some committees engage in global politics even if we would least expect it. In January 2010, the Transport and Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Committees debated the introduction of body scanners at EU airports in preparation for a first reading of legislation on aviation security in March 2010. This legislation will be considered by the Transport Committee, the decisions of which will have an impact on the security implications for international airlines and their passengers well beyond the EU. While the Civil Liberties Committee debated security issues and the danger of terrorists who swallow explosives not being identified by the scanners, the Transport Committee was more concerned with the health and safety implications of radiation from the scanners, as well as the cost of the equipment affecting the pockets of airline passengers.7

An important part of the EP’s attempt to have global reach is played by its inter-parliamentary delegations. These work like non-legislative committees and deal with parliamentary institutions around the world, including parliamentary assemblies of other international organizations.

There are 10 delegations to Europe, including candidate states like Croatia and Turkey and 28 other non-European states or regions like Central America or the Caucasus. In terms of building policy in the field of international security and economics, the delegations to the following entities demonstrate the activity of the EP at building a global role:

- Delegation for relations with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Parliamentary Assembly. This consists of 10 MEPs who are members of the EP’s subcommittee on Security and Defence. It represents the EP at the Parliamentary Assembly of NATO and focuses on the security relationship between the EU and NATO. Delegates from the EP may speak at meetings of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, attend its committees and present reports.8 The Parliamentary Assembly holds full meetings twice a year. Its other members are delegated from national parliaments.

- Delegation to the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA). This was established in 2003 at Naples. It provides parliamentary impetus for the Barcelona Process. Its membership numbers 280, of whom three are drawn from each of the 27 national parliaments in the EU, 49 from the EP, 13 from each of 10 founding national parliaments of the Mediterranean partners in the southern and eastern Mediterranean, 10 from Mauritania, eight from the Western Balkans and two from Monaco. It consists of a presidency and committee system, whose chairmanship and three vice-chairmen always revolve on a ratio of 1:1:2 between an MEP, an EU national parliamentarian, and two national parliamentarians from the partner states. The Euro-Mediterranean partnership builds on the EU’s economic and security relations with its close neighbours in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).

- Delegation to the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly. The Joint Parliamentary Assembly is a body, 78 members of which are drawn from the EP and one from each of the 78 members of the ACP countries. It is led by two co-presidents, one of whom is an MEP, and is subdivided into policy committees on matters such as trade, development, human rights and democracy. Apart from the EMPA, mentioned above, this is the only international assembly of which MEPs are directly members. It is also the only other international assembly bringing together elected parliamentarians from the developed and developing world.

- Delegation to the Pan-African Parliament. The Pan-African Parliament dates from 2004 and is located at Midrand in South Africa. The EP delegation monitors the Africa-EU Strategy adopted in 2007 to address global challenges and support economic development and
democratization in Africa. The EP delegation and the delegation of the Pan-African Parliament to the EP have held regular meetings at Midrand, Strasbourg and Brussels. Again, economic co-operation, development, democratization and security play an important role.

- Delegation for relations with the countries of the Andean Community. This deals with both the Andean Community and the parliaments of its member states. The substantive agenda items for one meeting (4 February 2010) were multilateral trade negotiations with the Andean Community, an exchange of views on the completion of the WTO talks on the banana trade, and the political situation in Bolivia following its elections and referendums of December 2009.

- Delegation for relations with the countries of Mercosur. This deals with parliaments and members states of Mercosur (the southern common market) in South America. The substantive agenda item for one meeting (1 February 2010) was an exchange of views between Argentina’s Ambassador to the EU, representing Mercosur’s revolving presidency, and the Commission’s Director General for Trade, on the subject of a new trade deal between the EU and Mercosur.

Although foreign policy is traditionally an executive responsibility, it is clear that the EP has done as much as it can to extend its influence in global politics through its committees and inter-parliamentary delegations.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a historical and theoretical introduction to consensual behaviour of the EP, which has continued since the enlargement of 2004. There are certain characteristics that determine whether a legislature is competitive or consensual, with the EP falling into the latter category. Since 1953 the EP has been a protagonist in European integration and at every significant stage of that integration has gained power. The EP of the decade following Amsterdam amends, approves, or rejects the economic regulation of the world’s largest internal market, the effects of which have a global reach. This recent increase in powers, the EP’s changing partisan composition from left to right, and the effects of the EU enlargements of 2004–07 that added 200 MEPs from the new member states make the EP a fascinating institution to watch. By means of its committees and inter-parliamentary delegations the EP has sought to influence politics on a global scale with regard to security, economics, trade and development.

Throughout this time, the strength of consensual norms can be understood in view of the conditions that first led to their establishment. These allowed them to become embedded and reinforced as successive enlargements to new member states occurred and powers increased, even if we would otherwise assume that such developments could undermine consensus. Limited competition may develop within the consensual mechanisms of the EP, with less willingness to logroll between the groups and significant divisions concerning controversial policy areas. However, the principles of proportionality in the distribution of office, such as committee chairmen or the authorship of legislative reports, as well as voting similarity will continue to characterize the behaviour of Europe’s Parliament for the foreseeable future.

Notes

1 From here on, the group will be referred to as the EPP for the sake of simplicity. Since 1999 it has been the largest political or party group in the European Parliament.
These include: executive-power sharing in broad multiparty coalitions within the Commission; legislative-executive balance of power; a multiparty system; proportional representation; a federal structure; a bicameral legislature (Council and EP); a rigid, super-majority amended constitution; powerful judicial review by an independent court; and Central Bank independence. Only one of the criteria is majoritarian, which pertains to the pluralistic rather than corporatist nature of interest groups.

AVC/2004/0176.
AVC/2005/0071.

The views of a nominee Commissioner, Rocco Buttiglione, on single mothers and homosexuality were unacceptable to the EP Committee on Citizens’ Rights and Freedoms. The EP convincingly threatened to vote ‘no’ to the Commission in 2004 unless another nominee replaced him.


Infokit: What is the Delegation for Relations with the NATO Parliamentary Assembly? (European Parliament and NATO Parliamentary Assembly).