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Multilateralism and democracy

A European Parliament perspective

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ABSTRACT

This analysis looks into the complex relationship between two trends in international governance: an increase in multilateral arrangements between countries in order to govern internationally on the one hand, and a lack of democratic control over the decisions taken by multilateral organisations or conferences on the other. Multilateralism in the modern sense refers to an international mode of operation involving peaceful negotiations and diplomacy, also referred to as a 'rules-based international order' or 'rules-based multilateralism'. Several European countries have recently launched initiatives in support of multilateralism, in reaction to the increasingly unilateral behaviour of states undermining the existing rules-based international order. Apart from the European Union, no other multilateral organisation has a parliamentary body with the competence to block or amend its decisions, which indicates that there is a democratic deficit in these multilateral organisations. An initial response to such a democratic deficit is the involvement of national parliaments in international decision-making. This is known as 'parliamentary diplomacy'. Secondly, the involvement of civil society in international decision-making through protests, petitions, consultations or participation can also enhance democracy. Thirdly, the organisation of national referenda on international decisions can be used by national governments or citizens' initiatives to increase democratic legitimacy. Fourthly, a lack of democracy at international level can also be countered by creating an 'alliance of democracies', aimed at multilateral cooperation between democratic countries rather than the democratisation of multilateral organisations. These are mostly alliances of Western countries, which risks emphasising the differences between West and East or North and South. Three short case studies of parliamentary diplomacy with the strong involvement of the European Parliament (the Parliamentary Conference on the World Trade Organization (WTO), delegations to the Conferences of Parties of climate change agreements and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly) show that enhancing multilateral democracy is not the only aim of parliamentary diplomacy and that each case reveals a different mix between the 'parliamentary' aspect of democratisation and the 'diplomacy' aspects of information exchange or influencing.

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1 The democratic deficit of multilateralism

This analysis will look into the **complex relationship between two trends** in international governance: an **increase in multilateral arrangements between countries** in order to govern internationally on the one hand, and a **lack of democratic control over the decisions taken by multilateral organisations or conferences** on the other. The first chapter will briefly describe multilateralism as an emerging lead principle of the EU's external policies. It will then explore four types of reaction to the experience of a democratic deficit in multilateral decision-making.

Parliamentary diplomacy is one of the possible reactions to the experience of a democratic deficit. The second chapter will present three cases of parliamentary diplomacy in which the European Parliament, itself a multilateral democratic actor, is involved. Each case highlights a possible way of introducing democratic components into multilateral decision-making. Finally, Chapter 3 wraps up the paper with some conclusions.

1.1 Multilateralism as an international governance model

Multilateral international cooperation became an important form of international governance after World War II and experienced another wave of initiatives in the 1990s. New multilateral international organisations were established, such as the WTO in 1994 and multilateral agreements in new policy areas have been concluded, such as the 1992 Framework Agreement on Climate Change and its follow-up protocols and agreements. Whereas leaders' meetings of the seven leading nations, known as the G7, had already started in the 1970s, a new format of meetings of the finance ministers of the 20 economically important countries, known as the G20, has been meeting regularly since 1999. Since the financial crisis of 2008-2009, the G20 has also been meeting at leaders' level.

Together, all of the different kinds of multilateral meetings and cooperation formats are nowadays referred to as 'multilateralism'. This can technically be defined as a process of organising relations between groups of three or more states. **The origins of multilateral international cooperation can to a large extent be traced back to post-Renaissance Europe, when states started to regulate international relations through the conclusion of treaties, often at the end of major conflicts.** The 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, ending the Thirty Years' War and redistributing power in Europe, can be seen as its origin. Following the defeat of Napoleon, the 1815 Congress of Vienna represents another landmark for multilateralism in its early forms. The foundation of the League of Nations after the First World War and of the United Nations (UN) and the Bretton Woods Agreements after the Second World War are more recent examples of post-conflict multilateralism.

However, multilateral cooperation also developed independently of international conflicts. **Structural forms of international cooperation also started in sectoral organisations** dealing with shipping or postal services[1]. Sectoral cooperation is also at the basis of the European Union, which started as the European Community for Coal and Steel. The spillover of sectoral cooperation into broader political cooperation is known in political theory as (neo-)functionalism. From this point of view, multilateralism has developed from a 'post-conflict solution' into a peaceful means to achieve international order while avoiding conflict. **Multilateralism in the modern sense refers to an international mode of operation of peaceful negotiations and diplomacy, also referred to as the 'rules-based international order' or 'rules-based multilateralism'.** James Scott notes that 'multilateralism is generally considered to comprise certain qualitative elements or principles that shape the character of the arrangement or

[1] The oldest sectoral multilateral organisations are the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine, which dates back to 1815 and the Universal Postal Union from 1874.

institution. Those principles are an indivisibility of interests among participants, a commitment to diffuse reciprocity, and a system of dispute settlement intended to enforce a particular mode of behaviour'[2]. In other words, participating countries will act as a group with shared interests and are willing to give up advantages for themselves in order to reach compromises, which are subsequently enforced. European countries are inclined to adhere to this broader kind of multilateralism. The German think tank SWP notes, for instance, that in German foreign policy, multilateralism refers to international cooperation 'oriented towards the principles and norms and carried out in accordance with the rules and regulations that underlie those organizations (such as, for example, the UN Charter)'. In this view, multilateralism has become something that deserves to be promoted as an end in itself.

Several European countries have recently launched initiatives in support of multilateralism, in reaction to the increasingly unilateral behaviour of states undermining the rules-based international order. Germany and France launched an 'alliance for multilateralism' in 2019. Norway published a white paper in 2019 on multilateralism, which gives a clear overview of the origins and state of play in multilateral relations. It distinguishes between five roles of the multilateral system: developing common rules and norms; initiating and implementing tasks for its member states; settling disputes among its members; producing ideas and knowledge relevant to the work in the particular area; and finally providing a meeting platform, not only for their member states, but also for invited parties. It also notes that multilateralism increasingly includes international organisations and non-state actors. It appears that multilateralism has become much more than a way of operating between three or more states. Multilateralism has developed into a desired way of operating according to a wide-ranging set of principles, which has become a model, at least for European countries.

The EU is a vocal promoter of rules-based multilateralism. In February 2021, the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy released a joint communication on 'strengthening the EU's contribution to rules-based multilateralism'. It states that growing global challenges call for more multilateral governance and rules-based international cooperation. It acknowledges that multilateralism is complex, but delivers tangible benefits for all. The normative character of multilateralism is encapsulated by the sentence: 'Multilateralism has been and will remain the cardinal principle of the EU as the most effective means to govern global relations in a mutually beneficial way' (page 1 of the communication). Nevertheless, the communication acknowledges that the multilateral system has been challenged and needs to be defended. It states that the EU needs to coordinate better internally and needs 'greater willingness to leverage the EU's collective strength to project its values and priorities abroad' (page 2). The communication states that 'a well-functioning multilateral system is an EU strategic interest in its own right' (page 6).

1.2 Different approaches to the democratic deficit

While the importance of multilateralism has been increasing to the point at which it has become a new model for international relations – at least from the European perspective – the challenges it involves and its shortcomings need to be addressed as well. The complexity of decision-making, the uneven representation of countries or the lengthy time spans for delivering results could all be mentioned as the challenges posed by multilateralism. However, from the perspective of the European Parliament, the democratic deficit of multilateral decision-making is one of the main shortcomings. If we consider the European Union as an important example of multilateral cooperation, it is at the same time the only multilateral organisation with a directly elected parliament possessing legislative and scrutiny powers. These powers have been acquired over time in a long and step-by-step process. They are crucial for the democratic legitimacy of the decisions taken by the European Union. **Apart from the European Union,**

[2] James Scott, 2015 on Britannica: Multilateralism | international relations | Britannica

no other multilateral organisation has a parliamentary body with the power to block or amend its decisions. The fact that this is so unusual indicates the existence of a democratic deficit in these multilateral organisations.

Parliamentary oversight over multilateral organisations is left mostly to national parliaments, which are supposed to exercise democratic scrutiny over what their national governments are doing at multilateral level. Some authors have noted that when powers are transferred to a multilateral organisation, national parliaments lose out twice in terms of their power to exercise scrutiny over the international policies of their national government. Firstly, they lose out because the powers are no longer in the national remit. Secondly, they also lose out because national governments often continue to play a role in the multilateral organisation – for example through veto power or voting rights – while the national parliaments do not. This further strengthens the position of the national executive branch of the government over its national parliament, leading to what is called 'reverse agency': **the national government further constrains the powers of its parliament by presenting the result of an international negotiation as a 'fait accompli'[3].**

This democratic deficit could become increasingly important, when more and more decisions in the future are taken at international level. Already today, many citizens feel that they cannot influence international decisions and are left out of decision-making processes perceived as being run by 'elites'. The lack of transparency in international decision-making is only one aspect of the democratic deficit. The lack of representation is a much more fundamental problem. **If this issue is not addressed, public support for international decisions may further decrease and large groups of citizens may turn to populist political parties or protest movements.** This conclusion is not exaggerated. Recent decades have already shown increased public opposition against the decisions of international organisations such as the WTO or against the leaders' meetings of the G7 and G20. Starting with the infamous 'battle of Seattle', the popular name for the public protests against the 1999 ministerial meeting of the WTO in Seattle, a broader protest movement known as the 'anti-globalisation movement' has developed.

Democratising multilateral organisations seems the most logical reaction to the experience of a democratic deficit at international level. However, it appears that no single change will rectify the problem. We will explore four types of reaction to the experience of a democratic deficit at international level.

- The first reaction – a long-established one – is the effort by national parliaments to influence international decision-making. Apart from the direct means of exercising scrutiny over the national government, this may include indirect means such as dialogue with other national parliaments or international organisations. The latter is known as 'parliamentary diplomacy'.
- Secondly, and mostly as a result of the protest movements dating back to the 1960s and the anti-globalisation movement, is the involvement of civil society in international decision-making. This can take several forms, including protests, petitions, consultations and participation.
- Thirdly, the organisation of national referenda on international decisions. Such referenda are sometimes held by national governments to assure public support for their decisions, sometimes organised as grassroots initiatives – often to oppose an international decision.
- Fourthly, the experience of a lack of democracy at international level can also be compensated for by encouraging multilateral cooperation between democratic countries. In this case, the goal is not to democratise the multilateral organisations, but to create an alliance of democratic countries. These have turned out to be mostly alliances of Western countries.

[3] See, for example, Christopher Lord, 'How can interparliamentary cooperation contribute to the legitimacy of the EU as an international actor?', (hereinafter Christopher Lord), on page 115 of Raube, K., Müftüler-Baç, M. and Wouters, J. (eds), *Parliamentary Cooperation and Diplomacy in EU External Relations*, Leuven Global Governance series, 2019 (hereinafter Raube, Müftüler-Baç and Wouters).

1.2.1 Parliamentary diplomacy

The idea that international cooperation should not be limited to the executive governments of countries but should also include directly elected representatives dates back to the late 19th century. Already in 1889, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) was founded on the initiative of Frederic Passy and William Randal Cremer, members of the French and British parliaments respectively. Today, its membership includes 179 parliaments from all over the world. The IPU is the oldest form of what has become known as parliamentary diplomacy. The IPU characterises parliamentary diplomacy on its website as follows: '**Parliamentary diplomacy is an essential part of international cooperation, helping to building bridges between countries and peoples and seeking to contribute a parliamentary perspective to global governance as well as the promotion of peace**'. Another definition is given by Davor Jancic as 'individual or collective action by parliamentarians aimed at catalysing, facilitating and strengthening the existing constitutional functions of parliaments through dialogues between peers on countless open policy questions across continents and levels of governance'[4]. Parliamentary diplomacy is, on the one hand, a form of diplomacy, which can be used to convey positions and influence others. On the other hand, it is an attempt to increase democratic influence over decision-making processes within international governance.

Whereas both definitions include various aspects of exchange and cooperation, neither of them is clear about the aspect of democratic oversight. The example of the IPU reveals one of the reasons for this lack of clarity, which may also be considered a weakness of multilateral parliamentary diplomacy: the IPU is not charged with the task of democratic oversight of one or more concrete international organisations. Its tasks and impact are directed towards the general goal of the promotion of democracy and some other noble goals (such as human rights, peace building or gender equality) which are not necessarily linked to democracy. Nevertheless, the IPU aims to play a more substantial role in democratic oversight over global governance, in particular over the UN. Its most noteworthy achievements in this respect are a cooperation agreement with the UN, giving it observer status to the UN and allowing Speakers' conferences and annual parliamentary hearings at the UN premises, and its role in the Parliamentary Conference on the World Trade Organization (see next section). Another role of the IPU, probably even less known, is its support for creating new initiatives of international cooperation, such as the Permanent Court of Arbitration (established in 1899 and the predecessor of today's International Court of Justice) and the League of Nations (the predecessor of the UN). **It appears that parliamentary diplomacy is only partly about resolving a democratic deficit. Its roles of exchange and indirect influence appear to be at least equally important.**

Since the foundation of the IPU, and in particular since World War II, parliamentary diplomacy has developed in many ways. Members of various national parliaments can meet each other in ad hoc formats or structurally in international parliamentary assemblies. Examples include the parliamentary network of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) or regional assemblies such as the Pan-African Parliament. Even when these assemblies lack powers of oversight and limit themselves to the exchange of information or the adoption of resolutions, this sometimes already counts as compensation for the loss of influence parliaments have experienced when executive powers have been transferred to multilateral level. By pooling information and using declaratory power, they not only try to influence the policies of the relevant multilateral organisation, but also regain the democratic status they have lost in the national arena. **Even without**

[4] Page 6 of *Parliamentary diplomacy in European and Global Governance*, edited by Stelios Stavridis and Davor Jancic, 2017 (hereinafter Stavridis and Jancic).

formal legal power, the expressions of parliamentarians have the democratic legitimacy that representatives of their governments – often acting as experts at civil service level – do not have[5].

The European Parliament constitutes a particularly interesting case of parliamentary diplomacy. On the one hand, its own development as a parliament has followed an exceptional path from loose parliamentary diplomacy along the lines described above, towards becoming a fully fledged parliament possessing the powers of a co-legislator within the European Union. Since the Treaty of Lisbon of 2009, it also has the power of consent to international agreements concluded by the EU, equally making it an international actor in its own right. From this position of relative strength, the European Parliament has become a very active player in global parliamentary diplomacy. **Projecting its own experience of democracy within the EU at global level, the European Parliament is a promoter of the democratisation of other multilateral organisations.** We will see in the next chapter how this works in three concrete cases.

1.2.2 Involvement of civil society

Apart from the involvement of parliaments, other groups can play a role in bridging the gap between multilateral decision-making by executive governments and opinions or sentiments in the broader layers of society. All these groups together are known as 'civil society'. Civil society is a broad concept. **Civil society can include all kinds of organisations that share the characteristic of being non-governmental organisations (NGOs).** This can include churches or other religious or philosophical organisations, business representatives, trade unions, human rights defenders or environmental organisations. Although many of the well-known NGOs were founded in the 20th century, some of them – like the churches – are older. A particularly prominent example of an NGO from the 19th century is the International Committee of the Red Cross, founded in 1863. The Red Cross is not only exceptional for its founding date, but also because it immediately acquired international recognition through the 1864 Geneva Convention[6], whereas NGOs founded later on often needed to fight for acceptance. The Red Cross can be seen as the origin of humanitarian aid efforts.

Another early form of civil society focused on the implementation of human rights. Starting from specific movements for the political representation of women or workers in the first half of the 20th century in Western democracies, broader organisations for the defence of human rights, such as Amnesty International (founded in 1961) or Human Rights Watch (founded in 1978) saw the light of day in the second half of the 20th century. Organisations for humanitarian aid, such as Oxfam (founded in 1942), widened their work to encompass development aid. Other NGOs, such as the World Wildlife Fund (WWF, founded in 1961), focused on nature conservation or on broader environmental issues, for example Greenpeace (founded in 1971). Already in the 1970s and 1980s, but increasingly since the 1990s, NGOs began organising themselves in networks that could operate together in making their case to governments and international organisations[7]. Since the 1992 UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro, interlinkages between social and environmental issues have become a significant focus of governments and civil society. Concepts such as 'fair trade' increasingly combine the economic and ecological aspects of trade relations. In terms of influencing decision-making in multilateral organisations, this has meant that different NGOs have been able to rally around common concepts or actions. Most researchers into these phenomena agree that the complex reality of the global system has pushed NGOs not only to cooperate more among themselves, but also to create cross-sector partnerships with governmental agencies and even with business. **While the second half of the 20th century saw the**

[5] Christopher Lord, pp. 115-117.

[6] The Red Cross's mission was never disputed and the organisation has received the Nobel Peace Prize three times, in 1917, 1944 and 1963. For the history of the Red Cross, see: https://www.icrc.org/en/document/history-icrc

[7] Current examples of partnerships of NGOs are Solidar, focusing on social affairs, international cooperation and lifelong learning; Concord, a confederation of relief and development NGOs; and the EEB, a network of environmental NGOs.

foundation of many issue-specific NGOs, after the turn of the millennium these NGOs have increasingly cooperated in networks among themselves, with government and with business.

The question for this analysis is how these NGOs try to influence multilateral decision-making. **NGOs have developed a wide set of instruments to influence governments and international organisations, which we may distinguish as information, organisation, finance and representation.** Providing information in order to influence decision-making is among the oldest instruments. The foundation of the Red Cross started with providing information, when Henry Dunant published a book about his terrible experiences on the battle field of Solferino. Today, NGOs provide information in the form of detailed reports, country assessments or position papers. In the following stage of their organisation, they start to perform actions which governments may have neglected or may delegate to them. Humanitarian aid can be collected and delivered where needed, or environmental pilot projects can be set up. Financing projects executed by local organisations has become one of the major activities of bigger and well-financed NGOs. Financing is also the main instrument of foundations which get their income from business but pursue philanthropic purposes. This model is used in the United States in particular, with the famous examples of the Rockefeller and the Gates Foundations. Representation can take several forms, starting with protest marches or demonstrations and extending to petitions, citizens' initiatives or taking seats in consultation bodies of governments or international organisations. The European Parliament has long recognised the right to petition, whereas the European Commission is in charge of the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) instrument, which allows one million citizens to put an issue on the Commission's agenda. Some of the ECIs held so far have dealt with multilateral issues[8].

The role of NGOs in international decision-making has been the subject of study from various angles. For our analysis, **three issues deserve attention as regards NGOs' influence on multilateral decision-making: attitudes towards globalisation, the difference between lobbying and advocacy, and the problem of representation.**

Many NGOs have focused on criticism of the social and ecologic impact of multinational businesses' activities, often linked to multilateral government policies. This has created the idea of a broad 'anti-globalisation movement' of NGOs, especially since the turn of the millennium. As some researchers have pointed out, the name 'anti-globalisation movement' is actually misleading, as most activists do not consider themselves as being against globalisation as such, but instead against a particular form of international capitalism that enriches the few and impoverishes the many, while damaging the natural environment[9]. This is reflected by the introduction of the term 'alter-globalisation' instead of 'anti-globalisation' and the organisation of 'World Social Forums' as complements to the 'World Economic Forum'[10].

This links to the second issue: if foundations funded by business act as NGOs trying to influence international decision-making, can they then be seen as true representatives of people's interests (advocacy) or are they indirectly lobbying for certain business interests? This question is, for example, at the heart of criticisms of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which is an important funder of the World Health Organization (WHO), while having interests in the pharmaceutical industry[11]. However, the issue of

[8] In February 2022, the Commission registered 87 ECIs in total, some of which have an international dimension (e.g. for a carbon pricing system or against the trade in fish fins). An initiative against the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership was not admitted by the Commission in 2014, but this decision was overruled by the General Court in 2017.
[9] See, for example, Catherine Eschle, 'Constructing the "anti globalisation movement"', *International Journal of Peace Studies*, Vol. IX, No 1, 2004.
[10] See, for example, Geoffrey Pleyers: 'A brief history of the alter-globalisation movement', on booksandideas.net, 2013.
[11] The Gates Foundation is the second biggest funder of the WHO, providing almost 10 % of its budget in 2018-19. See, for example, this briefing from 2020 by the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS).

financing is broader than the activity of philanthropic foundations. NGOs in general are under greater public pressure to be transparent about their financial sources. The days of financing by members only are long past and many NGOs receive funding from business, governments or both. When NGOs which lobby international organisations also receive funding from those same organisations, this can raise questions of independence[12].

Finally, some question the democratic legitimacy of NGOs, as they are not elected by the people (like parliaments) but based on voluntary membership or even looser forms of adherence. This means that they do not necessarily represent a majority of people, while influencing international decision-making. The issue of representation equally applies to the foundations involved in philanthropy[13]. There are no final answers to the questions of lobbying and representation, and everyone will have to decide for themselves. Many NGOs have recognised the issue of representation and pursue an agenda of participatory decision-making both inside and outside their organisations. This ideal of a true grassroots organisation may, however, come under pressure when the NGO grows and loosens its ties with its supporters.

A very specific group of NGOs has made democracy support their main mission. Instead of trying to achieve new channels of democracy separate from intergovernmental or parliamentary channels – as most NGOs mentioned above do – these NGOs work with local initiatives or governments to improve electoral forms of democracy through various means. Examples of such NGOs are Democracy International or the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA).

1.2.3 National referenda

A third possible reaction to a democratic deficit in multilateral decision-making is to involve citizens directly in such decisions through referenda. Research from IDEA shows that the use of referenda (whether on national or international issues) has been steadily growing, in particular since the mid-20th century. Most referenda are organised 'top down' by the executive or legislature of a government. However, some countries allow for a 'bottom up' approach, in which groups of citizens can initiate a referendum. The use of this kind of referendum has been growing in particular since the 1990s.

In the EU, referenda have been used by national governments to seek the approval of the population for their EU policies. In several cases, these referenda were aimed at obtaining public consent to changes to the EU Treaty already agreed by the national government in question. Examples are the referenda on Treaty change in Denmark and Ireland[14], as well as referenda on the draft European constitution in France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Spain in 2005. Although the case of the European constitution shows that the same international agreement can be put to the vote in several countries, this always takes place as different national referenda, not as one jointly organised multilateral referendum. In some cases, EU Member States organised referenda on specific European policy decisions, such as in Denmark in 2014 on accession to the Patent Court and in 2015 on opting into the EU Justice and Home Affairs policies and in 2022 on opting into the EU Security and Defence policies; in 2015 in Greece on the economic bailout; and in 2016 in Hungary on immigration quotas. A specific case was the consultative referendum in the Netherlands in 2016 on the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement[15]. This is one of the few

[12] For example, an overview of August 2019 showed that the European Commission provided funding to 28 environmental NGOs.
[13] See, for example: 'The Role of NGOs in Global Governance', Peter Willets, 2011.
[14] Denmark held eight referenda on EU affairs (on accession to the EU, the Single European Act, Maastricht (twice), Amsterdam, accession to the euro, accession to the Patent Court and the opt-in to Justice and Home Affairs): see the Danish Parliament's website; Ireland held nine referenda on EU affairs (on accession to the EU, the Single European Act, Maastricht, Amsterdam, Nice (twice), Lisbon (twice) and the fiscal compact): see the website of the Oireachtas.
[15] For an overview and analysis of recent referenda in EU countries, see the study entitled 'Referendums on EU matters', European Parliament, Directorate-General for Internal Policies, Policy Department C – Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, 30 January 2017.

cases where an agreement with a non-EU country was put to a referendum in an EU Member State, which makes it particularly interesting in terms of the relationship between multilateralism and democracy.

Although this form of direct democracy strongly involves citizens, it has several weaknesses. Important weaknesses are: incomplete or biased information campaigns prior to a referendum, the digital yes-no character of the question(s) and the *ex post* character of the referendum – meaning that a treaty is put to the vote in its completed form after international negotiations. One of the few countries in the world to regularly hold referenda on national and international issues is Switzerland. As a result, Swiss society is more accustomed to the instrument and has informed debates before a vote. Moreover, referenda in Switzerland may be initiated not only by the government, but also as a 'popular initiative' by a sufficient number of citizens[16]. The less frequent character of referenda in EU countries may cause less balanced information campaigns and more room for external influence and bias. This weakness could be offset by developing a learning process on referenda and a 'referendum culture', where more frequent referenda lead to better debates and decisions. Although lessons may be drawn from referenda, there does not seem to be a systematic culture of learning and improving. To avoid its weaknesses, governments may also decide to simply use the instrument less. Furthermore, as referenda represent a yes-no vote on a negotiated product, citizens may feel they have little influence and use the occasion to cast a protest vote, which tends to go against a proposal. These weaknesses have been identified as part of the explanation for negative votes on EU Treaty change[17]. **Governments deal with the negative outcomes of referenda in different ways: they can repeat the referendum after having negotiated specific changes, or they can avoid future referenda; a consistent learning process on referenda appears absent[18].**

There is another reason for the wariness of governments that support multilateralism towards holding referenda: while the instrument was initially advocated by groups in favour of open international societies, it has been increasingly used by groups with more national agendas and which have concerns about globalisation. In fact, public views on globalisation have undergone remarkable changes in the past 20 years. In recent years, opposition to economic globalisation has attracted different groups than in the 1990s and early 2000s. As some authors note, **the early anti-globalisation movement was mostly supported by people identifying with the political left, concerned about inequality in the global South. New groups opposing economic globalisation identify more with the political right and are concerned about the loss of employment or other issues in their own region, the global North[19].** These two groups sometimes meet in protest movements. However, there are important differences between them in terms of means and instruments. The 'old left-leaning' anti-globalists have – as described in the previous section – established ways and channels to influence multilateral decision-making. To a certain extent, they have become part of it[20]. The 'new right-leaning' anti-globalists have not accepted the global order as such and want to return to a national order. **Instead of democratising multilateral institutions, right-wing anti-globalists instead focus the political agenda on withdrawing from such**

[16] Switzerland held referenda on, for example, membership of the European Economic Area in 1992 and on its bilateral agreements with the EU in 2000 and 2005. A 2012 popular initiative to extend obligatory referenda to a broad range of multilateral agreements was rejected – currently only agreements which affect the Constitution are put to a referendum.
[17] For a short overview of referenda on EU issues, see this EPRS briefing, European Parliament, 18 May 2016.
[18] Although further study in this field is needed, examples show a lack of learning processes from lost referenda. The Danish Government needed two referenda to pass the Maastricht Treaty and lost referenda on accession to the euro or opting into EU Justice and Home Affairs policy; the Irish Government needed two referenda for the Treaty of Nice and the Treaty of Lisbon; the Dutch Government decided after the lost referendum on the EU Constitutional Treaty not to put the Lisbon Treaty to a referendum and after the lost consultative referendum on the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement to abolish the instrument of the consultative referendum altogether, which triggered a debate.
[19] Horner et al.: *How anti-globalisation switched from a left to a right wing issue – and where it will go next*, 2018.
[20] For example, according to a list of the UNFCCC, hundreds of NGOs were granted observer status to the COP26 in Glasgow in November 2021.

institutions. This group advocates referenda as a means to achieve this. This can be seen as a reaction to the democratic deficit of multilateralism and also to the inability of multilateral organisations to deliver results for all. Although sentiments are directed against multilateralism, the cause of perceived problems (for example, economic inequality or a lack of public services) can also originate from other, for example national, sources. If this group assumes political power, as was the case during the Trump Administration, it can turn its views into concrete policy. For example, President Trump withdrew the US from international agreements such as the Trans Pacific Partnership and the Paris Climate Agreement. The case of the Brexit referendum is more complex, as supporters of Brexit had multiple motives[21]. On the one hand, the arguments in favour of Brexit were based on the withdrawal from a multilateral organisation – the EU – in order to regain full control over national policies – for instance on immigration. On the other hand, the concept of 'Global Britain', as presented by the Government of Prime Minister Johnson in 2021, is aimed at establishing a multilateral order in which the UK is supposed to assume a more prominent role than it would have played as an EU Member State. As regards our analysis, it seems important to conclude that the new British involvement in multilateralism does not appear to focus on the democratisation of the multilateral order, but rather on an order of democratic countries[22].

Finally, there is a very specific form of direct democracy, called 'citizens' panels'. Instead of consulting the whole population on a particular issue in a referendum, in citizens' panels randomly chosen groups of citizens discuss political issues and make recommendations. Citizens' panels were used in the Conference on the Future of Europe in 2021-2022, for example.

1.2.4 Alliances of democracies

This brings us to the final approach to the experience of a lack of democracy in the international order. This approach is based on yet another perspective. **Instead of democratising multilateral organisations, a certain group of – mostly Western – governments has instead focused on forming alliances of democratic countries.** A prominent recent example is the Alliance of Democracies Foundation, founded in 2017 by former NATO Secretary General Rasmussen. Although the alliance at first glance presents itself as an NGO or Think Tank, it clearly differs from the bottom-up concerns about globalisation in at least three ways. Firstly, it is closely linked to political and business leaders, which the other critics perceive as 'elites' and as part of the problem[23]. Secondly, it combines the advancement of democracy with that of free markets. For example, the statement on the Alliance's website that: 'The Foundation recognizes the positive symbiosis between democracy and business and believes that democratically elected leaders and global business executives will benefit from a greater level of personal interaction' sounds more like a meeting of the World Economic Forum than an NGO promoting democracy. Thirdly, it perceives the problem of democratic decline mostly from a geopolitical perspective. This includes support for Anglo-American leadership in international affairs[24] and the notion of democracy as a concept of 'the West'.

[21] An analysis of the 'Leave' and 'Remain' campaigns for the referendum on the UK leaving the EU reveals that the 'Leave campaign' focused on legislative independence and immigration, while the 'Remain campaign' focused on the negative economic consequences of leaving the EU; voters had to implicitly rank the importance of these issues rather than express a clear yes or no on a single issue (see: 'Referendums on EU matters', Annexes A and B).

[22] In March 2021, the UK Government presented the report 'Global Britain in a competitive age – the integrated review of security, defence, development and foreign policy'. The foreword from the UK Prime Minister states: 'History has shown that democratic societies are the strongest supporters of an open and resilient international order.' Probably less known is the private organisation Global Britain, founded in 1997 – as it website states – 'with the aim of making the case that Britain's prosperity is founded on a global vision, not a European customs union, and that British prosperity would be best served by withdrawing from the European Union'. The organisation played a role in the 'Leave campaign'. The use of its name in the title of the government report is probably no coincidence.

[23] Supporters of the Alliance include, for example, Facebook, Microsoft, Google, BMW and the George W. Bush Institute.

[24] A press release from 16 March2021 by Rasmussen welcomes the 2021 UK Global Britain report (footnote 22) by saying **'**The free world has missed the UK's active engagement, with Brexit taking up a lot of bandwidth. But in recent months we've seen Global

In recent years, several initiatives from Western countries have been launched to form some sort of 'alliance for democracy'. In June 2018, then former US Vice-President Joe Biden was invited by Rasmussen to speak on democracy and the promotion of democratic values. Half a year later, in January 2019, Antony Blinken and Robert Kagan published an op-ed in *The Washington Post* presenting alternatives to the 'America First' approach of then President Trump. One of their proposals was the creation of a 'league of democracies or a democratic cooperative network'. Joe Biden became President of the US and Antony Blinken his Secretary of State. In December 2021, Biden hosted a Summit for Democracy in Washington, bringing together leaders from more than 100 countries and many non-state actors, upon whom he called to halt the 'backward slide of rights and democracy'[25]. Another initiative was the 2021 Open Societies Statement adopted at the G7 Summit in Cornwall, UK. It was adopted by leaders of the G7 and the four invited democratic countries Australia, India, South Africa and South Korea. It expresses 'shared belief in open societies, democratic values and multilateralism as foundations for dignity, opportunity and prosperity for all and for the responsible stewardship of our planet'. Although the four invited countries are not candidates for membership of the G7, their presence shows interest by at least the UK and possibly other Western leaders to form new alliances of democratic countries, which may also serve economic or geostrategic interests in the Pacific region[26]. Although linking all initiatives taken by the UK may seem too far-fetched, the Open Societies Statement fits in well within the Global Britain policy presented by the Johnson Government in 2021. While AUKUS has been presented as an alliance to defend the liberal democratic world order against an undemocratic China, it also fits into a longer tradition of Anglo-Saxon geopolitics in the Pacific region. Some authors have noted that 'the liberal order is implicitly associated with US leadership due to liberalism's historical connection to the two-century-long rise of Anglo-Saxon global hegemony'. However, initiatives such as AUKUS can also damage relations with other democratic countries, in particular France, whose sale of submarines to Australia was undermined by the deal.

Finally, it can be noted that some multilateral organisations from the post-World War II period partly also classify as alliances of democracies, although this is often not their primary goal. The OECD, for instance, started as a vehicle to execute US Marshall aid and became a broader organisation for economic development in 1960. Although the OECD Convention does not speak about the promotion of democracy, and although not all of its current 38 member countries have always been solid democracies, it maintains a distance from non-democratic countries like China, which is not a full member but only a partner country. NATO is closer to the concept of an alliance of democracies, as its founding charter contains a reference to democracy and it is presented regularly as a defender of democratic nations (see further Section 2.2).

Recent initiatives to establish a Western-led alliance of or for democracies have received mixed reactions. Critics say that although democracy is originally a Western concept, emphasising this too much may increase tensions within the global multilateral system. Not only East-West tensions with the autocratic regimes of Russia or China – towards which the message of such an alliance seems to be primarily addressed – but also North-South tensions with developing countries which are not or do not feel that they are part of the West[27]. **Others have defended these initiatives, because they perceive a need to call out the autocratic tendencies in other countries which seem to have formed their own 'alliance of dictatorships'[28].**

Britain taking shape with its G7 Presidency, increased defence spending, and its support for democracy in Hong Kong. This Integrated Review is good for Britain, transatlantic relations, NATO, and the free world.'

[25] The non-invitation of EU Member State Hungary to this conference was controversial.

[26] See, for example: 'G7 'extras' guest list reveals UK foreign policy aims' in *Politico*, June 2021.

[27] This view was, for example, expressed by former high-ranking EU Council and European External Action Service (EEAS) officials Jim Cloos and Pierre Vimont at the November 2021 ESPAS Conference.

[28] This view was, for example, expressed by Nicolas Tenzer in an op-ed in *The Conversation* in April 2021.

2 Three cases of multilateral parliamentary diplomacy

The role of the European Parliament in parliamentary diplomacy has been analysed in briefings, studies and recently also in books[29]. This chapter will neither repeat nor summarise these findings. It will focus on parliamentary diplomacy by the European Parliament in multilateral forums and organisations, which is a specific subset of parliamentary diplomacy. We selected three cases on the basis of the following criteria:

- The international agreement or organisation which the European Parliament tries to influence through parliamentary diplomacy should be of a multilateral nature;
- The European Parliament should participate with more than one of its Members in parliamentary delegations to the multilateral agreement or organisation in question;
- European Parliament efforts should be backed up by some form of mandate to its Members, for example a parliamentary resolution expressing a European Parliament position or a formal authorisation to represent the European Parliament provided by a leading body – usually the Conference of Presidents of the political groups – of Parliament.

These criteria exclude bilateral meeting forums, such as the EU-US Transatlantic Legislators' dialogue, or representation of Parliament by its (Vice-)President only, such as at meetings of the Speakers of the G7 or G20 parliaments. Our cases include, therefore, the WTO Parliamentary Conference as an example of a global organisation, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly as an example of a regional organisation, and delegations to Conferences of Parties of climate agreements as an example of a global agreement which is not backed up by a formal international organisation. For each case we will look at several parameters, in particular the nature and status of the international organisation and the corresponding parliamentary arrangements, the participating Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), and the timing, agenda and outcome of the meetings.

2.1 Case 1: WTO Parliamentary Conference (PCWTO)

Corresponding intergovernmental organisation: WTO

The World Trade Organization (WTO) is an example of a global multilateral organisation based on the functional principle of facilitating international trade. Founded in 1994 by the Marrakesh-Agreement, the WTO represents a global arena for negotiating trade issues and resolving disputes between its 164 member states. As a truly global organisation, the WTO does not identify with 'the West' or democratic government as a political system. The WTO even does not formally require that its members have a market economy, although its fundamental principles are more easily implemented in market economies. The accession negotiations of, for example, Russia and China to the WTO took many years, mainly due to the fact that their economies are of considerable importance but often do not fully comply with market economy rules. The fact that they are not liberal democracies is formally of no importance to their WTO membership, although some Western countries may implicitly have weighed this aspect in their judgement when negotiating on their accession. Because the EU has exclusive competencies for trade policy, the EU is a WTO member in its own right. The European Commission represents the EU and its Member States in the WTO.

[29] For instance Stavridis and Jancic, and Raube, Müftüler-Baç and Wouters, both mentioned before.

Origin and status of parliamentary diplomacy

In a globalising economy, trade policy has an increasing impact on the daily lives of people, either as consumers or as regards their jobs. Public protest against trade agreements was at the origin of the anti-globalisation movement and therefore the need to make the multilateral trade system more transparent and democratic was an obvious priority. Already in 1999, parliamentarians met in the margins of the third WTO Ministerial Conference in Seattle and agreed on the need to be more closely associated with the work of the WTO and therefore establish a standing body of parliamentarians to exchange views and monitor WTO negotiations and activities[30]. At the next and fourth WTO Ministerial Conference in Doha in 2001, members of parliaments established a Steering Committee in order to prepare a parliamentary conference on trade issues. This led to the establishment by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the European Parliament of the Parliamentary Conference on the World Trade Organization (PCWTO) in 2003[31].

The PCWTO's objective is to 'strengthen democracy at the international level by bringing a parliamentary dimension to multilateral cooperation on trade issues'. However, the PCWTO is a separate organisation from the WTO. The European Parliament and the Inter-Parliamentary Union together organise and co-preside over the conference, creating a hybrid form of organisation of global and regional multilateralism. Although there is no formal executive-parliament type of relationship between the WTO and the PCWTO, contacts with WTO officials are frequent and the WTO Secretariat attends the meetings of the PCWTO Steering Committee. Meetings usually include a briefing by the Director-General of the WTO and, if held in Geneva, other WTO officials and member state representatives. These exchanges can lead to mutual influence between the WTO and the PCWTO. For the WTO, the PCWTO also serves as a forum for the familiarisation of parliamentarians with the complex system of WTO negotiations and arbitration. This is, in particular, the case for delegates from small countries, who are less able to rely on information from national administrations, or delegates from new countries, who have to learn the process from scratch. As we will also see in the next example of the NATO-PA, education and familiarisation seem to be significant components of multilateral parliamentary diplomacy.

European Parliament participation

The PCWTO is characterised by the broad participation of members of national parliaments and international organisations, including the European Parliament. Although all WTO member states can send delegates to the PCWTO, not all do so. This can lead to significant cases of absence undermining the legitimacy of the PCWTO. The United States, for example, decided under the Bush Administration that it would no longer participate in the IPU and therefore not in the PCWTO either. Members and staff of the US Congress are often part of the US delegation to WTO Ministerial Conferences and they do meet with PCWTO members in side events or informal exchanges, but not in the PCWTO itself. By contrast, the European Parliament is a co-founder of the PCWTO and an active participant. It co-chairs the PCWTO and although this task is formally assigned to Parliament's President, it is usually assumed by one of its Vice-Presidents[32]. The European Parliament sends a delegation of about 10 to 15 of its Members to each PCWTO meeting, whose composition is decided on an ad hoc basis. It is usually led by the Chair of the Committee on International Trade (INTA Committee) and includes mostly members of that committee plus some from other committees. Apart from the PCWTO, a PCWTO Steering Committee meets twice a year, usually in spring and in autumn. This Steering Committee consists of parliamentarians from 22 countries according to regional groups and several international organisations, including the European Parliament. The Chair

[30] See the WTO's website on the involvement of parliamentarians.
[31] See the European Parliament's website on the establishment of the PCWTO. A chronology of meetings between 1999 and 2002 in the run-up to the establishment of a PCWTO can be found in a discussion paper by Thai MP Kobsak Chutikul from 2003.
[32] Since 2019, Vice-President Castaldo has assumed the task of co-chairing the PCWTO.

of the INTA Committee leads Parliament's delegation to the Steering Committee, of which they are also the co-chair. The European Parliament may send a delegation of seven Members to the Steering Committee[33]. Apart from preparing the meetings of the Assembly, the Steering Committee also discusses content issues, while often inviting the WTO Director-General to its meetings.

Timing and agenda

The PCWTO takes place once a year. In years in which a WTO Ministerial Conference (MC) is held, the PCWTO in principle meets in parallel to the MC, starting the day before with a pre-briefing by the WTO and ending the day after the ministerial meeting to reflect on its outcome. During such an MC, PCWTO members hold discussions not only with fellow parliamentarians, but also with WTO-representatives, such as ministers from national delegations or senior officials from the WTO and its member states. This allows for an alignment of discussion topics of the PCWTO and those of the MC. However, for different reasons, mostly linked to the organisational capacity of the host country, the PCWTO does not always meet in parallel to the MC. Both meetings coincided at the ninth MC in Bali in 2013 and the 11th MC in Buenos Aires in 2017. They did not coincide at the 10th MC, which took place in December 2015 in Nairobi, while the PCWTO met 10 months beforehand in February 2015 and again six months after the MC in June 2016, on both occasions in Geneva. The 12th WTO MC was planned for 2019, but was postponed several times for organisational reasons and because of the pandemic interrupting the rhythm of both the MC and the PCWTO.

Outcome

Every PCWTO meeting produces an 'Outcome Document' that summarises the position of the Conference on particular topics. The outcome document, along with other meeting documents, can be found on the websites of the European Parliament and the Inter-Parliamentary Union. This document has no binding effect on the WTO and even an indirect political effect is difficult to prove. Outcome documents may take stock of WTO actions, welcome decisions or urge action. The outcome document of the 2016 PCWTO, for example, welcomed several decisions of the preceding MC, in particular on agriculture, while urging WTO members to use the momentum for work on other topics in need of attention, such as services and digital trade. The 2018 outcome document deplored the crisis in the rules-based multilateral trading system and called for action in several areas. The WTO and the PCWTO may influence each other in both directions. The 2016 outcome document mentioned, for example, the issue of gender and trade, the 2017 WTO MC in Buenos Aires adopted a Declaration on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment and the outcome document of 2018 followed up with three points on gender and trade. The WTO may also make the case for the ratification of trade agreements concluded in the framework of the WTO, which the PCWTO can reflect in its outcome documents[34]. Even if the influence of the PCWTO on the WTO is difficult to prove, the democratic role of the European Parliament – one of its main constituents – is being taken seriously. Recent candidates applying for the post of WTO Director-General have visited the European Parliament during their campaigns.

Other democratic influences on the WTO

A separate aspect of democracy that should be mentioned in the context of the WTO is the role of NGOs. As indicated in the previous chapter, NGOs are increasingly playing a role in trade negotiations, for example by protesting, petitioning or participating in an advisory role. The WTO has institutionalised the participation of civil society in the annual WTO Public Forum. The 2021 Public Forum consisted of a three-

[33] The authorisation and composition of delegations to international meetings on behalf of the European Parliament are decided by the 'Conference of Presidents', which assembles the leaders of all political groups represented in the European Parliament. The composition of delegations to the PCWTO is decided each time on an ad hoc basis, taking a proportionate representation of political parties into account. The composition of delegations to the Steering Committee is decided at the beginning of each parliamentary term of the European Parliament for that particular term.

[34] Point 4 of the PCWTO outcome document of June 2016 called, for example, for the ratification of the Trade Facilitation Agreement.

day event entitled 'Trade Beyond COVID-19: Building Resilience'. The Public Forum is an interesting case of civil society democracy existing side by side with parliamentary diplomacy. Both forms of democracy meet when members of parliaments take part in the forum. This is usually the case and is facilitated by the European Parliament and the IPU by organising a Steering Committee meeting back-to-back with Public Forum meetings. NGOs even have the advantage over their parliamentary counterparts of being recognised as observers to WTO Ministerial Conferences – a status that parliamentarians lack. The Public Forum shows how civil society can be taken from the streets into the process in the WTO.

This phenomenon is not unique to the WTO. The EU has, for example, a Civil Society Dialogue between the European Commission's Directorate-General for Trade, the executive branch of EU trade policy and representatives of civil society. In individual cases of controversial trade agreements, civil society has employed a more varied pattern of action, including the role of outsider protester. This was the case, for example, for negotiations on the EU-US Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and the multilateral 23-country initiative for a Trade in Services Agreement (TiSA). When these agreements were not concluded, civil society protesters argued that they had been a major influence in achieving that outcome.

2.2 Case 2: participation in climate change conferences

Corresponding intergovernmental organisation: UNFCCC

Created in 1992, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is an international treaty that has been at the centre of international climate policy. In itself an example of multilateralism addressing a pressing global challenge, it has served as 'a framework for international cooperation to combat climate change by limiting average global temperature increases and the resulting climate change' (UNFCCC, 2021)[35]. Calling 'for the widest possible cooperation by all countries' (UNFCC, 1992)[36], UNFCC membership has extended from 165 signatories to the current 197 Parties, including the EU. The main decision-making body of the convention is the Conference of the Parties (COP), which reviews the implementation of the convention and any other legal instruments under its aegis. It has normally met on annual basis since March 1995, when the first COP meeting (COP1) took place in Berlin, Germany. Although the UNFCCC is not an international organisation but an international agreement, it is supported by a secretariat of about 450 staff located in Bonn (Germany), which provides technical expertise and manages climate change negotiations and the implementation of specific climate agreements. A major milestone in UNFCCC history was reached on 12 December 2015 at COP21 with the adoption of the Paris Agreement, widely recognised as the first ever legally binding international agreement stipulating ambitious global efforts to combat and adapt to climate change impacts. Article 2 of the Paris Agreement sets out the main objectives of the agreement, with the need to limit global warming to 'well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels' (and pursuing efforts to reach the limit of 1.5 °C) being the main, overarching goal. Most recently, the achievements of the Paris Agreement have been taken forward at the COP26 meeting in Glasgow (31 October-12 November 2021), where delegates agreed to raise global commitments and 'to turn the 2020s into a decade of climate action'[37].

[35] https://unfccc.int/process/the-convention/history-of-the-convention#eq-1 (accessed on 8 December 2021).
[36] https://unfccc.int/files/essential_background/background_publications_htmlpdf/application/pdf/conveng.pdf (accessed on 8 December 2021).
[37] https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-glasgow-climate-pact-key-outcomes-from-cop26 (accessed on 8 December 2021).

Origin and status of parliamentary diplomacy

COP meetings have increasingly gained international attention throughout time, as the effects and political importance of climate change have developed. The EU has been involved in these discussions since the 1990s, when climate aspects first featured on the international politics agenda (Oberthür and Dupont, 2021)[38]. The European Parliament, in turn, has been a staunch advocate of raising global ambitions and achieving strong outcomes of COP discussions. In particular, the European Parliament's involvement in international climate negotiations has been strengthened by its ability to ratify international climate agreements since 2009, in accordance with the Treaty of Lisbon. The European Parliament's power of veto, approving or rejecting the results of negotiations on international climate agreements, provides a strong incentive for the European Commission (and the Council) to take Parliament's position into account. As a result, in the past, European Commissioners have met with MEPs prior to international climate negotiations (Biedenkopf, 2019).[39] Another source of influence for the European Parliament is its role as (co-)legislator on the EU-wide climate and energy policies, which determines the EU's ability to take forward (international) climate commitments. In addition to its important legislative and veto powers, the European Parliament uses parliamentary diplomacy to influence the outcome of climate change negotiations. It tries to influence the position of non-EU countries through its worldwide network of interparliamentary meetings with (non-EU) partner parliaments, whether in bilateral or regional format. As such, parliamentary diplomacy serves as another means to align views and build partnerships with individual countries. In addition, and most importantly, the European Parliament sends a delegation of its Members to every COP meeting.

European Parliament participation

The European Parliament delegation to COP meetings is led by either the Chair or the Vice-Chair of its Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI Committee). For COP 26 in November 2021, Parliament's delegation consisted of 15 MEPs, mostly ENVI members or substitute members, including the ENVI Chair and a Vice-Chair, as well as a Vice-Chair of Parliament's Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE Committee).

Formally, the European Parliament delegation is an observer during international climate negotiations, with the European Commission, as the EU's top negotiator, providing updates on the progress of the discussions. However, although not present in the negotiation room, the European Parliament uses its presence on the spot at COP meetings to keep the Commission informed of its position, and to build ad hoc contacts with representatives of the Council and EU Member States. The European Parliament also makes use of this opportunity to engage with various stakeholders who attend COP negotiations; these include 'ministers, parliamentarians and other delegates from several non-EU countries, as well as representatives from international organisations and NGOs from Europe and developing countries' (ENVI Newsletter, 29-30 November 2021).

Timing and agenda

In comparison to, for example, the NATO-PA, European Parliament actions on climate change are directly linked to the timing and agenda of COP meetings. Parliament issues a resolution voicing its stance on the negotiations before each meeting[40] and sends its delegations to the COP meetings, guaranteeing proximity during the negotiation process. Furthermore, Parliament also continues its engagement after

[38] Oberthür, Sebastian and Dupont, Claire, 'The European Union's international climate leadership: towards a grand climate strategy?', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Volume 28. Issue 7, 2021, pp. 1095-1114.

[39] See: Katja Biedenkopf, 'The European Parliament and international climate negotiations' (hereinafter Biedenkopf), on pages 449-464 in Raube, Müftüler-Baç and Wouters.

[40] Parliament's resolution for COP26 is available at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0437_EN.pdf (accessed on 8 December 2021).

the conclusion of the negotiations. Following the conclusion of COP26, the most recent UN climate change conference, Parliament held a discussion on the outcome of the conference with the lead EU negotiator, European Commission Executive Vice-President Frans Timmermans, in its plenary debate on 24 November 2021, complemented by a similar debate in the ENVI Committee (ENVI Newsletter, 29-30 November 2021). At the same time, Parliament follows up on international climate change discussions via legislative initiatives and public policy debates.

Outcome

While the exact influence that the European Parliament exerts is difficult to assess (Biedenkopf, 2019), the various tools presented in this section show that it has established itself as a notable actor in international climate negotiations. Parliament's stance of pushing for more ambitious EU climate legislation and international climate commitments has positioned it at the forefront of climate debates. For example, on 28 November 2019, Parliament issued a resolution declaring a climate and environmental emergency (ahead of COP25 in Madrid, 2-13 December 2019 and the publication of the Commission's communication on the European Green Deal, also in December 2019), and calling for a 55 % reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. These views were in accordance with the Commission's subsequent package of legislation issued in July 2021 and entitled 'Fit for 55 in 2030', as well as the EU Climate Law, which turns this target into a legally binding commitment for the EU as a whole. Moreover, past research indicates that Parliament may also have had an influence on raising the level of ambition of EU objectives in international negotiations (Biedenkopf, 2019). Ahead of the 2015 Paris Agreement/COP21, the Council conclusions providing guidance for the EU's position in the negotiations included the global warming target of 'well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels'. Parliament's resolution was more ambitious than that, focusing in addition on the possibility of pursuing efforts to achieve the limit of 1.5 °C (Biedenkopf, 2019). The subsequent text of the Paris Agreement includes both of these targets, also as mentioned earlier. This is very much in line with the EU's long tradition of showing leadership in climate change negotiations (Oberthür and Dupont, 2021)[41] and climate initiatives globally, demonstrated not least by the 2019 launch of the European Green Deal, which is meant to turn Europe into the first carbon-neutral continent by 2050.

2.3 Case 3: NATO Parliamentary Assembly (NATO-PA)

Corresponding intergovernmental organisation: NATO

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is an example of post-conflict multilateralism. It was founded four years after the end of World War II through the North Atlantic Treaty (Washington Treaty) in 1949, in the emerging bipolar world order of the United States and the Soviet Union. NATO's main mission is to provide military and security protection to its members and its main principle is that of collective defence, as outlined in Article 5 of the NATO Charter. However, the preamble of the Treaty also states that its members 'are determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilisation of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law'. As already mentioned in Section 1.2, this makes NATO a further example of an 'alliance of democracies'. When NATO gradually enlarged eastward after 1989, and the central European countries which joined transited towards democracy, the notion of an alliance of democracies remained valid. The notion became self-evident and almost superfluous, while NATO redefined its mission in the 1990s from a mainly defence-oriented organisation to a broader organisation for peace and security. Recently, NATO has placed new emphasis on merging the notions of military defence and defending democracy. Indirectly, this was already acknowledged in the NATO Strategic Concept of 2010, which states: 'While the world is changing, NATO's

[41] Oberthür, Sebastian and Dupont, Claire, 'The European Union's international climate leadership: towards a grand climate strategy?', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Volume 28. Issue 7, 2021, pp. 1095-1114.

essential mission will remain the same: to ensure that the Alliance remains an unparalleled community of freedom, peace, security and shared values'[42]. In an interview in 2020, NATO Deputy Secretary General Mircea Geoana called NATO even more clearly the 'military backbone for democracy'. Such assertions have gained importance since the launch of Russia's war on Ukraine. In 2008, Ukraine (and Georgia) had acquired a 'perspective' of future NATO membership. However, their accession did not materialise, as several EU Member States considered this as risking an escalation in EU-Russia relations. In 2022, Ukraine's desire to join NATO was further blocked, as NATO does not admit any country which is involved in a war. Nevertheless, the war has also been used by NATO to emphasise its close relationship with a democratic Ukraine, in contrast to an undemocratic Russia[43].

Origin and status of parliamentary diplomacy

Apart from mentioning democracy in its preamble, there is, as Zachary Selden and Linda Oehman[44] point out in their analysis of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, 'nothing in NATO's founding 1949 treaty that outlines a role for parliaments'. They suggest that the governments of NATO members were not eager to encourage parliamentary oversight, which they might instead see as 'parliamentary interference', adding a layer of multilateral oversight to national parliamentary oversight without much added value. Nevertheless, members of the parliaments of NATO states started to organise themselves in the early 1950s, resulting in a parliamentary conference in 1955. The conference became a regular event, developed a committee structure and appointed its own secretariat, which finally settled in Brussels. Step by step, a new organisation was created, which has been called the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (NATO-PA) since 1999.

It is important to note that the NATO-PA is a separate legal entity from NATO, with its own headquarters at a different location in Brussels than that of the NATO headquarters. Since it has no formal role of oversight over NATO, the NATO-PA cannot be considered the parliament of NATO. Instead of oversight, a more complex relationship with the main NATO organisation has developed, which may be characterised as a blend of dependence and influence. The NATO-PA is dependent on NATO because it is financed by NATO and its member states and because it relies for most of its information on NATO. The NATO Secretary General regularly addresses the Assembly and members of the Assembly meet with other NATO officials. The mixed nature of the relationship between NATO and the PA is reflected in the PA's mission. It includes an educational function, because it 'fosters better understanding of the Alliance's objectives and missions among legislators and citizens of the Alliance'. This function extends to countries seeking a closer association with NATO, whose parliamentarians are involved in the Assembly's work, as well as cooperation with the parliamentary assemblies of the Council of Europe or the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The mission states that 'through this form of parliamentary diplomacy, the Assembly contributes to mutual understanding and to the strengthening of parliamentary democracy throughout the Euro-Atlantic region and beyond, thereby complementing and reinforcing NATO's own programme of partnership and cooperation'[45].

The NATO-PA can also influence decisions of NATO through its many contacts with its officials and governments. The President of the NATO-PA is, for example, allowed to address NATO Summits[46]. Such influence is difficult to measure, as the PA's resolutions are non-binding and the Assembly does not

[42] NATO Strategic Concept 2010, page 5.
[43] See, for example, NATO's website on the issue of relations with Ukraine.
[44] See: Selden, Zachary, Oehman, Linda,'The NATO Parliamentary Assembly in parliamentary diplomacy', in Raube, Müftüler-Baç and Wouters, 2019.
[45] Quotes from the mission as described on the NATO-PA website: https://www.nato-pa.int/content/our-mission
[46] There is a similarity with the President of the European Parliament addressing the European Council, which is equally an institution over which the European Parliament has no formal democratic control, but which it attempts to influence.

exercise formal democratic oversight over NATO. Nevertheless, Selden and Oehman point to various occasions on which parliamentarians may have influenced NATO decisions, such as the 2010 NATO Strategic Concept, outreach to central and eastern European countries at the end of the Cold War and fostering relations with countries in North Africa and the Middle East.

European Parliament participation

Today, the NATO-PA has 269 members from NATO member states, delegates from 11 associate counties but also 8 parliamentary observer delegations, making 361 members in total[47]. The European Parliament has been sending delegates to the NATO-PA since 2001 and has a special status within the NATO-PA, which is laid down in Article 5 of its rules of procedure. It states that the European Parliament may send 10 delegates to the Assembly, who have the right to speak and propose 'texts' but are not be entitled to vote or move amendments. This means Parliament's-delegation has fewer rights than those from NATO member state parliaments. However, these rights go further than those given to other interparliamentary assemblies participating in the PA. According to Selden and Oehman, this special status can lead to irritations in both directions. On the one hand, members of the European Parliament's delegation may feel frustrated at having fewer rights than members of the national parliaments, while on the other hand, members of the national parliaments may feel that the European Parliament is trying to 'encroach on the responsibilities and authority of the national parliaments'. This has not stopped MEPs from taking part actively in the work of the NATO-PA. MEPs are organised within Parliament as the Delegation for relations with the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (DNAT), which is linked to Parliament's Subcommittee on Security and Defence (SEDE). The DNAT delegation is currently chaired by Tom Vandenkendelaere (EPP).

Timing and agenda

The NATO-PA decides on its own meeting calendar and usually holds two plenary sessions per year, in spring and autumn. These plenaries have no direct chronological connection to NATO Summits. For example, in 2019, the Assembly and the Summit coincided in London. However, in 2021, the NATO Summit was held in July in Brussels, whereas the annual NATO-PA took place in October in Lisbon. This is a difference compared to the WTO and PCWTO, where the meetings are held simultaneously, where possible. Apart from the difference in status of the NATO and NATO-PA meetings – with NATO taking formal decisions by unanimity and the Assembly adopting non-binding resolutions – the difference in timing is another obstacle for the NATO-PA in influencing NATO decisions. However, there is a great deal of overlap in the topics discussed by both organisations, which recently focused on, for example, the future of NATO (the '2030 Agenda'), democratic resilience and disinformation, as well as climate change and its security implications. Although NATO-PA meetings usually take place in countries that are part of NATO, they can also take place in countries which have been given a prospect of future membership. According to a 2021 announcement, a NATO-PA meeting had been planned to take place in Kyiv in May 2022.

Outcome

The NATO-PA adopts policy recommendations in plenary and produces a number of documents, such as summaries of committee meetings, committee reports and studies. By responding to recommendations, orally or in writing, the NATO Secretary General indirectly legitimises these recommendations and engages informally in a political dialogue, which could be a first small step towards a parliament-executive relationship. Taking the work of the parliamentarians into account is also important for NATO, because the members participating in the Assembly will also be voting on the national defence plans and budgets on which NATO relies. In 2018, the European Parliament organised a joint meeting with the NATO-PA ahead of the NATO summit, in an effort to make democratic influence over the Summit a reality. Although not a

[47] For an overview of all members of the Assembly, see the NATO-PA website.

direct outcome of the Assembly, the vast amount of information on its website is also a form of output, which seems to be aimed at public outreach to enhance understanding and support for the cause of NATO.

At the NATO-PA, the topic of NATO as an alliance for democracies was brought up by its current Chair, US Democratic representative Gerald Connolly. In 2019, he proposed setting up a centre for democratic resilience within NATO. The proposal was endorsed in October 2021 by the NATO-PA, calling for a 'Centre for Democratic Resilience' to be set up. The idea was supported by US Speaker Nancy Pelosi and US Assistant Secretary of State Karen Donfried and therefore clearly carries an American signature. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said the initiative provided important input to NATO's new Strategic Concept, which 'is a way for us to recommit, but also step up when it comes to addressing our democratic values'. The accompanying report, as its title indicates, focused on 'Bolstering the democratic resilience of the Alliance against disinformation and propaganda'. The implementation of this idea remains unclear and is likely to open up conflicts of competence with existing organisations working for democracy support, such as the Council of Europe or the EU. It is also unclear whether the emphasis on democracy will facilitate or slow down the inclusion of new members such as Ukraine or Georgia, which are democracies, but imperfect ones. The war in Ukraine has, as mentioned above, both decreased the chance of membership for these countries and increased the importance of their democratic political system vis-à-vis an undemocratic Russia.

3 Conclusions

Parliamentary diplomacy is not the only way to enhance multilateral democracy

Although parliamentary diplomacy is a relatively old form of democratic involvement in multilateral decision-making, it is no longer the most important one. Civil society representatives have substantially increased their role and influence on international decision-making. By forging networks and partnerships among themselves and with business and government representatives, they have been able to carve out a recognised role in multilateral decision-making. This role consists of a mix of political activism, exercising pressure on governments and international organisations 'from the outside', and advocacy, by participating in the work of governments and international organisations as advisers and observers 'from the inside'. Referenda have been used by national governments as a complementary element to representative democracy, especially when international agreements are likely to influence national policy options or even change national constitutions. Debates on such referenda take place in a national context, also in national parliaments. There have been no multilateral referenda jointly organised by a group of countries or by a supranational organisation. Where citizens obtain the option of organising referenda on multilateral policy issues, this enhances the democratic nature of multilateral decision-making, provided that the quality of information and debate is sufficient. Switzerland is the only European country in which referenda have become a regular part of decision-making, thereby creating a culture of informed debate. However, because the outcomes of referenda may not dovetail with those of national governments or parliaments, countries may try to limit the use of the instrument. Changing public views on globalisation have led to new ways of democratic activism as regards multilateral decision-making. Civil society organisations aiming to influence multilateralism – often originating from the left of the political spectrum – have managed to become part of multilateral decision-making. New groups of people with concerns about globalisation – often coming from the right of the political spectrum – have occasionally succeeded in imposing a more national policy agenda by winning elections (for example in the US in 2016) or referenda (for example in the UK in 2016). Finally, new forms of citizen consultation, for example through citizens' panels, are increasingly being used, for example in the 2021-2022 Conference on the Future of Europe.

Compared to the actions of civil society and referenda, parliamentary diplomacy gets substantially less media attention. Parliamentary diplomacy takes place to a large extent under the radar of the general

public. This is not because parliaments are secretive about their efforts: descriptions of parliamentary cooperation bodies and their records can be found on many parliament websites, for example on those of the European Parliament. A possible explanation is that parliamentary diplomacy appeals less to the public because it does not involve spectacular actions or street demonstrations, but orderly and less exciting exchanges and debates. Furthermore, the concrete influence of parliamentary diplomacy on international legislation and action is hard to measure. Nevertheless, compared to civil society, which represents people on the basis of membership or even looser forms of adherence, parliaments have the advantage of legitimacy though elections.

Enhancing multilateral democracy is not the only aim of parliamentary diplomacy

As the definitions of parliamentary diplomacy have shown, enhancing democracy is not its only aim. Building networks of parliamentarians, creating platforms for exchange among them and with the executive branch of multilateral organisations, conveying messages to other governments or organisations and even contributing to peace are all considered as aims of parliamentary diplomacy. Exchanges between these parliamentary platforms and the executive branch of international organisations lead to a mutual process of influence. It is unclear which direction of influence is the strongest: that of the parliamentarians on the international organisation or that of the organisation on the members of parliament. When 'educating parliamentarians' is mentioned as an aim, the role of the international organisation seems to prevail. However, members of parliament can influence the policy concepts of multilateral organisations or particular countries through communication. Sometimes a government or international organisation appreciates the fact that members of parliaments pass on messages which they themselves do not wish to pass on (yet). In these cases, the 'diplomacy aspect' prevails over the 'parliamentary aspect'.

Our cases have revealed these differing functions of parliamentary diplomacy. The balance between the democratic 'parliamentary aspect' and the communicative 'diplomacy aspect' varies in these examples. The PCWTO and the delegations to the Climate COPs seem to have more opportunities for democratic influence than the NATO-PA. Delegates to the COPs almost always have a mandate from a resolution of the European Parliament that allows them to take positions. Delegates to the PCWTO can act on the basis of resolutions of the European Parliament as well, or on more diffuse forms of mandate expressed in legislative amendments or reports adopted by Parliament. Both the PCWTO and the COPs have meetings in parallel to the meetings of the multilateral organisation they are trying to influence. In the case of the COPs, influencing their outcomes even seems to be one of the most important reasons for sending delegates. While the COPs have identical agendas for parliamentarians and government negotiators, the agendas of the PCWTO and NATO-PA may differ from the counterpart multilateral organisation. NATO-PA meetings sometimes coincide with NATO Summits, but this does not seem to be an aim in itself. Finally, NATO is the only organisation of our three cases that also defines itself as an alliance of democracies. This concept has been picked up on by the NATO-PA, which subsequently decided to set up a 'centre for democratic resilience'. This initiative originates from representatives from the United Sates and reflects efforts by the current US Administration to establish some sort of 'alliance of democracies' worldwide. Although such an alliance at first glance appears to promote democracy in a multilateral setting, the fact that the initiative is mainly driven by the US, the UK and people close to NATO seems to indicate that it is more of a veil for Western interests.

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