
The European Parliament and the Origins of Social Policy



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Drawing on a wide array of sources and literature, this study examines the role of the European Parliament in the establishment of the European Community's social policy. It argues that Parliament played a key role in placing this nascent policy issue on the agenda. It influenced the definition of what the policy should include, what it should focus on, and which instruments should be used to address social problems. In this process, Parliament filtered ideas, issues and political objectives from national and international debates into the European Community.

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Overview

This study sheds light on the European Parliament's role in the evolution of social policy. It demonstrates how MEPs and staff pushed for a stronger social dimension to the Community project in pursuit of two strategic aims: first, they sought to make 'Europe' more tangible to citizens through improved living and working conditions, and by showing concern for their daily needs. Second, MEPs aimed to strengthen their position within the European Community's institutional system as representative of the people and their interests.

The study focuses on the 'long 1970s'.¹ From a social policy perspective, this period began with the 1969 summit in The Hague, at which the European Community's heads of state or government declared an unprecedented level of support for a genuine social dimension to the integration project alongside its economic dimension. The study covers European Parliament socio-political activism up to the first direct elections in 1979 and beyond. These elections did not fundamentally alter its established routines of parliamentary work or the positions that MEPs promoted in the field of social policy. Nonetheless, they changed the nature of European Parliament interventions in Community social policymaking quite significantly. Especially with the extension of parliamentary powers and Community competences from the 1987 Single European Act onwards, Parliament's social policymaking became much more reactive and dependent on Commission proposals, and more politicised and competitive.

Based on two examples of European Parliament socio-political activism, the study demonstrates that the 'long 1970s' set the course for its intervention in Community social policy until today. The study examines Parliament's involvement in the negotiation and adoption of the Community's first Social Action Programme (1973). It also sheds light on MEPs' attempts to introduce policy measures to educate citizens on the added value of European integration, so as to connect them more closely to the European Community as well as the European Parliament. Parliament became a norm setter in European social policy, notably for concrete measures and minimum standards.

Based on archival sources, interviews with former MEPs and staff and literature and media reports, the study explores the particular role that the political groups and committees, as well as individual Members of the European Parliament, played in shaping the origins of Community social policy. It investigates these actors' motivations and their strategies for making their voice heard and their views count: in interinstitutional relations within the European Community, in the emerging vertical multilevel governance system, and in relations with organised societal actors and citizens.

An [executive summary](#) of the study is published separately.

¹ The 'long 1970s', in socio-economic terms, lasted from the new social movements in the late 1960s and the 1973 oil crisis through to the reforms and transformation in the 1980s. Institutionally, it began with the 1969 summit in The Hague and extended beyond the 1979 direct elections to the European Parliament, which were far from a 'zero hour' for Parliament, let alone the European Community.

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Abbreviations

AEH	European Action of Persons with Disabilities (Action Européenne des Handicapés)
CD group	Christian democratic group
DG	Directorate General
EC	European Community
EESC	European Economic and Social Committee
EP	European Parliament
EPSR	European Pillar of Social Rights
ESF	European Social Fund
EU	European Union
HAEP	Historical Archives of the European Parliament
HAEU	Historical Archives of the European Union
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
OJ	Official Journal of the European Communities
OMC	Open Method of Coordination
SAP	Social Action Programme
SEA	Single European Act
UK	United Kingdom

1. Introduction

On 18 May 1979, a group of organisations representing persons with disabilities from across the European Community (EC) came together in Luxembourg City to establish the European Action of Persons with Disabilities (Action Européenne des Handicapés, AEH). Organisations from all but two member states (Ireland and Italy) took part. The newly founded transnational organisation aimed to contribute to the 'optimal social and occupational inclusion of persons with disabilities, as well as the extension of preventative measures [...], better visibility of persons with disabilities' problems etc'.² The AEH was expressly established in the context of the European Parliament's (EP) imminent first direct elections just one month later. Capitalising on a sharp increase in media and public interest for European affairs, the organisations forming the AEH called upon all political parties across the member states to position themselves vis-à-vis the AEH's demands for Community socio-political action.

Of the EC institutions addressed by the AEH, the EP had limited consultative powers and no decision-making role in legislation. Nonetheless, it had become a strong, outspoken promoter of more socio-political action at the Community level – not least in favour of the weakest and most disadvantaged members of society, among them persons with disabilities.³ During the 1970s, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) were facing two major hurdles complicating their pursuit of concrete measures to improve people's living and working conditions, however. At the time, the treaties provided neither for a comprehensive Community social dimension nor for fully-fledged parliamentary powers for the EP. As a result, even MEPs themselves had low expectations as regards the EP's potential socio-political impact. Nevertheless, the EP succeeded in influencing, and even partly in initiating, EC policymaking to a remarkable extent. This impact was important for MEPs not only in terms of concrete policy gains, but also in their efforts to establish their institution firmly as representative of the people, both in the eyes of citizens and of the other Community institutions, notably the Council of Ministers and the Commission. For MEPs, social policy served as a means to demonstrate the tangible added value of European integration to EC citizens. It also allowed them to claim they were the voice of the people, and hence providers of democratic legitimacy in Community-level policymaking.

Parliament's socio-political activism, its roots, motives, and impact, are at the heart of this study, with a temporal focus on the so-called 'long 1970s'.⁴ For social policy, this period began with the summit in The Hague (1-2 December 1969), at which the member states' heads of state or government declared an unprecedented level of support for a genuine social dimension to the Community project alongside its economic dimension. The 'long 1970s' were also a period of political – and indeed governmental – power for left-wing parties across Europe, contributing to an increased focus on social questions.⁵ In the Commission, the 'long 1970s' constituted a phase – reaching into

² [Europäische Behindertenvereinigung in Luxemburg gegründet](#), *Luxemburger Wort*, 21 May 1979, 7 (translation by the author). See also [Gehandicapten in Europa richten vereniging op](#), *Nederlands Dagblad*, 12 May 1979, 5.

³ See Mechthild Roos (2021b) *The Parliamentary Roots of European Social Policy. Turning Talk into Power*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

⁴ Aurélie Dianara Andry et al. (2019) Rethinking European integration history in light of capitalism: the case of the long 1970s, *European Review of History*, 26 (4), 553-572.

⁵ See Aurélie Dianara Andry (2022) *Social Europe, the Road Not Taken*, Oxford: Oxford University Press; René Leboutte (2008) *Histoire économique et sociale de la construction européenne*, Brussels: P.I.E. Peter Lang; Antonio Varsori and Lorenzo Mechi (2007) At the origins of the European structural policy: The Community's social and regional policies from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s, in Jan van der Harst (ed) *Beyond the Customs Union: The European Community's Quest for Deepening, Widening and Completion, 1969-1975*, Brussels: Bruylant, 223-250.

the first half of the 1980s – in which, notably, the staff of the Directorate-General on Social Affairs increasingly pursued codification of Community social policy with a growing legal corpus.⁶

Against this background, this study traces the EP's involvement in Community social policy up to Parliament's first direct elections in 1979. The elections did not alter the EP's established routines of parliamentary work nor the fundamental positions that MEPs promoted in the field of social policy. Still, they changed the nature of EP interventions in Community social policymaking quite significantly. During the dual mandate before 1979, MEPs had less time and resources for their Euro-parliamentary work. Yet, they had greater liberty in setting their own institution's agenda given the still limited extent of EP involvement in Community policymaking. Prior to the first direct elections, the EP's agenda included a larger share of self-initiated socio-political activism than in the latter half of the 1980s. Through their own initiatives, MEPs sought to make tangible to EC citizens the concrete added value of European integration, and of the EP's work. Especially following the 1987 Single European Act (SEA) and the treaties of Maastricht and Amsterdam, which formally extended the EP's powers, MEPs' agendas became more dominated by the increasing amount of draft legislation put on their desks by the Commission and Council, with the competences of the EC/European Union (EU) also being extended. The EP's policymaking thus became more output- and impact-oriented, and more reactive than before. Given the low share of social policy in Community draft legislation, MEPs' attention also shifted to some degree towards other policy fields. In short, with regard to EP social policy the 'long 1970s' was a period both of consolidation of policymaking procedures informally developed during the 1950s and 1960s and of looming change, both as regards the EP's powers and its wider institutional role.

In a similar vein, the 'long 1970s' was a transitional phase when it comes to European social policy.⁷ By the beginning of the decade, the 'trente glorieuses' – nearly 30 years of exceptional economic growth and low unemployment – had strengthened the perception among member state governments that successful economic integration in and by itself would improve living and working conditions, making more extensive socio-political intervention at Community level unnecessary. Governments gradually abandoned this view as circumstances changed: with the 1971 collapse of the Bretton Woods system, as well as the 1973 oil shock and the ensuing economic and financial crisis, unemployment rose. Occupational insecurity hit a growing number of people. Young people were particularly likely to be looking for a job, fuelling discontent among a generation already on edge since the 1968 student protests. Another group of people increasingly calling for socio-political action on their behalf were women: in the larger context of the so-called 'second-wave feminism', more and more women abandoned working only up until getting married or giving birth to a child. At the same time, female workers were significantly more likely to lose their jobs during the crisis of the 1970s. Not merely women and youths, but vulnerable social groups more generally gained increasing attention among socio-political actors – among them children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and migrants.⁸

⁶ See Karim Fertikh (2016) La construction d'un « droit social européen ». Socio-histoire d'une catégorie transnationale (années 1950-années 1970), *Politix*, 115 (3), 201-224.

⁷ See Andry, Social Europe; Mechthild Roos (2021a) A Parliament for the People? – The European Parliament's Activism in the Area of Social Policy from the early 1970s to the Single European Act, *Journal of European Integration History*, 27 (1), 37-56; Laurent Warlouzet (2020) Creating a social Europe or completing the Single Market? Debates within the European Economic Community (1973-86), in Lucia Coppolaro and Lorenzo Mechi (eds) *Free Trade and Social Welfare in Europe*, London: Routledge, 109-125; Bertrand Vayssière (2019) Pour une politique sociale européenne : les espoirs et les déceptions de Raymond Rifflet à la direction générale des Affaires sociales (1970-5), *European Review of History*, 26 (2), 284-304.

⁸ See Keith Pringle (1998) *Children and Social Welfare in Europe*, Buckingham/Philadelphia: Open University Press; Elizabeth Vallance and Elizabeth Davis (1986) *Women of Europe. Women MEPs and equality policy*, Cambridge: CUP;

This contemporary context provided MEPs with manifold opportunities to establish themselves as voices of the people, their interests, and needs. This was eminently relevant in the run-up to the EP's first direct elections – especially in view of the widespread lack of public knowledge about the EP's work and the importance of voting.⁹

This study examines two concrete examples of EP socio-political intervention, demonstrating how and why MEPs sought to shape the EC's social dimension. Chapter 2 traces the EP's involvement in the drafting and adoption of the Community's first Social Action Programme (SAP) of 1973, with a specific focus on provisions for persons with disabilities. The chapter sheds light on MEPs' strategy to take a Commission proposal as a starting point for the pursuit of larger-scale political and institutional objectives, thus trying to extend Community and EP competences and influence beyond narrow treaty provisions.

Chapter 3 examines a socio-political sub-field where MEPs got very little to work with from the Commission and the Council, yet which they considered important enough to pursue nonetheless, and largely on their own initiative: educating EC citizens on European integration generally, and on the Community and its institutions in particular. This example of MEPs' socio-political activism demonstrates the broad understanding of social policy in the EP during the 'long 1970s', comprising virtually any aspect potentially contributing to the construction of a 'human dimension' to the Community project. It also shows the symbolic and ideological importance that MEPs attributed to Community social action at the time, notably in the run-up to the first direct elections.

Chapters 2 and 3 trace the activism of MEPs and the EP collectively at different levels. They cover, for example: interventions such as parliamentary questions, individually drafted and submitted amendments, and MEPs' personal contacts with members of other Community and national institutions, organised societal actors, and citizens; committee discussions, reports and motions, as well as collective action by the EP's political groups; and collective EP resolutions, decisions, and opinions. From this in-depth analysis of two exemplary social policy issues, Chapter 4 explores larger patterns of MEPs' strategies to influence Community politics and policymaking, through the setting-up of intra- as well as interinstitutional networks and working procedures, and contacts with their home countries and constituencies. In conclusion, the study summarises and contextualises the main findings in terms of their larger relevance for the EP's institutional development and regarding its role in the evolution of European social policy up until today.

The study draws on sources in various archives, most notably the Historical Archives of the European Parliament (HAEP) and the Historical Archives of the European Union (HAEU), but also on archival material from the EP's different political groups at the time. To trace newspaper reporting about EP activism and EC policy developments, a variety of different media archives were also consulted. Lastly, the study draws significantly on a number of interviews and written exchanges with former MEPs from all political groups, as well as former staff in different European institutions.

Commission of the European Communities (1984) [*The economic integration of the disabled: an analysis of measures and trends in Member States*](#), Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

⁹ See Commission: [Euro-Barometer. Public Opinion in the European Community, No 7: July 1977](#), Brussels, 29-88.

2. The 1973 Social Action Programme

From the beginnings of the EC, some MEPs saw a need for a genuine social dimension to the integration project. In total numbers, the group of MEPs strongly engaged in the field was rather small prior to 1979 and was typically limited to those sitting on the EP's committees on Social Affairs and Employment, and on Cultural Affairs and Youth. Together these committees had roughly two dozen members; another dozen MEPs occasionally intervened in EP socio-political debates, notably on issues close to their home constituencies, their national parties, or personal fields of activity prior to or besides their dual mandate, including in trade unions or transnational political or youth networks. Considering the overall number of 142 MEPs (198 following the 1973 enlargement), and the relatively limited EC competences in social policy, with associated low expectations of actual impact and political gains, three dozen engaged MEPs was nevertheless a significant group size.

2.1. Market creation and social policy issues

Until the late 1960s, the majority of member state governments and commissioners (with the exception of those holding the social policy portfolio) held the view that the EC did not require a comprehensive, politically regulated social dimension. The member states were keen to retain as much national decision-making power as possible in social policy, hampering attempts – not least by the EP – to extend the EC's social dimension.¹⁰

At the same time, the approach of regulating only the bare minimum of what was considered necessary for the functioning of the common market left much space for MEPs to become normative agenda-setters in the area of social policy. They countered the dearth of EC intervention by taking to the Community level social demands that were being widely discussed at the time, such as equality between men and women (especially regarding employment matters), the reduction and abolition of poverty, or special support for particularly vulnerable groups and their better inclusion and participation in social life and the labour market. Given the lack of common minimum standards among the member states in these areas, let alone specific Community legislation, MEPs' demands and suggestions were mostly fundamental and broad in character. Later, once a more extensive corpus of Community social legislation emerged, they became more detailed and narrower. As their advocacy did not require institutional or even treaty change, and implied no major fiscal commitments and redistribution at EC level, MEPs engaged in the area usually had little trouble convincing the entire Parliament to support and adopt their motions.

Such motions, however, had little prospect of having an impact if adopted on their own, that is on the EP's own initiative rather than as a contribution to a pre-existing Commission proposal. Indeed, MEPs typically depended for their pursuit of socio-political aims on at least some form of legal proposal – which could only come from the Commission, as the Community institution holding the exclusive formal power of initiative. The EP could try to amend such a proposal in terms of its scope and detailed provisions.

This is why the EC's first SAP was of such importance for MEPs' socio-political endeavours. This programme was the result of a gradual change in member state attitudes regarding the necessity

¹⁰ See i.a. Linda Hantrais (2007) *Social policy in the European Union*, Basingstoke/New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 28, 93ff; Éliane Vogel-Polsky (1997) *Lés institutionnelles et juridiques pour une politique sociale européenne*, in Institut d'études européennes (ed) *Le contrat social en Europe. De Jean-Jacques Rousseau à la dimension sociale de Maastricht. Actes des conférences et séminaires de la Chaire Glaverbel de Sociétés et Civilisations européennes*, Louvain-la-Neuve: Institut d'études européennes, UCL, 35-91, here 51.

of a genuine social dimension to integration, which took shape following the 1969 summit in The Hague. Whereas the High Authority and the European Commission as well as the EP had been pushing for some form of common social action since the 1950s, this summit was the first forum at which member state governments expressly called for a Community social dimension. They underlined their message at the 1972 Paris summit, with the three new member states – Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom (UK) – already sitting at the table, where the governments charged the Commission with developing a proposal for a SAP.¹¹

2.2. Drafting the Social Action Programme

The Commission submitted its final proposal for the SAP to the Council and the EP in October 1973.¹² This version was preceded by an intensive six-month consultation among the Community institutions and resulting revisions of earlier drafts. This consultation process opened the door to the involvement of MEPs in an unprecedented manner. The commissioner holding the social affairs portfolio at the time, the Irishman Patrick Hillery, was proactively asking for input from a variety of political actors, including transnational political groups as well as the EP through its Committee on Social Affairs and Employment, and the plenaries (Interviews Brown; McDonald). This consultation process offered various avenues for MEPs to shape what was intended, according to the Commission, as 'the basis for a Community social policy which could form part of a future social charter for the Community. What is involved, in fact, is the implementation of the first phase of European Social Union.'¹³

Building on the mandate from the 1972 Paris Summit, Hillery formally started the drafting and consultation process by submitting to the EP, as well as the Council and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), a document entitled 'Guidelines for a SAP'.¹⁴ Even these guidelines had been prepared in an inter-institutional consultation process – or 'anticipatory consultation of Parliament', as the Italian Christian democrat Luigi Girardin called it, who authored the EP Committee on Social Affairs and Employment's report on the Commission's final proposal for the SAP.¹⁵ There is plenty of evidence of several instances between January and April 1973 of Commissioner Hillery or Commission staff appearing before the EP as a whole, in plenary meetings, and its Committee on Social Affairs and Employment to discuss the content of the guidelines, and also the path these set for the later action programme.¹⁶

The EP relied heavily on informal procedures like this 'anticipatory consultation'. Indeed, MEPs' involvement in the drafting process of the SAP gave them a better chance of introducing their priorities. Once the Commission formally submitted its proposal to the Council, MEPs were left trying to amend a text that had been commented upon by three Community actors at the same time – the

¹¹ Antonio Varsori (2010b) Le développement d'une politique sociale européenne, in Gérard Bossuat, Éric Bussière, Robert Frank, Wilfried Loth and Antonio Varsori (eds) *L'expérience européenne. 50 ans de construction de l'Europe 1957–2007. Des historiens en dialogue*, Brussels: Bruylant, 235-269, here 259; Leboutte, *Histoire économique et sociale*, 666; Varsori and Mechi, *At the origins*, 225; Jill Murray (2001) *Transnational Labour Regulation. The ILO and EC compared*, The Hague/Boston: Kluwer Law International, 91.

¹² See [Social Action Programme, COM\(73\)1600](#), 24 October 1973.

¹³ Commission: [Guidelines for a social action programme \(presented by the Commission to the Council on 19 April 1973\)](#). Bulletin of the European Communities, Supplement 4/73, 5.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Report drawn up on behalf of the Committee on Social Affairs and Employment on the Social Action Programme submitted by the Commission of the European Communities to the Council (Doc. 216/73), PE 34.699/fin., 6, December 1973 (HAEP, PE0_AP_RPIASOC.1973_A0-0256!730010EN_018992), 17.

¹⁶ See Written Question no. 530/73 by Hans Edgar Jahn to the Commission of the European Communities, 27 November 1973, Official Journal of the European Communities (OJ) C12, 9 February 1974, 81.

EP itself, the Council, and the EESC – followed by a painstaking process of making the different actors' demands and suggestions, often on the same paragraphs, compatible and adoptable. Thus, rather than focusing on their much weaker formal role, MEPs prioritised shaping Commission drafts as a pivotal tool to exert political and legislative influence.

In order to facilitate the later consultation process, Commissioner Hillery took the SAP project beyond the EP plenary and the EP's Committee on Social Affairs and Employment. Charles McDonald, an Irish Fine Gael Christian democrat who was among the group of particularly socio-politically active MEPs from 1973 to 1979, has recalled that Hillery consulted the fellow Irish Christian democratic MEPs because 'he needed the Christian democrat support [as the largest group in the EP until 1975] to get [his draft SAP] through'. As head of the Irish delegation, McDonald took Hillery's ideas for the SAP to the Christian democratic group (CD group), where they were discussed, and then went back with the group's reaction to Hillery, to brief him on its position. Hillery subsequently 'came back and addressed the group. And then, when he went to Parliament, all our amendments were accepted' (Interview McDonald).

Among these amendments, the CD group sought to introduce into the SAP a stronger commitment to Community action in favour of persons with disabilities. While this group of persons already figured in the guidelines for the later SAP, it was only in relation to their employability.¹⁷ Indeed, as McDonald (Interview) has recalled, the Community 'could not have spent any units of account on any project or people from whom an economic return was not guaranteed', including through the then very limited European Social Fund (ESF). This, however, was too limited an approach to Community social policy not only in the eyes of the Christian democrats, but the bulk of socio-politically active MEPs at the time. Thus, among the amendments introduced by the CD group were actions aiming at improving people with disabilities' living conditions and social integration more generally. What is more, the CD group specifically called for measures to improve the treatment and integration of children with disabilities – many of whom were still housed in facilities together with adults, although they required special professional care. Importantly, the CD group insisted that the proposed measures be funded via the EC budget, which posed a legal challenge given the absence of provisions in the treaties in favour of children, and the general employment focus in EC social competences. McDonald (Interview) has recalled that his group succeeded in getting these amendments with budgetary implications through despite lacking a proper treaty basis 'because we [... did not] mention either children or other young people'; instead, they put the focus on opening ESF funding more generally for supporting 'a wide spectrum of people with difficulties'. In this endeavour, the group's secretariat played a crucial role. Through an in-depth consultation of the treaties, the secretariat worked out what provisions existed and which articles the group's suggestions might refer to, thus developing a strategic approach to pushing the above-mentioned points whilst staying within the given legal limits.

Indeed, both the final SAP and the Council Resolution on the SAP of 21 January 1974 made various mentions of persons with disabilities. Whilst still focusing on the employment dimension, the Council resolution included the objective: 'to initiate a programme for the vocational and social integration of handicapped persons, in particular making provisions for the promotion of pilot experiments for the purpose of rehabilitating them in vocational life, or where appropriate, of placing them in sheltered industries, and to undertake a comparative study of the legal provisions and the arrangements made for rehabilitation at national level'.¹⁸

¹⁷ See Commission: Guidelines for a social action programme, 7-8.

¹⁸ [Council Resolution of 21 January 1974 concerning a social action programme](#), OJ C13, 12 February 1974, 1-4; here 2.

The SAP itself contained even more explicit and extensive references, including a call for the expansion of the ESF's remit to promote 'concerted efforts on behalf of migrant workers and handicapped people'. The SAP referred to migrant *workers* generally, not *workers* with disabilities only, and used the broader term *people*. It also stated the long-term objectives of 'a wide programme of specific actions to improve the chances of social integration of all handicapped people', and improved social integration specifically for children with disabilities.¹⁹

Beyond this successful – though largely informal – attempt at shaping the SAP's target group and general direction, MEPs' chances of influencing the programme were highest at the committee level. Here, again, the political groups' staff played an important role in influencing the Commission proposal (Interview Richardson).²⁰ All minutes of SAP-related meetings of the Committee on Social Affairs and Employment confirm the presence of a number of staff from different political groups, most frequently from the Socialist and CD groups, and occasionally also from the Liberals and Allies, the European Progressive Democrats (dominated by the French Gaullists at the time), and non-affiliated MEPs. It was the task of these staff to provide their MEPs with background information, and to brief them on legal and political opportunities to strengthen their suggestions and demands. The frequent presence of staff at the committee meetings and the broader confirmation of such consultation procedures in EP policymaking by various former MEPs and EP staff points strongly to comparable practices in the context of the SAP (Interviews McDonald; Richardson; Ferragni).

Supported by the work and expertise of EP and political group staff, the consultation process between the EP's Committee on Social Affairs and Employment and the Commission intensified further following the Commission's presentation of the SAP guidelines in April 1973. MEPs discussed the concrete contents of the SAP's different chapters and its schedule during 10 committee meetings between May and November 1973. At most of these meetings, the SAP was either the only point of discussion on the agenda, or one of very few, and it occupied the MEPs for up to several hours per meeting.

Commission staff – not only from the Directorate General (DG) for Social Affairs, but also the DG for Information and the DG for Public Relations – were present at all of these committee meetings.²¹ Their presence underlines the importance that the Commission gave not only to involving the EP, but also to making this involvement publicly visible – providing the Commission with the opportunity to emphasise the democratic scrutiny of and backing for its proposals, and thus to strengthen the democratic legitimacy of its own actions. Commissioner Hillery joined the committee on three occasions, and on 24 October Director-General for Social Affairs Michael Shanks was present to comment on the final Commission proposal for the SAP. During the EP's main plenary debate on the SAP in December 1973, the committee's rapporteur on the SAP, Luigi Girardin,

¹⁹ Commission, Social Action Programme, 16, 25.

²⁰ See; Philomena Murray (2004) Factors for integration? Transnational party cooperation in the European Parliament, 1952–1979, *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 50 (1), 102–115, here 113.

²¹ Committee on Social Affairs and Employment, Minutes of the meeting of 22 May 1973, HAEP, PE0.AP.ASOC.1973.PV//ASOC-19730522, Minutes of the meeting of 25-26 June 1973, HAEP, PE0.AP.ASOC.1973.PV//ASOC-19730625, Minutes of the meeting of 24 October 1973, HAEP, PE0.AP.ASOC.1973.PV//ASOC-19731024, Minutes of the meeting of 30-31 October 1973, HAEP, PE0.AP.ASOC.1973.PV//ASOC-19731030, Minutes of the meeting of 20-21 November 1973, HAEP, PE0.AP.ASOC.1973.PV//ASOC-19731120, Minutes of the meeting of 28 November 1973, HAEP, PE0.AP.ASOC.1973.PV//ASOC-19731128.

thanked Hillery 'for his accessibility and his readiness to meet the requests and observations put forward by the Committee on Social Affairs'.²²

Nevertheless, the EP's committee-level engagement regarding the SAP was not a neat success story. Among other issues, the Committee on Social Affairs and Employment protested in vain against the indefinite re-scheduling of a tripartite conference of employer and employee representatives with Commission, Council and EP representatives. Initially, the conference was planned for 28 June 1973, so as to secure the involvement of the social partners in drafting the Community's future social dimension. In the end, it did not take place at all.²³ In response – and both as a form of protest and demonstration of the EP's role as representative of the people, their interests, and needs – the Committee on Social Affairs and Employment organised its own meeting on the SAP with employer and trade union representatives on 30 October 1973.²⁴ However, this meeting had a much lower chance of leaving a mark on the eventual SAP than an earlier tripartite conference with representatives of all major Community institutions involved in legislation would have had, and thus remained largely symbolic.

2.3. Adopting and implementing the Social Action Programme

The SAP turned out to be a platform of informal rather than formal and visible EP success in influencing EC social policy. Examining the various SAP-related EP documents, juxtaposed with the final SAP and adopted Council resolution on the SAP, it becomes clear that the EP's influence on the programme was more significant via the largely informal channels of Commission-committee and Commission-political group exchanges, than via the public and more formal consultation of the EP by the Council. A speech by the Council President-in-Office and Danish Employment Minister Erling Dinesen during the EP plenary debate on the SAP on 10 December 1973 allows insights into at least some Council members' expectations vis-à-vis the EP. Coming at the very end of the Danish Council presidency, Dinesen remarked that, '[t]his is the first time that I have had the honour [...] to follow the work of the European Parliament'.²⁵ This comment contrasted with the fact that the EP had been very active with regard to not only the SAP, but also a broad number of other social and employment policy issues during the previous six months.²⁶ According to Dinesen's diplomatic assessment, the EP's work left him 'impressed by the well informed speeches here in Parliament'.²⁷ Again, his remarks betrayed his limited knowledge of the EP's recent activities, as the speeches were rather broad and superficial in comparison to the in-depth work conducted at the committee and group level, of which Dinesen had seemingly not taken any notice.

²² Speech by Luigi Girardin during plenary debate on 10 December 1973, HAEP, PE0_AP_DE!1973_DE19731210-019900EN_9315861, 10.

²³ See minutes of the meetings of the EP Committee on Social Affairs and Employment on 22 May 1973, HAEP, PE0_AP_PV!ASOC.1973_ASOC-197305220010DE, and 25-26 June 1973, HAEP, PE0.AP.ASOC.1973.PV_ASOC-19730625_0010; Report by the Committee on Social Affairs and Employment on the Social Action Programme submitted by the Commission of the European Communities to the Council, 6 December 1973, HAEP, PE0_AP_RP!ASOC.1973_A0-0256!730010EN_018992, 18.

²⁴ See minutes of the meeting of the Committee on Social Affairs and Employment on 30-31 October 1973 in Brussels, HAEP, PE0_AP_PV!ASOC.1973_ASOC-197310300010DE.

²⁵ Speech by Council President-in-Office Erling Dinesen during plenary debate on 10 December 1973, HAEP, PE0_AP_DE!1973_DE19731210-019900EN_9315861, 12.

²⁶ See Oral Question 116/73 with debate by the Committee on Social Affairs and Employment to the Council, 5 October 1973, HAEP, PE0_AP_QP!QO_O-0116!730010FR_230395.

²⁷ Speech by Council President-in-Office Erling Dinesen, 40.

Parliament debated an extensive and detailed resolution on the SAP during the plenary on 10 December 1973,²⁸ a resolution which was adopted almost unanimously, with the exception of a number of Communist MEPs who abstained.²⁹ However, the Council subsequently did not adopt the majority of amendments contained in the resolution. Among these failed amendments were calls for measures supporting women in reconciling job aspirations and family responsibilities, pilot schemes for low-cost housing for third-country migrant workers, the upward harmonisation of minimum wages across the member states, the establishment of a European Labour Office, and action towards the formation of a Community social security system.

Some of these EP proposals indicate that the SAP became quite important for the EP's larger socio-political agenda. By opening the larger debate about the EC's future social dimension, the SAP drafting process provided MEPs with a wide range of opportunities to advance proposals for political action that they had been asking for repeatedly in the past, but were now able to insert into EC policymaking in conjunction with the SAP. This concerned, for example, the issues of harmonised maternity benefits, which had been on the EP's agenda since the 1960s,³⁰ and special ESF assistance for women over the age of 35 wishing to (re) enter the labour market. Although neither of these two objectives made it into the final SAP or Council resolution, the two adopted texts did include equality-related provisions going beyond the narrow limits of Article 119 of the 1957 EEC treaty, which merely provided for equal pay for men and women, such as equal access to education and equal working conditions.³¹

In a range of other examples, the SAP extended the scope of the EC's social dimension in directions previously promoted by the EP for years. Thus, the SAP envisaged measures specifically directed at young people – a target group that MEPs referred to from the 1950s as future upholders of the integration project and thus a prime target of their initiatives in the pursuit of ever closer union as stipulated in the EEC treaty.³²

The Commission did not broaden the EC's social agenda exclusively based on previous EP proposals and demands, however. Concerns about the socio-economic challenges following the first oil crisis in 1973, the strength of socialist parties in the 1970s, and the relatively strong influence of trade unions at the time all played a role. Still, the intensive interinstitutional collaboration between the EP and the Commission since the 1950s, and the Commission's frequently and increasingly demonstrated openness vis-à-vis EP demands were important factors that contributed to the SAP's extension of the EC's social dimension. The EP acted as a 'norm entrepreneur' seeking to ensure its 'action becom[ing] social structure, ideas becom[ing] norms, and the subjective becom[ing] the intersubjective'.³³

This long-term impact stood in contrast to the EP's more mediocre impact in the short term, with the Council adopting very few of the multiple EP amendments for its resolution. Most importantly,

²⁸ Resolution on the Social Action Programme submitted by the Commission of the European Communities to the Council, 10 December 1973, HAEP, PE0_AP_RP!ASOC.1973_A0-0256!730001EN.

²⁹ See A. Scholtes, [Sauver au moins l'Europe sociale](#), *Luxemburger Wort*, 27 April 1974, 22.

³⁰ See Roos, *The Parliamentary Roots*, 176-7.

³¹ See e.g. plenary debate on the social policy of the European Economic Community, 9 January 1959, HAEP, PE0_AP_DE!1959_DE19590109-019900DE_9301894; plenary debate on maternity protection, 27 June 1966 (HAEP, PE0_AP_DE!1966_DE19660627-029900DE_9303678; see also Roos, *The Parliamentary Roots*.

³² See e.g. Note by Alessandro Schiavia concerning a Community intervention in favour of miners' children, 18 May 1955, HAEP, AC_AP_RP!ASOC.1953_AC-0046!55-mai0040FR_0311030; Resolution on the creation of a European Youth Office, 9 May 1966, HAEP, PE0_AP_RP!RECH.1961_A0-0052!660001DE_0001.

³³ Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink (1998) International Norm Dynamics and Political Change, *International Organization*, 52 (4), 887-917, here 915.

the EP successfully introduced the mention of Article 235 of the EEC treaty, as part of the treaty basis for the SAP implementation measures. This article was of special relevance for the early EP: it provided for the possibility of taking Community action where none was envisaged in the treaty, in areas and cases where action had become necessary 'in the course of the operation of the common market'. The article was crucial for the EP in two senses: first, it provided a general remedy for what MEPs saw as 'the inadequate powers conferred by the Treaties for action in the field of social policy'.³⁴ Second, it provided for the consultation of the EP on any action taken under the article's scope. Consequently, Article 235 constituted an opportunity for the EP to promote two aims that were of major importance for its political activism at the time: widening and deepening Community competences so as to achieve closer political integration, and formally involving the EP in this process in a compulsory way so as to achieve institutional integration and the EC's increasing democratisation.

The Council, however, did not just reject the majority of EP amendments. It also limited any Europeanisation of social policy by toning down several parts of the Commission's proposal for the Council resolution – proposals that the EP had worked towards and in some parts explicitly endorsed. For example, the Council replaced references to Community-level 'equalisation' of socio-political standards with 'harmonisation' among member states, thus leaving more rule-setting power in the hands of the member states. It also deleted Council commitments to act on some specific Commission proposals which had previously been in the Commission proposal for the Council resolution.

Speeches by various members of the Committee on Social Affairs and Employment during the main EP plenary debate on the SAP in December 1973 made MEPs' disappointment with the limited scope and vague provisions of the SAP's final version abundantly clear. In their view, the SAP could and should have taken a much more decisive step towards providing the EC with a true social and human dimension. Several MEPs blamed not only the Council, but also the Commission for shying away from more comprehensive social integration.³⁵ Those MEPs who aired their criticism of the limited scope of the SAP and Council resolution, and who called for a stronger EC social dimension came from the CD, Socialist, Liberals and Allies, and Communists groups, with no group being particularly strongly represented. Members of the Committee on Social Affairs and Employment often held more left-wing views compared to the dominant social policy positions within their party groups, for example as Social Catholics or left Liberals. They may also have been somewhat socialised into developing preferences for a stronger EC social policy dimension through their committee membership. In any case, committee membership clearly had a more uniting effect on the MEPs – notably in their criticism of the Council, and to some extent the Commission – than their group membership.

The Council's course of action in toning down the SAP corresponds to a larger pattern in Community social policymaking at the time. The Commission typically made relatively ambitious proposals, calling for an extension of Community socio-political competences. Based on its own previous policy discussions, the EP then demanded more ambitious action that would result in wider and deeper Community competences in the policy field. In the end, though, the Council adopted a much toned-down version of the Commission proposal – often with a significant delay, if indeed at all.

³⁴ European Parliament: Resolution on the Social Action Programme submitted by the Commission of the European Communities to the Council, 10 December 1973, HAEP, PE0_AP_RPIASOC.1973_A0-0256!730001EN.

³⁵ See speeches by Luigi Girardin, Alfred Bertrand, René Pêtre, Egbert R. Wieldraaijer, Luigi Marras and Charles B. McDonald during plenary debate on 10 December 1973, HAEP, PE0_AP_DE!1973_DE19731210-019900EN_9315861.

The case of the SAP replicated this pattern, and did not mark a decisive take-off in European social policy. Many of the ambitious initiatives for a strengthened EC social dimension proposed at the beginning of the 'long 1970s' – including large parts of the SAP agenda – faltered in the face of the economic and financial crisis and pressures of globalisation and technological change. At the time when the nine governments commissioned the SAP, and when it was drafted, unemployment was at an average of 2% throughout the EC, and member states' economies had experienced more than two decades of fairly consistent economic growth. Already towards the end of the drafting process, however, and particularly during the implementation phase, the Community was hit by a global economic and financial crisis combined with international political insecurity, following the 1971 collapse of the Bretton Woods system and the 1973 Yom Kippur War and first oil shock.³⁶ In the face of such disruption, short-term crisis management pushed into the background lofty ambitions for an extended EC social dimension that had seemed possible and desirable in calmer and more prosperous times. The rapid changes around 1973 thus contributed significantly to making the final version of the SAP less ambitious in its scope and less concrete than the initial Commission guidelines.

The economic, financial and political turmoil also shaped the process of the SAP's implementation. In its aim to implement the broad SAP objectives, the Commission adopted a piecemeal approach of submitting single-issue draft regulations, directives, action programmes and other forms of Community intervention. This fragmented approach dominated EC social policymaking up to the SEA and beyond. In the aftermath of the SAP, the Commission focused its proposals chiefly on groups of persons who suffered most under the impact of the crisis, such as the unemployed, workers in need of retraining, and migrant workers and their families forced to move by the circumstances.³⁷

Moreover, although the Commission submitted a series of socio-political proposals in the wake of the SAP, several of them were either not adopted or not fully implemented at member state level. Michael Shanks, the Director-General for Social Affairs during the SAP's drafting and adoption process, claimed in 1977 that already by the end of 1975 preparations for an envisioned action programme on migration and various measures concerning social protection outlined by the SAP had 'slowed to a trickle, and it was already clear before the end of the year that the programme could not be completed on schedule'.³⁸ In the early 1990s, the Commission still opened infringement proceedings against Belgium, France and the UK for their failure to implement properly Community measures – for example, concerning equal treatment of men and women at work, and collective redundancies, which had been adopted based on the SAP.³⁹

Delayed, stalled or entirely dropped legislation projects stemming from the SAP limited interinstitutional possibilities for the EP to intervene, which in turn induced an increased (perceived)

³⁶ See Laurent Warloutzet (2018) *Governing Europe in a Globalizing World. Neoliberalism and its Alternatives following the 1973 Oil Crisis*, Abingdon: Routledge; Isabelle Cassiers (2006) Le contexte économique. De l'âge d'or à la longue crise, in: Éric Bussière, Michel Dumoulin and Sylvain Schirmann (eds) *Milieus économiques et intégration européenne au XXe siècle. La crise des années 1970 de la Conférence de la Haye à la veille de la relance des années 1980*, Brussels: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 13-32; Varsori and Mechi, *At the origins*, 234ff.

³⁷ For a discussion of European social policy in the context and aftermath of the SEA, see Warloutzet, *Creating a social Europe*; Leboutte, *Histoire économique et sociale*; Hantrais, *Social policy*.

³⁸ Michael Shanks (1977) *European Social Policy, Today and Tomorrow*, Oxford: Pergamon Press, 16.

³⁹ See Martin Rhodes (1995) A Regulatory Conundrum: Industrial Relations and the Social Dimension, in Stephan Leibfried and Paul Pierson (eds) *European Social Policy. Between Fragmentation and Integration*, Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 78-122, here: 119; also more generally Varsori and Mechi, *At the origins*, 234ff; Harriet Warner (1984) EC social policy in practice: Community Action on behalf of women and its impact in the member states, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 13 (2), 141–167; here 141.

need for EP activism in the SAP's implementation phase to address these failures. This activism consisted initially in MEPs' – among them the German Christian democrat Hans Edgar Jahn and the Italian Christian democrat Ferruccio Pisoni – oral and written questions to the Commission,⁴⁰ in which they inquired critically to what extent the objectives of the SAP had already resulted in concrete proposals, or why there was insufficient follow-up of its broader aims. As the economic and financial crisis of the 1970s unfolded and threatened increasing numbers of people with unemployment, MEPs furthermore called upon both the Commission and the Council to follow up on the SAP, allowing the EC to react to and remedy the consequences of the crisis.⁴¹

Despite the limitations of the 1973 SAP and its implementation, the programme had a larger long-term impact. Its drafting phase was crucial in this regard, as it created a blank canvas on which political actors – including MEPs – could sketch their ideas for a social Europe. For an institution like the EP with no formal power of initiative or decision-making on legislation, the SAP drafting process created a rare opportunity for influencing the Community social agenda.

A group of socio-politically activist MEPs used this window of opportunity with some success, especially in the long run. For example, the EP's promotion of Community-level rules for maternity protection were eventually adopted by the Council in 1992.⁴² Generally, therefore, as the Socialist group claimed, EP involvement contributed to the SAP's long-term significance by 'propos[ing] measures beyond the employment field and introduc[ing] for the first time an element of Community involvement in areas of broader social concern'.⁴³ As regards short-term effects, the above-mentioned case of persons with disabilities stands out. The Council did adopt a specific Community action programme in 1974, constituting the starting point for more extensive Community intervention in the area.⁴⁴ Moreover, Charles McDonald (Interview) recalls that the very first project in Ireland implemented and funded as a consequence of the SAP was a workshop for persons with disabilities in the south of the country. Even concerning this issue, however, the Socialist group noted in 1979 that 'the economic situation has prevented' the 'full implementation' of the SAP's 'proposals relating to measures for the integration of the handicapped into working life and also a long-term proposal on social integration'.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ See [Written Question No. 37/77 by Hans Edgar Jahn to the Commission of the European Communities, 17 March 1977](#); [Written Question No. 157/76 by Ferruccio Pisoni to the Commission of the European Communities](#), 4 May 1976.

⁴¹ See [Written Question No. 76/76 by Luigi Girardin to the Commission of the European Communities](#), 7 April 1976; [Question No. 4 by Willy Dondelinger during Question Time on 7 July 1976](#); [Motion for a resolution tabled by Marie-Thérèse Goutmann and Luigi Marras on behalf of the Communist and Allies Group on the updating of the social action programme](#), PE 39.892, 20 February 1975

⁴² See Council Directive 92/85/EEC of 19 October 1992 on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding, OJ L348, 28 November 1992, 1-7.

⁴³ [Socialist Group: Note for the attention of members of the Socialist Group](#), 23 January 1979, PE/GS/194/78/rev./2, 3 [370 of the source PDF GPSE 646_EN]; final version likely not preserved.

⁴⁴ See [Council Resolution of 27 June 1974 establishing the initial Community action programme for the vocational rehabilitation of handicapped persons](#), OJ C 80, 9 July 1974, 30-32.

⁴⁵ Socialist Group: [Note for the attention of members of the Socialist Group, 23 January 1979](#), PE/GS/194/78/rev./ 7 [372 of the source PDF].

3. Education on European integration

The case of the SAP demonstrates that the EP's understanding of Community social policy was significantly broader than that of the Commission, and even more so than that of the Council and the member state governments throughout the 'long 1970s'. Despite a deepening and widening of Community-level discourse on socio-political issues in the wake of the 1969 summit in The Hague, the majority of MEPs invested in social policymaking remained dissatisfied with its scope in the 1970s. Beyond the cushioning side-effects of the creation of the common market, the understanding of the EP, and especially of its Committee on Social Affairs and Employment, of Community social policy clearly implied a means-to-an-end logic of viewing social policy as instrumental for ensuring public support for, and citizens' connectedness to, the integration project.

In pursuit of this larger aim – a Community for and of the people – MEPs strove for 'the creation of European cultural and educational policies that would be based on, and strengthen, the ideals of European supranational integration'⁴⁶ from the very beginning of the EC. To this end, MEPs from across the EP's political groups and all member states called for the establishment of various channels to educate citizens, predominantly young ones, about European integration more generally and the functioning of the EC in particular. The first (albeit relatively fruitless) EP initiatives in this direction go back to the 1950s.⁴⁷

3.1. Educating Community citizens

During the 1970s, EP activism in the field gained new momentum. It was partially framed by the final communiqué of the summit in The Hague, which emphasised that a closer association of 'the younger generation' with the Community project would provide them with 'a better future', be 'conducive to European growth', and should hence be pursued through common action.⁴⁸ Moreover, the upcoming first direct EP elections induced MEPs to try to raise awareness of the Community and Parliament's added value, and to establish their institution as the main voice and representation of the people. MEPs' advocacy of a closer connection between the EC and its citizens becomes especially clear in the field of integration-related education. Based on the express aim of ensuring that all citizens would be able to identify with the Community project, MEPs proposed, discussed and adopted a large number of integration-related educational measures targeting different social groups.

One of these groups were schoolchildren. In a 1975 resolution on a draft directive on the education of migrant workers' children, the EP demanded 'throughout the Community a bicultural education with a Community basis', starting at the nursery stage.⁴⁹ Three years earlier, the EP's Political Affairs Committee on Community education and youth policy had already called for concrete teaching programmes 'through which all pupils in the schools of the member states might be familiarised

⁴⁶ Antonio Varsori (2010a) From Normative Impetus to Professionalization. Origins and Operation of Research Networks, in Wolfram Kaiser and Antonio Varsori (eds) *European Union History. Themes and Debates*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 6-25, here 11.

⁴⁷ See e.g. Note by Alessandro Schiavia concerning a Community intervention in favour of miners' children, 18 May 1955, HAEP, AC_AP_RP!ASOC.1953_AC-0046!55-mai0040FR_0311030.

⁴⁸ [Final Communiqué of The Hague Summit, 2 December 1969](#), point 16.

⁴⁹ European Parliament: Resolution embodying the Opinion of the European Parliament on the proposal from the Commission of the European Communities to the Council for a Directive on the education of the children of migrants workers, 13 November 1975, OJ C280, 8 December 1975, 48-49, HAEP, PE0_AP_RP!JEUN.1973_A0-0375!750001EN_0001; here 48.

with European questions, if being provided as obligatory elements of the syllabi'.⁵⁰ The report in which these aims were stated suggested Community funding for the development of textbooks, and possibly educational films, 'portraying history, geography etc. from a truly European perspective'.⁵¹

The EP also concerned itself with young people entering employment after primary or middle school. In the discussions on the 1972 report on Community education and youth policy, a group of MEPs from the EP's Political Affairs Committee emphasised the importance of political integration-related education, not only for students at secondary schools and universities, but also for young people entering the labour market directly after primary or middle school.

After all, as these MEPs and the committee report argued, their later sphere of work life was itself greatly influenced by European integration. Moreover, education measures for this group of persons should ensure that not just a well-educated 'technical ruling elite', but equally 'young workers' should be able to engage with Community politics.⁵² The EP adopted another call for Community action explicitly focusing on this target group in a 1976 resolution on the promotion of education on European affairs for young workers, following an own initiative report by the Committee on Cultural Affairs and Youth.⁵³ Concerning adults in or looking for employment, the main Community instrument was a joint exchange scheme for young workers within the EC, adopted by the Council on 8 May 1964. The EP criticised this programme as too limited in scope and funding, however.⁵⁴ The EP – and its Committee on Cultural Affairs and Youth – called for an extended second joint exchange scheme, as well as short-term courses on European integration and the Community aimed at 'young workers and young unemployed persons to foster their European awareness'.⁵⁵

The EP also addressed students in higher education. To deepen and widen their knowledge of the EC and European integration, in a 1975 resolution the EP called for 'financial assistance given as an incentive' to higher education institutions either intending to offer, or already offering, 'the teaching of subjects related to European integration'. In addition, the resolution urged Community support for closer cooperation between such institutions'.⁵⁶ Similar demands – along with an emphasis on the added value of EC support for integration-related higher education research and teaching in the pursuit of improved public knowledge about the Community and European integration – appeared repeatedly in the EP's discourse on the creation of a European university. This materialised in 1972 with the founding of the European University Institute in Florence.⁵⁷

⁵⁰ EP Political Affairs Committee: Bericht im Namen des Politischen Ausschusses über die Jugend- und Bildungspolitik im Rahmen der Europäischen Gemeinschaften, PE 26.861/engd., 2 February 1972, HAEP, PEO_AP_RP!POLI.1961_A0-0232!710010DE_012217, 33 (translation by the author).

⁵¹ Ibid., 42 (translation by the author).

⁵² Ibid., 32 (translation by the author).

⁵³ See Resolution on the promotion of education on European affairs for young workers, 8 March 1976, OJ C79, 5 April 1976, 7-8, HAEP, PEO_AP_RP!JEUN.1973_A0-0538!750001EN_0001.

⁵⁴ See Resolution on the promotion of education on European affairs for young workers, 8 March 1976, HAEP, PEO_AP_RP!JEUN.1973_A0-0538!750001EN_0001.

⁵⁵ Report drawn up on behalf of the Committee on Cultural Affairs and Youth on the provision of education on European integration for young workers, PE 43.516/fin., 2 March 1976, HAEP, PEO_AP_RP!JEUN.1973_A0-0538!750010EN_032939, 7.

⁵⁶ European Parliament: Resolution on the information memo from the Commission of the European Communities concerning the allocation of aid to higher education institutions, 22 September 1975, HAEP, PEO_AP_RP!JEUN.1973_A0-0148!750001EN_0001.

⁵⁷ See European Parliament: [Resolution on the Convention setting up a European University Institute](#), 15 March 1974, HAEP, PEO_AP_RP!JEUN.1973_A0-0396!730001EN_0001; see also Convention Setting up a European University Institute, Florence, 19 April 1972.

Finally, the EP promoted life-long learning opportunities about the Community project for European integration. For instance, a 1978 EP resolution and connected report by the EP's Committee on Social Affairs and Employment, focusing on 18-25-year-olds but with the perspective of a broader age range of beneficiaries, called for Community assistance to support residential adult education structures aimed at 'strengthening confidence in the Community' and making a 'contribution to European understanding'.⁵⁸

In promoting such Community action, MEPs moved on the very fringes of, if not entirely outside, the existing treaty.⁵⁹ This was reflected in the extremely limited selection of treaty articles invoked by EP documents: beyond the widespread reliance on Article 235 discussed above, MEPs based their demands and proposals on Article 50 for a Community exchange programme for young workers, and Article 9 of the Euratom Treaty for the creation of a Community university or higher education institution. In other words, MEPs resorted to articles incorporated into the treaties for reasons largely different from the implementation of Community-wide education on European integration. Most EP documents on the issue in fact made no reference to treaty articles at all, but instead invoked ideational reasons and commitments.

Indeed, action in the area of education and culture was largely considered the domain of the Council of Europe.⁶⁰ Community action was typically only agreed upon if firmly embedded in the creation or strengthening of the common market and the promotion of further economic integration, for example in the form of improved preparation of young people for employment, better living and working conditions for migrants, and re-education or re-training schemes for adults, not least in the larger context of skilled labour shortages.⁶¹ Moreover, Community initiatives in the area of education typically took the shape of non-binding programmes and schemes, rather than binding legislation.

In light of the 1968 student protests, which called the EC's legitimacy into question and thus demonstrated the need for a more political dimension to integration, education policy became somewhat more systematically embedded in the Community institutional structure.⁶² There was also a Cold War dimension to the rising Community-level interest in education policy: 'Confronted with the failure of both the United States and the Soviet Union to act as credible and attractive points of reference, Europe faced up to the historical responsibility to safeguard its own identity and build an original cultural model.'⁶³

In July 1971, the Commission established 'an embryonic internal administrative structure to work on education',⁶⁴ reporting to the Commissioner for Research, Science and Technology. On

⁵⁸ European Parliament: Resolution on residential adult education as an element of the European Community's education policy, 16 June 1978, HAEP, PEO_AP_RP!ASOC.1976_A0-0158!780001EN_0001.

⁵⁹ See Simone Paoli (2009) *Between Sovereignty Dilemmas and Cultural Strategies. France and the Birth of the Community Education Policy, 1968-1974*, in Morten Rasmussen and Ann-Christina L. Knudsen (eds) *The Road to a United Europe. Interpretations of the Process of European Integration*, Brussels: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 319-333, here 319; Simone Paoli (2007) *Building a European cultural and educational model: another face of the integration process, 1969-1974*, in Jan van der Harst (ed) *Beyond the Customs Union: The European Community's Quest for Deepening, Widening and Completion, 1969-1975*, Brussels: Bruylant, 251-273, here 253.

⁶⁰ See Paoli, *Between Sovereignty Dilemmas and Cultural Strategies*, 321.

⁶¹ For a contemporary discussion and overview of Community action in the area of education, see Jacques-Jean Ribas (1969) *La politique sociale des communautés européennes*, Paris: Dalloz et Sirey.

⁶² See e.g. EP Political Affairs Committee: Bericht im Namen des Politischen Ausschusses über die Jugend- und Bildungspolitik im Rahmen der Europäischen Gemeinschaften, 11 & 19.

⁶³ Paoli, *Building a European cultural and educational model*, 260.

⁶⁴ Paoli, *Between Sovereignty Dilemmas and Cultural Strategies*, 329.

16 November of the same year, the then six ministers of education met for the first time within an own institutional setting, although not yet in a formalised Council framework, to discuss the equivalence of diplomas across member states, and the establishment of a European university. Commission representatives were also present at the meeting;⁶⁵ however, the EP had no formal institutionalised mode of access to decision-making processes concerning education.

At the time, the member state governments were at odds over the institutional framework in which education-related cooperation should take place: whereas Belgium, Germany and Italy advocated embedding it in a Community framework, France argued in favour of a cooperation mechanism outside the EC.⁶⁶ The ministers resolved this dispute at their second meeting on 6 June 1974, where 'education was legitimised as an area of joint [Community] policy by the first European Council of Ministers'.⁶⁷ More generally, this dispute reflects the larger potential for intergovernmental conflict in the area of education policy, and thus the difficulty any Community actor faced who sought to initiate or extend Community action in the area.

3.2. European Parliament action on EC integration-related education

Neither the thin treaty basis nor disunity among member state governments stopped a group of MEPs from promoting Community action geared towards educating citizens about the tangible merits of European integration. The German social democrat Horst Seefeld has recalled that MEPs found overly detailed discussions – for example, on agricultural policy, including on 'soft and hard wheat semolina' and their regulation – were becoming 'unbearable'. They were more eager 'to get the young generation enthusiastic about Europe' (Interview Seefeld). This group of MEPs was, however, 'a small group ... particularly interested, and who took care that topics which might possibly be youth-related were included in more general reports'.⁶⁸

This group of MEPs was quite heterogeneous, both in terms of nationality and political group affiliation. According to Seefeld, one aspect that made his own group stand out to some extent was their attempt to claim a certain degree of ownership of the issue. According to the group's 1979 draft brochure on Community social policy, for instance, '[t]he Socialist Group in the Parliament has always maintained that education and training should be provided for all of the Community's citizens to enable them to participate fully in political, economic and social life and to develop their full potential as individuals'.⁶⁹ The socialists especially asked for Community measures aimed at people of all age groups that would strengthen their connection to the EC via knowledge-building and getting them to feel personally involved in integration.

Among the MEPs engaged in policy issues relating to education for integration, however, cooperation prevailed over competition between political groups. In plenary debates, for example, the degree of controversy between the groups was very low, and reciprocal support for reports, questions and statements was the rule.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ See Margaret Anne Trewartha Corbett (2002) *Ideas, Institutions and Policy Entrepreneurship in European Community Higher Education Policy 1955-95*, PhD, London: London School of Economics and Political Science.

⁶⁶ See Paoli, Building a European cultural and educational model, 262.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 273.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Socialist Group: [Note for the attention of members of the Socialist Group, 23 January 1979](#), PE/GS/194/78/rev./12 [374 of the source PDF].

⁷⁰ See e.g. all speeches by MEPs during the plenary debate on Community youth policy, 23 April 1979, HAEP, PE0_AP_DE!1979_DE19790423-039900EN_9319311, 16-22.

According to Seefeld (Interview), most of the MEPs engaged in the policy field were largely motivated in their activism by the shared ideational conviction that the Community needed to be more strongly rooted in its populace. Seefeld has remembered that this group of MEPs did not expect any noteworthy political or institutional gains from their education-related activities, given the thin treaty basis, and as a result had low expectations regarding their political impact. In fact, all of these MEPs also worked on other portfolios. Seefeld, for example, was an expert on and responsible for transport policy, and Hans Edgar Jahn was strongly engaged in the field of environmental policy.⁷¹ The Belgian liberal Norbert Hougardy was active in economic and monetary affairs, but also authored a number of reports on education policy.⁷² One of them was a report for the Political Affairs Committee, which became one of the most fundamental EP documents on education and youth issues prior to 1979.⁷³

Hougardy's 1972 report was an own initiative report based on two motions for resolutions – one by the Socialist group regarding the creation of a European Youth Council, and one by the CD group on the creation of a European Youth Office – as well as a resolution by the Liberal and Allies group on Community youth policy. Hougardy built his report explicitly on point 16 of the communiqué from the 1969 summit in The Hague, and the first meeting of the member states' education ministers in a Community setting on 16 November 1971, for a broader Community-level framing of his report's objectives. Prior to its adoption, the report underwent an intensive committee scrutiny process. The Political Affairs Committee discussed it in four meetings between February and October 1971, before adopting it on 20 January 1972.⁷⁴ The EP collectively passed the motion for a resolution contained in the report on 8 February 1972.⁷⁵

This 80-page report discussed in some detail existing initiatives and proposals for Community measures in the area of education and youth policy, as well as the context and concrete circumstances making Community intervention necessary. On educating young people on European integration, the report sternly remarked that 'schools and other educational means have largely failed in the task of political education',⁷⁶ whilst also acknowledging that '[t]oday, young people are pushing for political responsibility, which is most welcome, yet which demands an answer on the part of the democratic institutions'⁷⁷ – including those of the EC. Furthermore, the report pointed out that '[o]ver the past years, it has become visible that young people take for granted the existence of European cooperation, which is encouraging, yet that in many heads no clear idea exists of the challenges of the European construction process. [...] The esoteric character

⁷¹ See Jan-Henrik Meyer (2024) *The European Parliament and the Origins of Environmental Policy*, PE 757.644, Brussels: EPRS.

⁷² See EP Political Affairs Committee: Bericht im Namen des Politischen Ausschusses über die Jugend- und Bildungspolitik im Rahmen der Europäischen Gemeinschaften, PE 26.861/endg., 2 February 1972, HAEP, PE0.AP.RP!POLI.1961_A0-0232!710010DE_012217, 19.

⁷³ See e.g. [Interim Report drawn up on behalf of the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs on index-linking of savings](#), PE 40.933/fin., 10 July, for which Hougardy was the rapporteur.

⁷⁴ See EP Political Affairs Committee: Bericht im Namen des Politischen Ausschusses über die Jugend- und Bildungspolitik im Rahmen der Europäischen Gemeinschaften, (Norbert Hougardy) 3, HAEP, PE0.AP.POLI.1961.RP//A0-0232/71.

⁷⁵ European Parliament: Entschliessung zu der Jugend- und Bildungspolitik im Rahmen der Europäischen Gemeinschaften, OJC19, 28 February 1972, 20-23, HAEP, PE0.AP.RP!POLI.1961_A0-0232!710001DE_0001.

⁷⁶ EP Political Affairs Committee: Bericht im Namen des Politischen Ausschusses über die Jugend- und Bildungspolitik im Rahmen der Europäischen Gemeinschaften, (Norbert Hougardy) 12 (translation by the author), HAEP, PE0.AP.POLI.1961.RP//A0-0232/71.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 14 (translation by the author).

of official documents and the complexity of [Community policy-making] procedures often makes the texts incomprehensible for non-insiders'.⁷⁸

Hougardy's report thus sought to demonstrate the necessity of Community measures geared towards educating the next generation of Europeans about the integration project. To this end, the report already anticipated potential counter-arguments from other Community institutions to refute such a necessity. It argued for the need for the EC to go beyond the activities of the Council of Europe: 'All these considerations are evidently of an entirely different character than those considerations which led the European countries to cooperate in the areas of culture, youth and education within the framework of the Council of Europe. The objectives of the Community exist independently next to those of the Council of Europe, [and] they are in many aspects significantly more concrete.'⁷⁹

The 1972 Hougardy report became a landmark document in EP integration-related education policy, and later EP documents regularly referenced it. In this way, MEPs sought to demonstrate the EP's consistent and ongoing engagement both in the promotion of Community engagement in the field more generally⁸⁰ and regarding more specific objectives, such as an updated Community exchange scheme for young workers⁸¹ or adult education on European integration and the Community.

A 1978 report on such adult education constitutes another case demonstrating that integration-related education was an issue promoted by MEPs from across the EP's political groups. Its author was the British Conservative Elaine Kellett-Bowman, on behalf of the Committee on Social Affairs, Employment and Education. This report focused specifically on residential adult education as an element of Community education policy and was based initially on a motion for a resolution tabled by the Dutch Socialist Hendrik Waltmans and the German Christian democrat Isidor Früh. Following a discussion on the initial draft report, the committee's members decided to develop their position in more detail by setting up a working group, which had MEPs from the CD, Socialist, Liberal and Allies, Communist, and Conservative groups. The working group met three times; additionally, the rapporteur undertook study trips to Denmark, Germany and Luxembourg to visit adult education institutions – partly with a European focus – and to meet ministerial experts, before taking a revised report back to the committee. The committee again discussed it during two meetings and finally adopted it on 23 May 1978.⁸² The EP approved the report on 16 June 1978.⁸³

The genesis of this and the Hougardy reports also demonstrates that the EP committees did not consider education for integration to be an unimportant fringe issue. Instead, they invested a significant amount of time and resources into discussing it, something particularly noteworthy

⁷⁸ Ibid., 16 (translation by the author).

⁷⁹ Ibid., 20 (translation by the author).

⁸⁰ See e.g. European Parliament: Resolution on the communication from the Commission of the European Communities to the Council on education in the European Community, 23 April 1974, HAEP, PE0_AP_RP!JEUN.1973_A0-0052!740001EN_0001.

⁸¹ See Report drawn up on behalf of the Committee on Cultural Affairs and Youth on the provision of education on European integration for young workers, PE 43.516/fin., 2 March 1976, HAEP, PE0_AP_RP!JEUN.1973_A0-0538!750010EN_032939, 11.

⁸² See Report drawn up on behalf of the Committee on Social Affairs, Employment and Education on residential adult education as an element of the European Community's education policy (Doc. 281/77), PE 49.547/fin., 14 June 1978, HAEP, PE0_AP_RP!ASOC.1976_A0-0158!780010EN_055287, 3 & 9-13.

⁸³ See Resolution on residential adult education as an element of the European Community's education policy, 16 June 1978, HAEP, PE0_AP_RP!ASOC.1976_A0-0158!780001EN_0001.

considering the low political gains that MEPs were expecting from their engagement compared to other policy fields.

In the run-up to the 1979 direct elections, the issue's prominence in EP policymaking reached a peak. At this point, MEPs, who had claimed for two and a half decades that they were speaking for the people, had to face the actual level of interest in and approval of the integration project by these very people. Convincing them of the EC's added value, and of the EP's role as the representative institution of the people, was thus vital for the MEPs' own identity and maintaining their narrative vis-à-vis the other Community institutions. After 1979, and especially after the EP gained legislative power in the SEA and beyond, the EP's formal involvement in EC policymaking intensified. Horst Seefeld, who remained in the EP until 1989, has recalled that EP initiatives geared towards involving young people in Community affairs gradually moved to the background. Until 1979, 'we picked up issues, that is, we made own reports, and this needed to be stopped to some extent later given that what came to us from the Commission and the Council, in some form or other, delimited our scope of work considerably' (Interview Seefeld).

Throughout the 1970s, however, EP involvement in the area remained high. The EP's Committee on Social Affairs and Employment and its Committee on Cultural Affairs and Youth produced the bulk of reports touching upon integration-related education. However, despite their most obvious expertise, these two were not the only committees seeking to shape EP action in the field. The Political Affairs Committee – regarded as especially prestigious among the EP's committees – also played a prominent role, something that reflects the broader political and ideational relevance attributed to the issue of educating citizens about the Community project. Amongst other initiatives like the 1972 Hougardy report, the Political Affairs Committee issued a request to the EP Presidium on 5 August 1972. It asked to be allowed to regularly invite the minister responsible for youth affairs (or with the most relevant portfolio) of the country holding the rotating Council presidency to participate in one of its meetings regarding 'the follow-up measures taken based on point 16 of The Hague Communiqué concerning the participation of youth in the construction of Europe'.⁸⁴ The Presidium granted the committee's request at its meeting on 14-15 September 1972.⁸⁵ Moreover, the MEPs on the Political Affairs Committee collectively addressed questions to the other Community institutions, such as an oral question with a debate on Community youth policy and the creation of a European Youth Office first submitted to the Commission following the 1969 summit in The Hague, and discussed during the plenary meeting on 15 September 1970.⁸⁶

Another EP committee that repeatedly became involved in EP policymaking on the issue was the Committee on Budgets. This committee was asked its opinion whenever an initiative at hand had (potential) budgetary implications, which was actually the case quite frequently during the 1970s. Following the 1970 Luxembourg Treaty and the 1975 Brussels Treaty, the EP's budgetary powers were one of its most developed formal parliamentary powers. As a result, MEPs frequently sought to increase the chances of adoption of their demands by connecting them to budgetary debates, as was also the case for initiatives in the area of education policy, such as in the case of the 1978 report on residential adult education. However, the MEPs responsible for budgetary issues feared a possible overuse of the EP's newly gained budgetary influence. In its opinion on this 1978 report, for example, the Committee on Budgets stated: '[We] take the view that cost estimates must be

⁸⁴ Presidium of the European Parliament: Protokoll der Sitzung vom 14./15. September 1972, Brussels, HAEP, PE0_OD_PV!BURE_BURE-197209140010DE_00298942, 20 (translation by the author).

⁸⁵ See *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ See European Parliament: Mündliche Anfrage Nr. 17/69 mit Aussprache: Jugendpolitik in der Gemeinschaft, plenary debate of 15 September 1970, HAEP, PE0_AP_DE!1970_DE19700915-019900DE_9306641, 8-35.

accompanied by precise calculations to enable Parliament to consider the overall financial consequences'.⁸⁷ In the case of the Committee on Social Affairs and Employment's suggestions for measures in the area of adult education, the Committee on Budgets criticised the absence of such calculations and demanded '[m]ore financial data...'; nevertheless, the committee expressed its support for the initiative '[i]n principle'.⁸⁸ In other words, divisions among MEPs on issues of education for integration policies evolved more around committee membership than nationality or political group affiliation.

Suggesting concrete budgetary measures became an important tool that MEPs used to achieve their objectives. In the negotiations on the 1972 Community budget, for instance, the EP successfully introduced an increase in funding (by 5 million Belgian francs, constituting a 25% increase from the 1971 budget) for the so-called 'Kreyssig Fund'.⁸⁹ This fund had been established in 1960 following an EP resolution. Based on a report by the German social democrat Gerhard Kreyssig, it had called for financial resources to promote information about the Community, especially among children and youths.⁹⁰ An increase in the fund's resources – for measures such as studies, exchanges, and teaching material – was important for the larger EP objective of extending Community measures in the area of integration-related education. At the same time, attaching a price tag to its demands meant that the EP found an opportunity for indirect agenda-setting, adding an institutional dimension to the political success of convincing the other Community institutions of the need for more Community action in the area.

A 1975 EP resolution on a draft directive on the education of migrant workers' children marked another attempt to achieve political aims in the policy field through budget negotiations. In this case, the EP appealed to the Council to 'approve the appropriations re-entered by Parliament in the budget for the financial year 1976 for the Commission's educational activities'.⁹¹ The focus both of the draft directive and the EP resolution clearly seemed to be on the children of migrant workers. However, some of the EP's demands articulated in the resolution included repercussions for all children in member state education systems. After all, the MEPs called for the establishment of bicultural education with a Community dimension throughout the entire EC.

Thus, the EP's committees on Social Affairs and Employment, on Cultural Affairs and Youth, on Political Affairs, and on Budgets all contributed to shaping the EP discourse and actions concerning citizens' education on integration. This sharing of thematic responsibility led to some competition for ownership of the issue during the 1970s. This competition culminated in the dissolution of the Committee on Cultural Affairs and Youth following the reassignment of the EP committees' areas of responsibility in January 1976.⁹² The dissolved committee's area of responsibility was transferred partly to the Committee on Political Affairs (for cultural affairs), and partly to the Committee on

⁸⁷ Opinion of the Committee on Budgets, in Report drawn up on behalf of the Committee on Social Affairs, Employment and Education on residential adult education as an element of the European Community's education policy (Doc. 281/77), 14 June 1978, PE49.547/fin., HAEP, PE0_AP_RP!ASOC.1976_A0-0158!780010EN_055287, 19.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ See EP Political Affairs Committee: Bericht im Namen des Politischen Ausschusses über die Jugend- und Bildungspolitik im Rahmen der Europäischen Gemeinschaften, 17 & 33.

⁹⁰ See Roos, *The Parliamentary Roots*, 221.

⁹¹ European Parliament: Resolution on the draft Directive on the education of the children of migrant workers, 13 November 1975, 49.

⁹² Resolution on the number and composition of the European Parliament's committees, PE 43.474/BUR, 13 January 1976.

Social Affairs and Employment.⁹³ The latter took on the portfolios of education and youth, including more specifically 'the question of the involvement of young people in the construction of Europe'.⁹⁴ Accordingly, the committee's name was changed to Committee on Social Affairs, Employment and Education.⁹⁵

Beyond EP resolutions and committee reports, political group initiatives and interinstitutional contacts, parliamentary initiatives in the field of education on integration can also be traced to the activities of individual MEPs. For example, MEPs invited groups of interested people, and specifically young people, to come to the EP, visit plenary sessions, and enter into discussions on EC issues (Interview Seefeld). The 1972 Hougardy report also emphasised the importance of enabling citizens to visit the EP and see their MEPs at work, with the larger aim of educating them on the integration project. The report called for an increase in funding for EP visitor groups, referring to 'very long waiting lists'.⁹⁶

Individual MEPs' attempts at education through personal contacts were not limited to their own constituents, and thus not only geared towards gaining votes in future national or even the upcoming European elections. Horst Seefeld has recalled, for instance, welcoming a group of British students in Strasbourg. This experience was quite moving for him as someone who still had vivid memories of the Second World War and its aftermath. 'It would not have been thinkable in 1945', Seefeld reminisced, that a German MEP would one day welcome British youths in France (Interview Seefeld). To him, conveying the added value or even pure necessity of European integration especially to young people was of great personal importance.

One major opportunity for EP involvement in integration-related education measures opened up through a personnel change in the Commission. In 1977, the former Dutch Labour MEP Hendrikus Vredeling became Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs. During his time in the EP, Vredeling had been among the most socio-politically active MEPs. His engagement had comprised repeated calls for Community action in the field of education policy.⁹⁷ On 13 March 1979, at the instigation of Vredeling, the Commission put forward a proposal for a second joint exchange programme for young workers within the Community.⁹⁸ This was the kind of programme MEPs had been requesting for years, 'to bring home the European ideal' as the Italian Christian democrat Maria Luisa Cassanmagnago Cerretti put it during the plenary debate on the Committee on Social Affairs, Employment and Education's report concerning the Commission proposal, which she had authored

⁹³ Committee on Cultural Affairs and Youth: Minutes of the meeting of Wednesday, 18 February 1976, PE 43.828, 26 February 1976, 8.

⁹⁴ Bureau of the European Parliament: Directive on the distribution of responsibilities among the committees of the European Parliament, PE 43.250 (BUR), 6 January 1976, 5.

⁹⁵ See Committee on Social Affairs and Employment: [Minutes of the meeting of Tuesday, 24 February and Wednesday, 25 February 1976](#), PE/V/PV/76-2, 4 March 1976, 7; Committee on Social Affairs, Employment and Education: [Protokoll der konstituierenden Sitzung vom Dienstag, 9. März 1976 in Strasbourg](#) [sic], PE/V/PV/76-3, 16 March 1976.

⁹⁶ See EP Political Affairs Committee: Bericht im Namen des Politischen Ausschusses über die Jugend- und Bildungspolitik im Rahmen der Europäischen Gemeinschaften (Norbert Hougardy), 26, HAEP, PEO.AP.POLI.1961.RP//A0-0232/71.

⁹⁷ See e.g. Written Question No. 88/69 by Hendrikus Vredeling to the Commission of the European Communities, HAEP, PEO_AP_QP!QE_E-0088!690010DE_135514; Written Question No. 388/72 by Hendrikus Vredeling to the Commission of the European Communities, HAEP, PEO_AP_QP!QE_E-0388!720010DE_167652; Written Question No. 99/73 by Hendrikus Vredeling to the Commission of the European Communities, HAEP, PEO_AP_QP!QE_E-0099!730010EN_177355.

⁹⁸ See Proposal for a Council Decision on setting up a second joint programme of exchanges of young workers within the Community, OJ C81, 28 March 1979, 16-18.

as rapporteur.⁹⁹ Having one of their own in the position to draft and propose Community action – even if he had new constraints and obligations in his Commission role – greatly facilitated MEPs' activism. After all, Vredeling had formed and developed his political views and preferences, had been socialised, and had become acquainted with Community politics and social policy within the EP, leading him in his new position to keep in very close contact with the EP and MEPs (Interview van der Hek). This showed, for instance, in the plenary debate on the second joint exchange programme. In his speech, Vredeling expressed, in line with all MEPs who spoke, his dissatisfaction with the scope and impact of the Community's first exchange programme.¹⁰⁰ Accordingly, his draft second programme was significantly broader in its scope and aims. In this way, Vredeling becoming the commissioner responsible for the social affairs portfolio constituted a political gain for socio-politically proactive MEPs, not least in the field of education and youth policy.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ European Parliament: Minutes of the plenary debate on 23 April 1979, HAEP, PE0_AP_DE!1979_DE19790423-039900EN_9319311, 16.

¹⁰⁰ European Parliament: Minutes of the plenary debate on 23 April 1979, 20.

¹⁰¹ See Roos, *The Parliamentary Roots*, 231-2.

4. European Parliament strategies for influencing Community social policy

By the 1970s, the EP was no longer the same actor that it had been in the 1950s. This shows clearly in the EP's increasing involvement in Community social policy. While the EP faced significant difficulties in its attempts to Europeanise this policy field in more and more adverse circumstances after 1973, it gradually standardised and formalised its parliamentary working patterns. In the course of this transformation, the MEPs developed a variety of strategies for influencing EC social policy.

4.1. Entrepreneurial leadership

To begin with, MEPs sought to exercise 'entrepreneurial leadership', understood here as strategic attempts to impress and mobilise fellow actors in EC politics, first in the EP, and then also in the Commission, Council, and the member states in pursuit of specific political and institutional aims.¹⁰² MEPs could of course use a set of formal institutional tools in the absence of any EP legislative decision-making powers prior to the SEA. Whereas the EEC treaty provided for the EP's consultation in a number of policy fields, the main Community body in EC social policy that had to be consulted was actually the EESC. In the 1960s, however, the Council agreed to generalise consultation of the EP to all legislative and eventually, non-legislative texts. In 1973, moreover, the Commission agreed to consult the EP on all of its policy proposals, to forward them to the EP and the Council at the same time, and to re-consult the EP in case of major changes to the proposed draft legislative text.¹⁰³ Even though the Council, in particular, did not always uphold its self-commitment to consult the EP, these concessions intensified and facilitated EP involvement in social policy.

The EP's role was not limited to formal consultation on Commission proposals, however. Instead, MEPs sought to influence proposals at the drafting stage. Arnaldo Ferragni, Secretary-General of the CD group from 1960 to 1972, has recalled that these preliminary, informal consultations between the EP and the Commission were crucial because 'once the draft regulations or draft directives arrived at the Council, the die was cast', making EP amendments significantly more difficult (Interview Ferragni).

Alongside consultation rights, the EP held some budgetary rights transformed into proper budgetary powers in the 1970 Luxembourg and the 1975 Brussels treaties. Henceforth, the EP could not only amend but also reject the Community budget. Moreover, the new budgetary procedure included the possibility of a conciliation procedure between the EP and the Council in case of disagreement between the two institutions. With some success, the EP pursued socio-political legislative objectives by threatening to resort to a conciliation procedure, which would delay the legislation and put pressure on the Council to accept at least some of the EP's demands. For example, the EP used this strategy in a revision of the scope and rules of operation of the ESF in 1977. The EP resolution stated that, 'if the Council intends to depart from the opinion of the

¹⁰² Wolfram Kaiser (2015) *Political Dynamics in an Emerging Polity: Globalisation, Transnational Relations and Europeanisation*, in Johnny Laursen (ed.) *The Institutions and Dynamics of the European Community, 1973-1983*, Baden-Baden: Nomos, 51-75, here 68ff.

¹⁰³ See Wolfram Kaiser (2018) *Shaping European Union: The European Parliament and Institutional Reform, 1979-1989*, PE 630.271, Brussels: EPRS, 14ff; Roos, *The Parliamentary Roots*, 85-87.

European Parliament it will be necessary to open a conciliation procedure with the European Parliament'.¹⁰⁴

On this specific occasion, the EP could base flexing its new budgetary muscles on cooperation with the Commission. The original proposal prepared by Commissioner Vredeling had already included a reference to the possibility of a conciliation procedure.¹⁰⁵ The EP chose to emphasise this aspect in the plenary debate on its resolution, though only following an amendment tabled by the Dutch MEP Frans van der Gun, on behalf of the CD group, and the Irish MEP Liam Kavanagh, on behalf of the Socialist group.¹⁰⁶

Beyond a merely reactive role, the EP also tried repeatedly to induce the Commission, which alone had the formal power of initiative, to develop a social policy proposal. It did so via own initiative reports and resolutions, parliamentary questions, and informal contacts with commissioners, notably via political groups and committees with whom commissioners and Commission staff were in regular exchange. In this way, MEPs could try to put items on the Commission's agenda and point out the need for Community intervention. In social policy, the EP had access to one additional means of initiating Community action. Article 122 of the EEC treaty provided for the EP's right to ask the Commission to draw up reports on arising social issues. If such a report then shed light on a problem falling within the EC's competences, it could open up the opportunity for a subsequent Commission proposal. During the 1970s, however, MEPs largely preferred other options of inter-institutional contacts with the Commission, notably the above-mentioned consultation and exchange routines in the drafting process of legislative proposals, and parliamentary questions.

In using these tools, the EP did not always act as a unitary actor. In fact, as the previous chapters have indicated, the EP's work in this policy field was characterised by important divisions. One core cleavage existed between MEPs who considered the investment of time and effort in the extension of the Community's social dimension worthwhile, and those who did not. This could have been for a variety of reasons, for example because they considered other policy fields more important and conducive to their political careers, or because they did not invest much time in their European part-time mandate at all.

The second cleavage was at the committee level. The Committee on Social Affairs and Employment was not the only one involved in social policymaking. In addition, the Committee on Cultural Affairs and Youth, as well as – although to a lesser extent – the Political Affairs Committee shaped the EP's positioning on socio-political issues. Occasionally, other committees such as the Committee on Agriculture or the Committee on Regional Policy, Regional Planning and Transport gave their opinion, typically in cases where an issue within their scope of expertise had a social dimension. These latter, socio-politically more marginal committees rarely clashed with the Committee on Social Affairs and Employment and the Committee on Cultural Affairs and Youth. All of them pursued similar objectives based on similar motives, namely, the extension of the EC's social dimension with the aim of improving living and working conditions throughout the member states, making the EC more than an economic project, and thus establishing a closer connection between the EC and its citizens.

¹⁰⁴ Resolution embodying the opinion of the European Parliament on the communication from the Commission of the European Communities to the Council on the review of the rules governing the tasks and operations of the European Social Fund, 12 May 1977, HAEP, PE0_AP_RP!ASOC.1976_A0-0084!770001EN_0001.

¹⁰⁵ See Commission: Review of the rules governing the tasks and operations of the European Social Fund (Communication of the Commission to the Council), COM (77) 90 final, 29 March 1977, HAEU, CES-7662, 7.

¹⁰⁶ See European Parliament: minutes of the plenary debate on 12 May 1978, HAEP, PE0_AP_DE!1977_DE19770512-029900EN_9317481, 228.

The main inter-committee cleavage was between these committees and the Committee on Budgets. A speech by the German social democrat MEP Erwin Lange – at the time, chair of the Committee on Budgets – during the plenary debate on 12 May 1977 points to the fact that this division was not limited to socio-political questions. Lange expressed 'the concern of many colleagues that the Committee on Budgets might develop into the guardian of all the other committees. [...] The Committee on Budgets has only one task, namely to secure, or to help secure and expand, the responsibilities of this Parliament in the fields of budgetary policy and budgetary law. [...] It will be careful [...] not to want to perform social tasks or any other kind of policy tasks'.¹⁰⁷

This attempt at delineating the different committees' spheres of action did not prevent tensions among them, however. This became evident in a 1978 opinion by the Committee on Budgets on a report by the Committee on Social Affairs, Employment and Education concerning the review of the rules governing the tasks and operations of the ESF. Here, the Committee on Budgets felt the need to request the Committee on Social Affairs, Employment and Education to adopt its suggestions, or otherwise 'to state, in accordance with Rule 44 of the Rules of Procedure, its reasons for not following the Committee on Budget's [sic] opinion'.¹⁰⁸ MEPs used a similar tone typically only in cases where they wanted to apply pressure on the addressee of its demands – usually the Council or the Commission.

The EP's political groups also sought to leave a mark on Community social policy. Whereas they represented a large bandwidth of political positions, in social policy these inter-group differences were not as evident or impactful as the inter-committee differences. One major factor for this was the self-selection of socio-politically active MEPs. The majority among them did so based on their pro-integrationist convictions, including their general support for a deeper and wider social dimension to the EC.¹⁰⁹ In addition, the ideological gap among the EP political groups on social questions was not as wide during the 1970s as it gradually became after the first direct elections. This was the case not least because the CD group had a somewhat more leftist identity and socio-political positioning than some national Christian democratic parties. The group comprised many MEPs from left-of-centre sections of the Benelux and Italian Christian democratic parties in particular, whose political preferences and strong interest in social policy were influenced by Catholic social teaching.¹¹⁰ Moreover, the vast majority of MEPs from the Communist group who actively engaged in the policy area generally supported more EC social intervention – contrary to the fundamental position of the French, and also some Italian, communists, who still opposed the EC as an allegedly capitalist construct and extension of American influence.

More generally, the extent of Community social policy was so limited at the time that 'there was much more to gain [...] which is why social policy was not a very controversial issue [within the EP]', as the Luxembourg socialist (later Christian democrat) MEP Astrid Lulling has recalled (Interview Lulling). The German social democrat Heinz Schreiber also confirmed that 'Parliament – or at least the bulk of members – tried to attach the social aspect' to the Community as an economic project –

¹⁰⁷ Speech by Erwin Lange during plenary debate on 12 May 1977, HAEP, PE0_AP_DE!1977_DE19770512-029900EN_9317481, 205; emphasis in the original.

¹⁰⁸ Opinion of the Committee on Budgets, in Report drawn up on behalf of the Committee on Social Affairs, Employment and Education on the communication from the Commission of the European Communities to the Council (Doc. 50/77) concerning the review of the rules governing the tasks and operations of the European Social Fund, PE 48.478/fin., 11 May 1978, HAEP, PE0_AP_RPIASOC.1976_A0-0084!770010EN_044929, 22-30; here 30.

¹⁰⁹ Roos, *The Parliamentary Roots*.

¹¹⁰ See Wolfram Kaiser (2020) *Shaping institutions and policies: The EPP Group in the European Communities*, in Luciano Bardi et al., *The European Ambition. The Group of the European People's Party and European Integration*, Baden-Baden: Nomos, 23-88.

a 'tedious' process, as Schreiber remembered, 'and we always had to make a real effort' (Interview Schreiber). Having to make a strong common effort seems to have had a unifying effect on the MEPs involved in their shared striving for a common social dimension. Thus, the main difference between the MEPs and their groups mostly concerned how they set priorities, not the substance of the policy issues.

4.2. Interinstitutional contacts in the Community multilevel governance system

In their socio-political activism, MEPs relied heavily on good and often informal contacts with other Community institutions. By far the most relevant and productive interinstitutional relationship in this respect were EP contacts with the Commission. Especially in the pursuit of political and institutional aims that went beyond narrow or vague treaty provisions, both institutions relied on each other's support. The EP depended on the Commission with regard to initiating Community action, and for securing a stronger role in legislative procedures than envisaged by the treaties. In return, based on its claim to represent citizens, the EP was in a unique position to offer the Commission a key ingredient for its supranational-level activism: democratic legitimacy. Beyond these rational considerations of mutual benefit, the socio-political activism of both institutions went in similar directions during the 1970s: largely towards further, and more concrete, Community social action. As a result, the EP's resolutions and reports on socio-political issues frequently called for a stronger role for the Commission. After all, this typically also meant greater involvement of the EP, given that the Commission consulted the EP on all its socio-political proposals, and the EP held the power of control over the Commission.¹¹¹

The most important interinstitutional exchanges took place at the committee level, where the MEPs had insights into, and access to, policy and legislative projects under preparation in the Commission. In these informal but, over time, more institutionalised exchanges, MEPs with a certain expertise – or at least a substantial interest – in social policy could already intervene at the drafting stage of documents. This allowed them to leave a significant mark on Community social policy – although the Council often cut back on what it saw as overly ambitious attempts at expanding binding EC legislation. At times, the Council even rejected a proposal outright. This possibility constituted a source of tension between MEPs and the Commission. Whereas the Commission was keen to put proposals on the table that stood a chance of being adopted, MEPs faced little political pressure to deliver anything concrete, especially before the first direct elections (Interview Santer).¹¹²

Contacts between EP committees and their MEPs and commissioners or Commission staff were not limited to committee meetings. Intensive exchanges took place between the committees' chairpersons and the Commission, both personally, for example during a lunch or dinner meeting, and via committee officials like the committee chair's assistant. As Dutch Labour MEP Arie van der Hek (Interview) has recalled: 'This civil servant also frequently had contacts with the civil servants of the European Commission.' In addition, the committees' rapporteurs got in touch with Commission representatives individually to discuss issues regarding the contents of their draft reports (Interview Seefeld).

¹¹¹ For an example, see European Parliament: Resolution on the youth and education policy of the European Communities, 8 February 1972, HAEP, PEO_AP_RP!POLI.1961_A0-0232!710001DE_0001.

¹¹² Committee on Social Affairs and Employment: [Protokoll der Sitzung vom 22. Und 23. Januar 1975](#), Brussels, PE/V/PC/75-1, 5-6.

As in the case of the SAP, commissioners and Commission staff were also in touch with the political groups, including their staff, seeking to test the waters regarding MEPs' support for their initiatives. They also sought to gather helpful input regarding concrete conditions, requirements and needs in the different member states and even in distinct regions and sectors that MEPs knew well through their constituency work (Interviews Ibrügger; Richardson). At the same time, such meetings between political group delegations and individual commissioners provided MEPs with an additional opportunity for low-threshold influence. From the MEPs' perspective, given their informal and often behind-closed-doors nature, these meetings came with the drawback of extremely limited visibility and representativeness. As a result, they had limited added value in promoting the EP's role as representative of the people.

Whereas the opportunity of having impact during the preparation stage of a proposal arguably made MEPs' contacts with the Commission the most important interinstitutional forum, the EP also gained from good relations with the Council and its individual members. Only the EP collectively could provide democratic legitimisation. It appears that the Council collectively took notice of EP input first and foremost because of its role as provider of democratic legitimacy, and then also whenever budgetary issues were on the table, given the EP's formal powers in the area (Interview Schreiber). Taking notice of the EP was only to a lesser extent the result of MEPs' expertise-based recommendations or substantive criticism (Interview Flesch).

Contacts between the committees and the Council had little relevance for democratic legitimacy. Their added value lay in facilitating the MEPs' pursuit of concrete political aims. Council members occasionally joined committee meetings, which helped them find common ground and compromises on socio-political draft texts, not least by accelerating the speed of the interinstitutional exchanges. Moreover, given that committee meetings were not public at the time, and in any case aroused very limited public interest, Council members and staff could express themselves relatively freely in these settings, allowing for a more open and constructive interinstitutional dialogue (Interview Cot).

The same applies to contacts between individual MEPs and members of the Council. In this regard, the MEPs' dual mandate as national and European parliamentarians gave them – notably those who were members of national parties involved in the respective national government – access to their national ministers, whom they could try to persuade to push a proposal in a certain direction within the Council. The Luxembourg liberal MEP Colette Flesch (Interview) has recalled that colleagues from smaller member states in particular used this strategy, as they had easier access to their ministers than MEPs from the larger member states. In addition, MEPs through their dual mandate exerted pressure on their respective national governments via their national parliaments and – if belonging to the same party as the minister in question – their national parties (Interviews Ballardini; Ibrügger; Cot; Terrenoire). Whilst confirming this practice, the Socialist group's Irish staff member Fionnuala Richardson has also recalled that MEPs whose party was in government back home 'were less likely to rock the boat [in EP-Council exchanges] than if their party was in opposition' (Interview Richardson). Horst Seefeld (Interview) has similarly remembered that the influence could be the other way round, from the government to the MEP. Some MEPs refrained from backing certain EP resolutions because they had been advised to do so by their national government or party in government.

In social policy, as in other policy fields, MEPs' attempts at influencing national ministers were eased if the minister considered the issue at hand to fall within Community competences and a political priority. In this regard, following Charles de Gaulle's resignation in 1969 and in view of the great socio-economic changes of that time, the 'long 1970s' were a crucial period of change. At the 1972

Paris summit, for instance, the German social democrat Chancellor Willy Brandt stated that, 'If we can put social policy into a European perspective, then many of our citizens will find it easier to identify themselves with the Community'.¹¹³ Such general statements did not necessarily result in EC legislation. However, they did provide MEPs with a point of reference for their demands and gave them better access to national level policymaking.

4.3. Cooperating with other actors

MEPs instrumentalised social policy as a means to reach out to citizens. At the same time, many of the socio-political initiatives that MEPs got involved in had their roots in concrete issues arising in their own constituencies or home regions. MEPs' pursuit of a genuine Community social dimension was consequently more than a lofty ambition as part of the larger aim of building a European Union of sorts. Rather, a number of MEPs understood their dual mandate as providing them with an additional level to pursue political objectives that they held more or less independently from their Community-level engagement.

This shows not least in frequent references by MEPs to their home cities, regions, or constituencies when outlining specific needs for Community socio-political intervention – references that could similarly function as justification directed at MEPs' constituents for the added value of the MEPs' time spent away from home and national parliaments. If citizens were aware of their MEP's Community-level engagement, which was often not the case (Interviews Clerfayt; Santer), they typically needed to be convinced that this engagement in an apparently relatively powerless institution was not a waste of time and political resources – something that was clearly easier in border regions than further inland, especially in larger member states (Interviews Seefeld; Zywiets). The German Christian democrat Hans-Werner Müller (Interview), for instance, has recalled that he could interest people in his constituency – located in the Saarland, one of Germany's main mining regions, bordering France – in the EP's work regarding the social dimension of Community coal and steel policy. Being able to demonstrate that they took 'their' citizens' concrete problems and interests to the EC level, and that these problems informed European policymaking processes, made it easier for MEPs to justify their EP-related absence from their constituency and national parliament.

Yet, taking concrete social problems from the local level to the EP constituted more than a mere tool for justification. It was often a source of inspiration. For example, the Scottish National Party (unaffiliated) MEP Winifred Ewing's critical reference to insufficient gender equality in young persons' preparation for higher education and training during Question Time on 13 October 1976 was informed by her experience in her remote and poor Moray and (from 1979) Highlands and Islands constituency in Scotland.¹¹⁴ MEPs also pointed out communal or regional-level model solutions that might be transferred and adapted to alleviate similar problems throughout the EC. Thus, Ewing, during a plenary debate on 15 September 1977, recommended to the Commission to look into a pilot scheme in the Scottish town of Motherwell that brought young people into contact with local industry as a possible inspiration in the larger context of the EC's fight against youth unemployment.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Quoted in Socialist Group: [Note for the attention of members of the Socialist Group, 23 January 1979](#), PE/GS/194/78/rev./2 [369 of the PDF].

¹¹⁴ See speech by Winifred Ewing during plenary debate on 13 October 1976, HAEP, PE0_AP_DE!1976_DE19761013-049900EN_9314461, 119.

¹¹⁵ See speech by Winifred Ewing during plenary debate on 15 September 1977, HAEP, PE0_AP_DE!1977_DE19770915-019900EN_9317841, 191.

MEPs taking inspiration from local and regional politics was not limited to their own constituencies. A case in point is the above-mentioned report by British Conservative Elaine Kellett-Bowman on adult education institutes for the EP's Committee on Social Affairs and Employment. For this report, Kellett-Bowman travelled to various cities across the EC to gather information and get inspiration for the suggestions she wanted to develop. In other words, MEPs' attempts at connecting their socio-political action to concrete issues and conditions across the member states were not exclusively motivated by their interest in re-election. Rather, they were often embedded in MEPs' broader aims of improving citizens' living and working conditions – and, in this case, their knowledge of, and hence support for, the Community.

When gathering information via study trips, MEPs largely consulted groups of people that were in some way or other organised and whose activities were somewhat institutionalised. In other words, MEPs directed their consultative outreach typically at other political actors in the emerging Community multilevel-governance system, at administrative institutions, at employers or employees (or their representatives), or at organised societal actors. Similarly – and in contrast to other policy areas, such as the environment¹¹⁶ – it was principally such actors who proactively approached the EP, its political groups, or responsible committees with concrete social issues. In contrast, individual citizens often expressed their social concerns more directly when MEPs were touring their constituencies (Interviews Müller; Seefeld). In one example of organised lobbying of the EP, the International Festival of Youth Orchestras Foundation approached the EP's Committee on Cultural Affairs and Youth in 1973 to propose the creation of an EC Youth Orchestra. The committee subsequently endorsed the initiative as 'one way of showing the youth of the nine member countries of the EEC that a common bond exists between them'.¹¹⁷ The EP then passed a resolution on the topic in 1976¹¹⁸ that indeed led to the establishment of the orchestra, which still exists today.¹¹⁹

As another institutionalised group of actors, national trade unions and transnational trade union confederations provided the EP with input on social policy. Several MEPs were themselves trade union members, and thus readily agreed to take trade unions' socio-political positions and demands to the EP and, through it, to the other Community institutions (Interview Lulling).¹²⁰ Institutionalised actors were also the only ones who brought to MEPs' attention problems and needs in the area of social policy via the publicly accessible intervention tool of petitions. This tool apparently was used only in two cases of social policy, with both petitions focusing on migrant workers' living and working conditions.¹²¹ This minimal use of petitions points to the limited success of MEPs' attempts during the 'long 1970s' to make citizens perceive the EP as the institutional defender of their social needs and interests at Community level. They were still more likely to approach an individual MEP rather than the EP as a whole.

¹¹⁶ See Meyer, *The European Parliament and the Origins of Environmental Policy*.

¹¹⁷ Report drawn up on behalf of the Committee on Cultural Affairs and Youth on the motion for a resolution submitted by Mrs Kellett-Bowman on the formation of an EEC Youth Orchestra, PE 43.515/fin., 2 March 1976, HAEP, PEO_AP_RP!JEUN.1973_A0-0537!750010EN_032957, 6.

¹¹⁸ See Resolution on the motion for a resolution submitted by Mrs Kellett-Bowman on the formation of a European Community youth orchestra, 8 March 1976, HAEP, PEO_AP_RP!JEUN.1973_A0-0537!750001EN_0001.

¹¹⁹ See [European Union Youth Orchestra](https://euoyo.eu/), available at <https://euoyo.eu/>

¹²⁰ See Roos, *The Parliamentary Roots*, 57, 186-7.

¹²¹ See Resolution on a petition on the improvement of the situation of Italian guest workers in the Community, and about a European Migrant Workers' Charter, 21 September 1971, HAEP, PEO_AP_RP!ASOC.1967_A0-0051!710001DE_0001; and Resolution on two petitions on an International Charter of Migrant Workers' Rights, and a European Migrant Workers' Charter, 12 June 1974, HAEP, PEO_AP_RP!ASOC.1973_A0-0084!740001EN.

Beyond contacts with different organised societal actors, their own personal experiences and socialisation influenced several MEPs' socio-political activism. Thus, Seefeld (Interview) has reported that his own activism in youth policy was strongly influenced by his experience as vice-president of the International Union of Socialist Youth and as secretary-general of the German Young Socialists, prior to taking up his dual mandate. His fellow German social democrat MEP Heinz Schreiber (Interview) was engaged in adult education and European integration at the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, itself informally linked to the party. In other examples of personal and professional experiences feeding into socio-political engagement in the EP, the French Progressive Democrat Alain Terrenoire (Interview) had founded the youth section of the Union Paneuropéenne de France in the early 1960s, prior to taking up his EP mandate in 1973. Lulling (Interview) worked for different trade union organisations from 1949, first at the national, then the Community level, before becoming an MEP in 1965. The Danish social democrat Karen Dahlerup was secretary for women's questions (1963-1970) and chair of the family affairs committee (1967-1974) of her national party, as well as editor of the journal *Frie Kvinder* (Free Women, 1966-1970), before becoming an MEP from 1977 to 1980.¹²² Indeed, female MEPs shaped the EP's social policy to a disproportionate extent – somewhat similar to consumer policy, although not quite as pronounced.¹²³ Especially with regard to issues of particular relevance to women at the time (such as questions of equality, care issues, or part-time work), but also on various other social portfolios, female MEPs took a leading role in EP policymaking.¹²⁴

In contrast to social contacts and MEPs' socialisation, national-level party debates played a comparatively minor role as a channel of information transfer and influence in European social policy. In the 1970s at least, socio-politically active MEPs were largely left to themselves. According to national-level expectations, with limited powers, especially in this field, the EP could hardly influence social policy significantly in view of the equally limited Community competences (Interview Seefeld). As a result, MEPs were under little national party pressure and relatively free to choose their preferred topics for engagement and their political preferences at the Community level.

4.4. Working with media

MEPs' ambition to position the EP as the voice and representative of the people required those people's knowledge of and about their representative and its political work. MEPs could not increase such knowledge via their constituency work alone. As a result, they, together with the EP's administration, sought to promote the institution as well as their individual work in transnational, national and regional media.

Although social policy had the potential to make tangible the EC's added value and the work of the EP for citizens, media coverage seldom focused on this policy field. What did feature in the media depended somewhat on the contemporary context as well as the country or region. For instance, the Italian newspaper *La Stampa* published an extensive article on the EP's social policy and the work of its Committee on Social Affairs, Employment and Education in June 1979, in the immediate run-up to the EP's first direct elections. This article was based on interviews with two Italian MEPs – the socialist (but non-affiliated in the EP) MEP Tullia Caretoni Romagnoli and the Christian democrat Maria Luisa Cassanmagnago Cerretti. It discussed social issues of particular relevance to *La Stampa*'s

¹²² See Annette Borchorst [without year] Karen Dahlerup, [Danks Kvindebiografisk Leksikon](#)

¹²³ See Liesbeth van de Grift and Koen van Zon (2024) *The European Parliament and the Origins of Consumer Policy*, PE 757.647, Brussels: EPRS.

¹²⁴ See Roos, *The Parliamentary Roots*, 199ff.

readership: youth unemployment, the education of migrant workers' children, and equality between men and women, including the question of abortion, which was being intensely debated in Italy at the time.¹²⁵

On the EP's media relations more generally, Charles McDonald (Interview) has recalled: 'We spent lots and lots of money in bringing people working in the media, over to the sessions', to trigger headlines – not only with the aim of informing people, but also of putting pressure on the Council. After all, 'politicians in any country don't like adverse publicity. [...] So the Council had to take note. It would have been foolish for them to swim against the tide'. Alongside disseminating information and gaining media support for the EP's agenda, MEPs also sought, through media reporting, to justify their work at the Community level for their home audience. The German Christian democrat Hans-Werner Müller (Interview Müller) has recalled frequently using the tool of parliamentary questions for this purpose, 'to showcase my work [...]. And then I [published] these questions and the respective answer to the question here via press releases. [...] And this appears in the regional news, with your picture; that's what you need to do. And you only get this into the regional news by giving [the question] a regional connection, making it interesting for [the people] here. I had to construct a bridge between what was decided in Brussels or Luxembourg or wherever, and local circumstances'.

MEPs' outreach attempts were easier if they could work with media with an inherent interest in their specific area of parliamentary engagement, either because of a regional connection or because of ideological proximity or party affiliation. Thus, until 1991 the Italian communist party newspaper, *L'Unità*, repeatedly covered the EP activities of Italian Communist MEPs who actively sought to shape the EP's social policymaking. Such reported activities included, for instance, a study trip by the Communist group to Rome in June 1974, which focused specifically on 'problems of social policy and of immigrant workers in the Community',¹²⁶ or the paper's coverage of the Italian communists' campaign in the run-up to the EP's first direct elections directed at Italian migrant workers and their families in Luxembourg, which was strongly based on social themes.¹²⁷ A December 1973 article even focused specifically on '[t]he position of the Communists in the Strasbourg Parliament: Europe needs a real social policy'.¹²⁸

Not all socio-politically active MEPs had access to such affiliated media. Some also sought to introduce social issues when journalists were present for other reasons. For instance, the Luxembourg socialist MEP Lulling, as well as Joseph Lucius and Jean-Pierre Glesener from the CD group, received a group of pupils and teachers from the Lycée Hubert-Clément in Esch-sur-Alzette on the premises of the EP in Strasbourg in October 1972. A short article with a photograph in the national newspaper *Luxemburger Wort* covered the visit and reported that the MEPs had discussed the merits of European political unification with the roughly 100 young people.¹²⁹ In spring 1978, another group of visitors from Luxembourg travelled to the EP in Strasbourg: Christian democrat MEP Jacques Santer welcomed 43 members of the Grand Duchy's Kathoulesch Männeraktioun, or organisation for Catholic men, before they listened in on a plenary debate concerning youth

¹²⁵ Domenico Garbarino, [La parità di lavoro e diritti tema delle donne a Strasburgo](#), *La Stampa*, 1 June 1979, 5.

¹²⁶ [Concluso il seminario del gruppo comunista al Parlamento europeo](#), *L'Unità*, 21 June 1974, 2 (translation by the author).

¹²⁷ See e.g., [Un'intensa attività della Federazione](#), *L'Unità*, 27 January 1978, 15; [Intensa attività elettorale del PCI](#), *L'Unità*, 11 May 1979, 13.

¹²⁸ Michele Ingenito, [La posizione dei comunisti al Parlamento di Strasburgo: È necessaria all'Europa una vera politica sociale](#), *L'Unità*, 11 December 1973, 11 (translation by the author).

¹²⁹ See, [Les classes de première du Lycée Hubert-Clément en visite auprès du Parlement européen](#), *Luxemburger Wort*, 14 October 1972, 8.

unemployment in the EC. The *Luxemburger Wort* article about this Strasbourg visit reported in some depth about the problems of unemployed youth and the positions of the EP and Commission on this issue.¹³⁰

In a similar vein, MEPs used their own visits and public speeches to promote their socio-political positions and demands. This applied both to study trips by EP delegations and engagements of individual MEPs. Thus, two Dutch newspaper – *Tubantia and de Volkskrant* – covered a 1969 study trip by the EP's Committee on Social Affairs and Employment to Nordhorn in West Germany and the adjacent Twente region in the Netherlands, to examine social problems in the textile industry in this border region and gather information on social support practices for workers in the sector.¹³¹ In an example of individual promotion of EP socio-political positions, in early November 1975 the Dutch Labour MEP Cornelis Laban called for the opening of European schools to migrant children in his speech to a conference organised by the Centrum voor Europese Vorming (Centre for European Training) at the Europe House in Bemelen in the Netherlands, as reported by the *NRC Handelsblad*.¹³²

MEPs also benefited from media reporting on noteworthy incidents in the plenary, with social policy occasionally appearing as a means to generate relevance for readers. For instance, on 26 October 1978 the *Nederlands Dagblad* summarised a speech by the German liberal MEP Martin Bangemann, at that time chair of the EP's Committee on Budgets. Bangemann emphasised the EP's potential influence on Community policies, as well as the development of an 'own identity of the Community', via its budgetary power – not least in the field of social policy.¹³³ In November 1973, the German *Honnefer Volkszeitung* reported on a visit by the German social democrat Chancellor Willy Brandt to Strasbourg. During his speech before the chamber, Brandt outlined a six-point programme for attaining European Union – including, amongst other elements, 'significant progress' towards a common social policy, as well as extended parliamentary powers for the EP.¹³⁴ Having such a prominent figure back demands that MEPS had been making for years provided them with some additional leverage – also in the sense of public pressure – in their pursuit both of socio-political and institutional aims.

¹³⁰ See Luss Heyart, [Katholische Männeraktion. Europaparlament und Jugendarbeitslosigkeit](#), *Luxemburger Wort*, 20 May 1978, 9.

¹³¹ See [Leden Europees parlement naar Twente](#), *Tubantia*, 8 April 1969, 9; [Parlementariërs bezoeken Twente](#), *de Volkskrant*, 26 April 1969, 15.

¹³² See [Europese scholen moeten kinderen van migranten helpen](#), *NRC Handelsblad*, 7 November 1975, 3.

¹³³ See [Euro-parlement moet eigen ideeën ontwikkelen](#), *Nederlands Dagblad*, 26 October 1978, 7.

¹³⁴ [Europa-Union noch vor 1980](#), *Honnefer Volkszeitung*, 14 November 1973, 1 (translation by the author).

5. Conclusion

During the plenary debate on 19 December 1973, Luigi Girardin, the EP's rapporteur on the Commission's flagship SAP, stated, 'The opportunity now afforded to Europe to follow a social and therefore more human line should be responsibly seized by us as Parliament – and therefore as the expression of the democratic public opinion of Europe – so that we can look to the future with greater confidence'.¹³⁵ His statement aptly summarises the EP's general perception of social policy and its relevance both for the EP's institutional role and European integration more generally during the 'long 1970s'. In these years of subsiding growth and intensifying globalisation, of economic and financial crisis and social unrest, MEPs fought fervently for a deepening and widening of the EC's social dimension. They expected an extended Community social policy to make the EC future-proof by strengthening its connection to its citizens. At the same time, intensive EP activism to this end would cement Parliament's position as representative of the people in Community politics.

The fundamental importance MEPs accorded to social policy was not entirely new in the 1970s. MEPs had pursued socio-political integration for the same reasons since the 1950s. Similarly, the EP's social policy trajectory did not suddenly change after 1979. Indeed, MEPs have used similar rhetoric up until today.¹³⁶ Nevertheless, the 'long 1970s' constituted a key phase in shaping the EP's involvement in and impact on European social policy in the long term.

These years of global socio-economic change coincided with the EP's professionalisation. For social policy, this meant that MEPs had various opportunities to promote social action in light of unexpectedly emerging needs for socio-political intervention, as well as the institutional and political toolbox to grasp these opportunities. The Commission consulted the EP on virtually all of its social policy proposals, so that the EP gained public visibility for its involvement in EC politics. By the 1970s, moreover, MEPs and EP staff were in frequent contact about socio-political issues with the Commission, especially via the EP's committees and political groups. Through these interinstitutional exchanges, MEPs could leave their mark on legislative drafts by the Commission prior to their formal submission. Here, MEPs benefited massively from the growing institutional experience and legal expertise within the EP. By the 1970s, the EP had developed a variety of strategies, such as playing the card of increased democratic legitimacy in pursuit of more EP involvement, connecting social demands to policy areas with more established or extensive Community competences, or interpreting vague treaty articles to demand more social integration and more EP involvement. MEPs applied these strategies within parliamentary resolutions, reports and questions, all of which they used not merely in a reactive form, following Commission proposals, but also in proactive attempts at agenda-setting. In the area of social policy, MEPs frequently based such attempts on study trips and concrete problems encountered in their constituencies, or brought to their attention by trade unions and civil society actors.

During the 1970s, the EP furthermore gained parliamentary powers that changed its position in Community politics fundamentally: it got a binding say over the EC budget. This new power became instrumental in the MEPs' pursuit of socio-political aims. On the one hand, attaching a price tag to social measures increased the EP's chances to have a say in the policymaking processes. On the other, MEPs successfully utilised interinstitutional procedures introduced as part of the new

¹³⁵ Speech by Luigi Girardin during plenary debate, 19 December 1973, HAEP, PEO_AP_DEI1973_DE19731210-019900EN_9315861, 10ff.

¹³⁶ See Roos, *A Parliament for the People*.

budgetary processes – such as the conciliation procedure – for policymaking processes in other fields, including social policy.

In this policy field, the EP's new budgetary powers also led to an increase in controversies between committees, however. Whereas all committees involved in social policy supported more integration in the field, some were more driven by their ideological preferences and others by finding practical solutions to concrete problems. The committees on Employment and Social Affairs, Cultural Affairs and Youth, and Political Affairs tended to promote ambitious and far-reaching objectives of EC social intervention and increasing competence. In contrast, the Committee on Budgets insisted more strongly on calling only for what could realistically be implemented at the time, with the available funding.

In social policy during the 'long 1970s', this fault-line between committees was more significant than the level of controversy among the EP's political groups. At a time when political competition mainly took place in the national parties and parliaments rather than the EP, MEPs did not prioritise achieving political victories over other groups. Rather, they sought to gather as much political and institutional strength as possible in order both to reach common socio-political aims, and to strengthen the EP's position in EC policymaking. Self-selection by generally pro-integrationist MEPs who became particularly involved in the area contributed to the low level of inter-group controversy. Moreover, no single political group stood out in the context of the EP's socio-political activism. At times, a group of MEPs from one group or another took the lead on specific issues, without any group trying or actually managing to dominate the entire social policy portfolio.

Many socio-politically active MEPs shared a personal background of and experience with social or socio-political engagement at other levels. While this engagement informed their involvement, the EP's social policy was steered by a heterogeneous and ever-changing group of MEPs with different levels of political experience, national and party backgrounds. As in consumer policy, however, the high number of female MEPs stands out compared to the overall gender (im)balance in the early EP, which might have to do with the gender dimension attributed to both policy areas, as areas with a larger focus on the regulation of spheres of women's lives (care, consumption, equality, etc.).

The composition of the group of socio-politically active MEPs did not suddenly change after the first direct elections in 1979. Indeed, several of them remained in the EP and continued to advocate for a stronger EC social dimension, like, for example, the Luxembourg MEP Lulling, who only left the EP in 2014. These long-serving MEPs eventually saw some social initiatives become European social legislation that the EP had supported since the days of the dual mandate, among them higher standards of maternity protection, or the transferability of social and health insurance benefits throughout the EC/EU.¹³⁷

As social rights became more explicitly defined and embedded in both EC and national legislation from the second half of the 1980s, some of the EP's social demands assumed a narrower focus. They aimed, for instance, for social support and improved living and working conditions for some marginalised or particularly vulnerable groups of persons, or they addressed social problems in specific sectors of the labour market and economy. More narrowly defined EP social policy demands also resulted from growing competition between the political groups in the directly elected Parliament, even more so as the EP's party group landscape became more heterogeneous, notably following the rise of Eurosceptic groups. This, together with the EC/EU's enlargements that added

¹³⁷ See Roos, *The Parliamentary Roots*, 137.

new welfare state traditions and national or regional social issues to the mix, made it more cumbersome within the EP to find common positions in the policy field.

Nevertheless, among the EC/EU institutions, the EP has sought, through its entrepreneurial leadership, to remain a norm-setter in social affairs, although the policy field is still not central to EU politics. Within the EP, the social portfolio has increasingly had to compete with other policy issues on the parliamentary agenda. However, the EP has continued to emphasise the importance of better connecting the integration project to its citizens, not least through a stronger European social dimension.¹³⁸ Treaty changes, starting with the SEA that first expanded the EP's influence on social legislation, have somewhat facilitated EP activism. In the 2000s, however, the EP faced a setback in its ambitions as the member states decided to resort to the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) to tackle an increasing number of social issues, based on persisting government reluctance to Europeanise socio-political integration.¹³⁹ The OMC provides for virtually no involvement of the EP, thus leaving MEPs once more in a position to protest, argue or strategise their way into shaping EU policy.

Still, MEPs as entrepreneurial leaders are pushing various proposals for a more social Europe. They have continued to mould these ideas into specific calls for binding action – more so indeed than many Commission proposals or Council positions. The 2017 European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) is a recent case in point. In contrast with the Commission proposal for a mere reference framework of social principles and rights, the EP resolution on the EPSR contained calls for concrete and binding EU action.¹⁴⁰

The EP acquired and consolidated the necessary expertise, strategic positioning, and institutional self-confidence for such activism during the 'long 1970s'. In this sense, its activist skills and ability to perform as a long-term norm- and agenda-setter in social policy may well be the main enduring legacy of the EP's involvement in Community social policy during the 'long 1970s'. Without Parliament's earlier activism, the social dimension of today's EU would likely be less concrete, less tangible, and less binding.

¹³⁸ Francesco Corti (2022) *The Politicisation of Social Europe. Conflict Dynamics and Welfare Integration*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

¹³⁹ Hantrais, *Social Policy*.

¹⁴⁰ Patrik Vesan and Francesco Corti (2019) New Tensions over Social Europe? The European Pillar of Social Rights and the Debate within the European Parliament, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 57 (5), 977-994.

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- Digital Archives of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament (at the HAEU)
- Digital Archives of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Group in the European Parliament (at the HAEU)

Digital Archives of the European People's Party Group in the European Parliament

Digital newspaper archives:

- ProQuest (various European and international newspapers)
- Delpher (Dutch newspapers)
- Deutsches Zeitungportal (German newspapers)
- eLuxemburgensia (Luxembourg newspapers)
- Internet Archive (Italian newspapers)
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Drawing on a wide array of sources and literature, this study examines the role of the European Parliament in the establishment of the European Community's social policy. It argues that Parliament played a key role in placing this nascent policy issue on the agenda. It influenced the definition of what the policy should include, what it should focus on, and which instruments should be used to address social problems. In this process, Parliament filtered ideas, issues and political objectives from national and international debates into the European Community.

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