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**THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: AN AUTONOMOUS
FOREIGN POLICY IDENTITY?**

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Although it has acquired a significant role in several areas of the European Union (EU) over the years, the European Parliament still plays a rather marginal one with respect to the EU's external relations. It has only limited powers as regards Community external policies (mainly the powers of assent on international treaties and the budgetary power) and a mainly consultative role under the EU's second pillar (the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy).

In spite of these limits, the European Parliament (EP) has often adopted autonomous foreign policy stances and has on several occasions even entered into opposition with the Council. Therefore, while constrained by a lack of adequate power, the EP has developed an autonomous foreign policy, aimed mainly at promoting European values around the world.

This paper considers first the stances taken by the European Parliament on Union relations with third countries, namely Turkey and Taiwan. It is worth noting, in this respect, that the concept of foreign policy used here is not restricted to the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), but includes the Union's external activities under all its pillars.

The two case studies provide the basis for some reflections on the principles inspiring the EP's foreign policy stances. Nevertheless, given the limited range of policies examined, the analysis does not mean to be exhaustive in any way and aims only at providing some tentative conclusions on the nature of the EP's foreign policy.

Finally, considerations are put forward on the way the recent enlargement to the countries of central eastern and southern Europe will affect the European Parliament's approach to foreign policy.

The European Parliament and the promotion of human rights in Turkey

The recent agreement to begin accession talks with Turkey is evidence of the common view the European Council and the European Parliament currently share on the EU's relations with Turkey. In the past, however, the two institutions took different stances on Community policy towards this country.

The first divergence between the Council and the EP dates back to the 1980s. Relations between the Community and Turkey were at that time regulated by the Association Agreement they had signed in 1963. Although the Agreement mainly had economic objectives, in the early 1980s the Community also started raising political concerns.¹ This change followed the events that took place in Turkey (in particular, the military coup in 1980) as well as the internal transformation of the Community itself, which progressively started to get involved in political affairs. The new interest in

¹ Following the military coup of 1980 the Community decided to freeze its relations with Turkey. The latter were resumed after civilian government was restored in the country.

Turkey's political situation was also supported by the European Parliament, which adopted a number of resolutions in this regard.²

During the 1980s, the possibility of adding political concerns to the objectives of the Community's external economic relations was gaining support within the EP. While the Council was inclined to reject any automatic link between the Community's economic relations and respect of minimum political conditions (such as respect of fundamental rights and the rule of law), Parliamentarians were critical of this stance and more inclined to promote severe political conditionality.³ The debate over political conditionality, therefore, influenced most EP decisions on Community relations with third countries in the 1980s.

In 1987, the Single European Act provided the EP with the power of assent over international agreements undersigned by the Community with third countries. This provided the European Parliament with a new instrument to express its discontent and make its voice heard within the Community. Following the entry into force of the Act, the European Parliament was called upon for the first time to give its assent to the financial and technical protocols to the agreements signed by the Community with Turkey and seven other countries (Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia, Yugoslavia) in December 1987. On that occasion, while approving the protocols relating to agreements with all the other countries, the EP refused to give its assent to the protocols relating to the Association Agreement with Turkey. The Protocols were temporarily referred back to the Committee on External Economic Relations. As can be seen from the debate in the plenary, the decision was not taken on the basis of concerns over the Protocols themselves (Polydorakis, 1986:22), but was rather a symbolic gesture by which the EP expressed its discontent with human rights violations in Turkey. Besides concerns over the general human rights situation, the EP's discontent specifically regarded the controversial imprisonment of two Turkish politicians who had returned to their homeland to participate in the first free elections after the 1980 military coup.

The decision aroused animated debate within the European Parliament. In particular, the use of the power of assent to manifest political concerns over Community external economic relations was questioned. Political groups opposing the decision expressed doubts over linking Parliament's approval to political considerations not concerning the Protocols. The decision to refer the Protocols back to the competent Committee, moreover, was made even more controversial by the approval, on the same day, of the other protocols concerning agreements with countries whose records on human rights were no better than Turkey.

Even if the referral was eventually approved by a majority of votes, it represented a rather temporary solution. The EP's unwillingness to enter into a prolonged conflict with the Council and the doubts expressed over the conditional use of the power of assent eventually prevailed. Asked to vote again on the Protocols, the plenary gave them its assent only a month later.

The event was nevertheless of major importance. For the first time the plenary refused its assent to protocols relating to an external agreement of the Community,

² European Parliament, *Resolution on the Events in Turkey*, 18 September 1980; on *Death Sentence Imposed on 52 Turkish Trade Union Leaders*, 22 January 1982; on *Political Situation in Turkey*, 8 July 1982; on the *Respect for Human Rights in Turkey*, 24 May 1984.

³ As in the European Parliament, *Resolution for the year 1983/1984 on human rights in the world and Community policy on human rights*, in OJ C 172, 2 July 1984, p. 36.

manifesting a stance different from the Council on Community external relations (similar cases occurred in 1988 with the Protocols relating to the agreements with Israel and in 1992 with those relating to the agreements with Morocco and Syria).

In the following years, the MEPs continued to adopt reports and resolutions over the human rights situation in Turkey, trying to make the EU governments and Turkish authorities adopt a more proactive stance.⁴

In 1995, however, the European Parliament was given its second opportunity to have a more effective say in EU-Turkey relations, following the signature of a Custom Union Agreement between Turkey and the Community. The treaty predominantly concerned commercial matters, in which the European Parliament had only a consultative role. Nevertheless its clauses also envisaged the creation of a special institutional framework and amendments to domestic acts to be adopted by codecision, thus requiring the EP's assent (according to the new rules established by the Maastricht Treaty).

Given its concerns over human rights violations in Turkey, the European Parliament asked the Council to suspend the negotiation of the Agreement for the first time in December 1994. Among the reasons leading to this, was also the decision by the Turkish government to lift the parliamentary immunity of 13 Kurdish Democratic Party members of the Turkish Parliament (which led to their arrest and became a *cause célèbre* in the EU).⁵ Although the Council accepted some of the EP's requests (it introduced a clause on respect of human rights and the rule of law in the text of the Agreement and committed itself to a more proactive attitude in this regard), it did not agree to suspend the talks. In 1995, following the conclusion of negotiations, the European Parliament was asked to examine the final text of the Treaty. In all the plenary debates that took place that year, Parliamentarians continued to consider conclusion of the agreement premature.⁶ Therefore, the EP was exposed to intensive lobbying by the Council and the Commission. On the one hand, the two institutions committed themselves to taking Parliamentarians' concerns into consideration in their future relations with Turkey. On the other, they stressed the economic advantages of the agreement, inviting Parliamentarians to adopt a more realistic approach.

The European Parliament did not modify its position. On the contrary, to make it clearer, it awarded Kurdish MP Leyla Zana the Sakharov Prize for human rights.⁷ Eventually, the Turkish authorities agreed to send a positive signal: in July 1995, the Turkish National Assembly approved a constitutional reform called "Package for Democracy". In the same year the Turkish judicial authorities freed a number of political prisoners. These changes were nevertheless cosmetic rather than substantial, given that the most controversial Turkish law – allowing people to be criminally prosecuted for expressing their political opinions (used to imprison the Kurdish MPs) – remained in force (Krauss, 2000:231).

⁴ Concerns of the Parliament involved the political solution of the Armenian question (see European Parliament, *Resolution* of 18 June 1987), the problem of Cyprus (European Parliament, *Resolution* of 11 July 1990), and the Kurdish minority.

⁵ Hale, *Turkish foreign policy*, pp. 201 and 236, cited by K. Dalacoura, 2003:17.

⁶ MEPs adopted a resolution stating that "the human rights situation in Turkey is too serious to allow the formation of the proposed customs union at present", European Parliament, *Resolution on the draft agreement on the conclusion of a customs union between the EU and Turkey*, 16 February 1995.

⁷ Following her release, Leyla Zana personally collected her award from the European Parliament on 14 October 2004, only a few months before the Parliament gave its political backing to Turkey's entry into the EU (on 15 December 2004).

Despite these shortcomings, the MEPs gave their assent to the Agreement on 13 December 1995. On the same day, however, they approved a resolution asking the European Union, its Member States and Turkey “to give their full backing to a continuous and broad dialogue to promote respect for human rights and freedoms” and reminding that the “assent is to be considered as an encouragement to the Turkish Government’s commitment to continue the process of democratization and improvement of the human rights situation” in the country.⁸ Once the Agreement entered into force, none of the requests formulated by the European Parliament in the resolution were fulfilled.

In the following years, the European Parliament continued to stress the importance of promoting the respect of human rights in Turkey,⁹ and the condition has become a core point of EU policy towards this country since it was awarded candidate status in 1999.

The MEPs persistent sensitivity to these issues was also confirmed by the resolution, adopted on December 2004, on the Commission’s regular report on Turkey’s progress towards accession.¹⁰ While giving political backing to the opening of accession talks with the country, MEPs asked the Union and Turkey to give priority, in the first phase of negotiations, to the full implementation of the political criteria (defined by the Conclusion of the European Council of Copenhagen, 21-22 June 1993). The resolution, moreover, required that all mechanisms envisaged by the Commission to ensure close monitoring and a possible suspension of negotiations be made fully effective.

The two cases examined above (that of 1987 and that of 1995), therefore, show a clear and persistent determination within the European Parliament to link foreign policy choices to political considerations and, in particular, to the promotion of fundamental rights. Even if the EP gave its assent when its requests were not fulfilled, its position was not without consequences. There can be no doubt, in fact, that following Parliament’s behaviour, the other EU institutions have become increasingly aware of its power as regards EU external relations.

As for the Union’s relations’ with Turkey, moreover, one may argue that the MEPs’ obstinacy strengthened the EU’s position by allowing the Council and the Commission to use it as a reference in their negotiations with the country. It is worth noting, in fact, that despite their divergent positions, the Council and the EP have never entered into real conflict over the respect of fundamental rights in Turkey and have always shared a common concern, while disagreeing on how to achieve it.

The European Parliament’s pragmatic approach to Taiwan¹¹

Another issue on which the European Parliament has a significantly different position from that of the Commission and the Council, is EU policy towards Taiwan.

Until the end of the 1960s, Taiwan was recognised by the world community as the legitimate representative of the Chinese people living on both sides of the Taiwan

⁸ European Parliament, *Resolution on the human rights situation in Turkey*, 13 December 1995.

⁹ See for example European Parliament, *Resolution on Turkey’s progress towards accession*, 5 June 2003.

¹⁰ European Parliament, *Resolution on the 2004 regular report and the recommendation of the European Commission on Turkey’s progress towards accession*, 15 December 2004.

¹¹ For a complete analysis of the case see Y. Lan, 2004.

Strait. Following the 1971 United Nations decision to attribute China's UN seat to the People's Republic of China (PRC), a large majority of countries established diplomatic relations with the PRC and no longer maintained diplomatic ties with Taiwan. Subsequently, the EU and its Member States adopted the so-called One-China policy,¹² recognising the People's Republic of China as the only legitimate representative of China within the international community.

As a consequence, the EU does not recognise Taiwan as a sovereign state and does not have diplomatic ties with it. The EU does, however, recognise Taiwan as an economic and commercial entity and has solid relations with it in non-political areas (such as economic relations, science, etc). In fact, over the years Taiwan has become an important EU trading partner and is currently the EU's third largest trading partner in Asia. Taiwan's importance is nevertheless minor if compared to that of the People's Republic of China, which is currently the EU's second largest non-European trading partner after the US.

Although not directly opposing the Council's policy towards Taiwan, over the years the European Parliament has developed an independent and more pragmatic approach to this country's peculiar situation.

Since the late 1980s, the EP has encouraged a process of reform in Taiwan. In 1991 some Parliamentarians set up the EP-Taiwan Friendship Group to enhance relations between Taiwan and the European Union. The Group has, in fact, acted as a driving force within the EP and has become the promoter of most reports and resolutions adopted on Taiwan. The EP's interest in the island became more intense following the presidential elections that took place in the country in 1996.¹³ Since then, the MEPs have paid increasing attention to the transformation underway on the island. In 2000, when the second presidential elections brought a candidate of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) to power, after more than fifty years of the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang), the European Parliament considered this "proof of Taiwan's development into a fully fledged democracy".¹⁴ More recently, Taiwan has been considered "As a model of democracy for the whole of China".¹⁵ Taiwan's transformation, therefore, led the European Parliament to be more willing to increase its relations with it and promote a more open approach within the EU.

In the first place, the European Parliament has taken a critical stance towards Beijing's policies. In 1996 it condemned the military exercises that China conducted in the coastal areas opposite Taiwan while the presidential elections were about to take place on the island. Subsequently, in 2002, it adopted two resolutions deeming "unacceptable" the fact that Beijing reserved the right to use military force in the cross-strait dispute and asking for a peaceful resolution of the question.¹⁶ On this occasion, in particular, the EP affirmed that "The EU's adherence to the One-China policy is directly linked to its [the People's Republic of China] commitment to a peaceful resolution," a

¹² The Joint Press Statement of the Fourth EU-China Summit of 5/9/2001 stated that "The EU side reaffirmed that it would continue to adhere to the One-China principle and hoped for a peaceful resolution of the Taiwan question through constructive dialogue."

¹³ European Parliament, *Resolution on Taiwan's role in international organizations*, 18 July 1996, welcomed "the fact that the elections in Taiwan were conducted democratically and peacefully".

¹⁴ European Parliament, *Resolution on Taiwan*, 13 April 2000.

¹⁵ European Parliament, *Resolution on the annual report from the Council to the European Parliament on the main aspects and basic choices of CFSP*, 14 April 2005.

¹⁶ European Parliament, *Resolution on the EU strategy towards China*, 11 April 2002 and *Resolution on a strategic Partnership between Europe and Asia*, 5 September 2002.

stance that appears noticeably different from the cautious comments of the EU Member States and one that could even put into question the EU's adherence to the One-China policy. The cautious position of the Council and the Commission, on the contrary, was well resumed by External Relations Commissioner Chris Patten, who later said that "The issue of Taiwan's relations with China can only be resolved by the two sides."¹⁷

More recently, a certain divergence between the Council and the Parliament has emerged on the proposal of lifting the EU arms embargo on China. The measure was established by the European Union in 1989, as a response to the events of Tiananmen square. In December 2003, nevertheless, considering the embargo no longer in line with the EU's relations with China, the European Council gave the Council the mandate to re-examine the embargo with a view to lifting it. Member States supporting the move argued it was necessary to send a positive political signal to China, an increasingly important partner for the Union. The intention to lift the embargo was restated by the 7th EU-China Summit of 8 December 2004 and an agreement seemed near in January 2005, when the Council of General Affairs and External Relations asked the EU Presidency to finalise the negotiations in this regard by the end of June. But some divergences emerged after the approval of an anti-secession law by the China National People's Congress (on 14 March 2005). The adoption of the law, in fact, brought the proposal to lift the arms embargo under strong criticism both outside and within the Union.¹⁸

Even if the decision on lifting the embargo has now been postponed, the Council's approach to the matter seemed quite different from that of the EP. The MEPs have, in fact, always opposed abolition of the arms embargo on the grounds of concern over the China's human rights situation and the growing capabilities of the Chinese military vis-à-vis Taiwan.¹⁹

Besides criticising Beijing's moves, the European Parliament has addressed Taiwan's concerns over the isolation to which it has been condemned by the adoption by much of the world community of the One-China policy. In 1996, for example, the MEPs supported Taiwan's requests for entry into the world's main intergovernmental organisations. They urged the Council and the Member States to support Taiwan's attempt to secure better representation in international fora, including those bodies answerable to the UN General Assembly, whose membership is usually reserved for sovereign states.²⁰ Moreover, the European Parliament was among the main supporters of Taiwan's membership of the World Trade Organisation²¹ and currently supports Taiwan's membership of the World Health Assembly (WHA).²² Finally, the EP

¹⁷ Interview with the Commissioner Chris Patten, "One China policy can still accommodate EU relations with Taiwan", *European Voice*, 23 January 2003.

¹⁸ Beside restating the principle of One-China, the law foresaw the use of "non peaceful means" and other necessary measures in case this principle was threatened by Taiwan secessionists forces.

¹⁹ The MEPs called the Council and the Member States "to maintain the EU embargo on trade in arms with the People's Republic of China and not to weaken the existing national limitations on such arms sales", European Parliament, *Resolution on the Council's Fifth Annual Report according to Operative Provision 8 of the European Union Code of Conduct on Arms Exports*, 17 November 2004. The position was reiterated the following spring 2005 (op. cit. note 15).

²⁰ European Parliament, (1996), op. cit. note 14.

²¹ Taiwan joined it in January 2002 as a "Separate Customs Territory of Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu." See for example: European Parliament, *Resolution on the Accession of the separate customs territory of Chinese Taipei (Taiwan), Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu to the WTO*, 25 October 2001.

²² The Parliament approved two resolutions in this respect: *Resolution on Taiwan*, 14 March 2002 and *Resolution on Taiwan* 15 May 2003, both calling for Taiwan to be granted observer status respectively at the 54th and 55th annual World Health Assembly.

promotes the island's involvement in the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), as MEPs see ASEM as a forum of discussion that could help Taiwan and PRC build a constructive dialogue.

Last of all, Parliamentarians have called for a strengthening of ties between the EU and Taiwan, repeatedly asking for the creation of a EU representative office in Taipei (in March 2003 the Commission opened a European Economic and Trade Office in Taiwan) and inviting important Taiwanese politicians to take part in their meetings (their invitations have, however, met with the opposition of European Member States which have refused to grant visa permits to Taiwanese politicians²³).

Hence, the case of Taiwan provides another example of the EP's autonomous foreign policy line. Its divergences with the Council can be attributed to a number of factors. Above all, China's growing importance on the world market and in the international arena should not be underestimated when considering the position of the EU Member States expressed within the Council. This was particularly evident, for example in the debate over the abolition of the arms embargo on China. Although not directly challenging the One-China policy, the European Parliament considers the Council's approach to Taiwan inadequate. In order to address Taiwan's basic concerns, MEPs are in favour of a more pragmatic approach and the enhancement of EU-Taiwan relations on a practical basis. Nevertheless, as in the case of Turkey, the question does not seem to give rise to any serious conflict between the two institutions which would both like to see the question solved peacefully by the two parties.

The impact of enlargement

Following the recent enlargement to eastern, central and southern European countries, the number of seats in the European Parliament rose from 626 to 732 (after the June 2004 elections) – despite a reduction in the size of the delegations of all old members states except Germany and Luxembourg. At the same time, the number of political parties represented in the European Parliament swelled to over 150, with Parliamentarians from the new members states representing 48 different slates and parties.²⁴

This enlargement, therefore, has caused a dramatic increase in heterogeneity in the EP, bringing in new interests and ideas. This begs the question: what impact will this enlargement have on the body's political identity and how will it affect its foreign policy stances? Although it is too early to verify the effect of enlargement in real terms, predictions can be made on the basis of past experiences, as well as of the foreign policy concerns traditionally expressed by the new members.

Most analyses of voting behaviour in the European Parliament indicate that Parliamentarians are more likely to vote along party lines than along national lines, confirming the growing role of political parties within the EP. Even on the occasion of major international crises such as the Balkan conflicts or the second Iraq war (1990-91), Parliamentarians' voting behaviour was conditioned more by party allegiance than by nationality (Viola, 2000). Indeed, during these crises the EP's weak reaction and

²³ On March 2003, the Parliament invited Taiwan's President Chen Shui-bian to participate in an informal meeting. The politician, however, was not granted a visa permit by the Belgium government.

²⁴ Figures are taken from Francis Jacobs and Edward Best, *Ready for the Future? The Impact of Enlargement on the European Parliament*, *Eipascope* 2004/3.

inclination to avoid clear positions on delicate questions was due to political divisions between and within political groups. But even on these occasions, the EP appeared united in defence of human and minority rights and in hope of a peaceful resolution of the conflict. At the same time, comparison of the voting behaviour of Parliamentarians of old and new member states (for example, in the case of the enlargement to Sweden, Finland and Austria in 1995, see Noury and Roland, 2003), shows that MEPs from new members do not behave in a less disciplined way toward their party groups than other Parliamentarians. Past experience, therefore, leads us to predict that after a period of adjustment Parliamentarians from the new Member States will adapt to the new context and align themselves with the voting behaviour of their political groups.

Yet all comparisons with the past fail to take into consideration the specific economic, cultural and historical backgrounds of the ten new members from central, eastern and southern Europe. These will affect the Union's heterogeneity significantly more than after any previous enlargement and it is reasonable to predict that they will influence the MEPs' activism in various policy fields. For example, as H. Grabbe (2004) points out, the new member states' foreign policies generally have limited geographic horizons concentrated on regional areas. MEPs from the new members can reasonably be expected to generate activism on issues involving these areas - in particular the new neighbouring countries - affecting the parliamentary agenda in this regard. Parliamentarians from Hungary and Slovenia, for example, will bring to the European Parliament their national public opinions' concerns for the stabilisation process in the Balkans. More in general, the new members' activism will help shape the Union's approach to the countries of Eastern Europe and towards Russia. On January 2005, for example, mainly on initiative of the representatives of the new members, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the Ukraine elections of December 2004, calling for the country to be given "a clear European perspective, possibly leading to EU membership", in order to encourage its internal reform process. The proposal was however dismissed by both the European Commission and EU Member States.²⁵

In addition, the new member states' representatives will bring to the EP the special concerns of their public opinions on matters such as security. The activism they will predictably generate in this regard will enhance the activism already manifested by the MEPs in the past legislature.²⁶ The pronounced atlanticism of most of the new members and their scepticism about Europe's ability to equip itself with effective military forces and an autonomous defence policy have raised concern in the old member states. Yet, it remains to be seen whether these countries' representatives will oppose or support the European Parliament's traditional pro-integrationist stance as regards Union foreign and defence policy.

Finally, it is likely that their historical backgrounds will lead new Members to promote the values of independence and democracy in strong opposition to totalitarian ideologies. On February 2005, for example, a group of MEPs from central and eastern Europe called for a mooted Europe-wide ban on Nazi symbols to be broadened to cover symbols from other regimes.²⁷

²⁵ European Parliament, *Resolution on the results of the Ukraine elections*, 13 January 2005.

²⁶ In the past legislature the House adopted two important reports on ESDP: the Lalumière report, *Developing a common European security and defence policy after Cologne and Helsinki*, 30 November 2000 and the Morillon report, *The new European security and defence architecture - priorities and deficiencies*, 10 April 2003.

²⁷ See *Call for all totalitarian symbols to be banned in EU*, 3/2/2005, www.euobserver.com

Conclusion: the European Parliament's Own Perspective on Foreign Policy

In order to be exhaustive, an analysis of the principles inspiring and of the identity underlying the EP's foreign policy would imply study of the EP's positions over a broad range of issues. Yet, the two cases described above may provide the basis for a tentative conclusion in this regard.

First of all, with regard to Turkey, the European Parliament displayed great determination in promoting human rights and democracy as one of the fundamental objectives of the EU's external relations. Moreover, by conditioning approval of a trade agreement upon respect of these principles, the EP expressed its concern for the fact that any EU foreign policy addressing the issues of human rights and democracy in third countries would fall short if not given sufficient priority with regard to security-related or economic interests.

In fact, the importance that the EP attaches to promoting these principles with regard to the Community's economic relations is confirmed by the wide range of initiatives it has undertaken over the years. In order to monitor and promptly react to violations in foreign countries, the EP set up an *ad hoc* Subcommittee on human rights (within its Foreign Affairs Committee) that deals specifically with the matter. Since 1983, the Subcommittee is also entrusted with drafting the annual report on the human rights situation all over the world. Through the years, the European Parliament has become a convinced promoter of inserting a human rights clause in all the Community's external agreements.²⁸ Moreover, also under EP pressure, the Council eventually accepted to apply certain principles of political conditionality to EU external relations with the central and eastern European countries, and later to insert a clause on the respect of human rights in all agreements signed by the Community with third countries.²⁹

Following the launch of a European Common Foreign Security Policy by the Maastricht Treaty, Parliamentarians asked that the question of human rights be discussed by the Council in its political dialogue with third countries (China and Iran are among the countries with which the Union currently holds political dialogues on human rights). In the case of Taiwan, in addition, the European Parliament has shown its willingness to speak in favour of an inclusive international community, based on the rejection of the use of violence and the peaceful resolution of controversies.³⁰

Therefore, the identity of the European Parliament that seems to emerge is one that is less concerned with the utility of foreign policy for the Member States and more attentive to promoting the values specific to the European Union. In other words, according to Nicole Fontaine, the European Parliament seems to have attributed itself the function of delivering the European message in conflicting global and regional affairs.³¹

²⁸ See for example European Parliament, *Resolution on the situation of human rights in the world, 1991-1992*, 12 March 1993.

²⁹ Council Decision 29 May 1995 EU Bulletin no. 5, 1995. For a more complete review of the use of political conditionality within the Union, see K. E. Smith, (1997).

³⁰ In this sense, also of interest are the conclusions of P. Bender (2002) on the position of Parliament as regards WTO.

³¹ N. Fontaine, *Mes combats à la Présidence du Parlement Européen*, (Plon, Paris, 2002), pp. 149-165, quoted in Y. Lan, (2004: 115).

The divergence between the positions of the EP and the Council can be ascribed to various factors. First, the differences in the two bodies' composition: while Council foreign policy tends to reflect the sensitivities of Heads of States and Governments to economic and commercial matters, such *Realpolitik* concerns are of less interest for the representatives of the European peoples sitting in the European Parliament. At the European level, the divergence between the two institutions is also favoured by the structural absence of a parliamentary majority linked by loyalty to a government. This, for example, plays a fundamental role in making the Members of the European Parliament less reluctant than their national colleagues to undermine the body that negotiates an international agreement (in the national systems usually the executive) by rejecting it.

Second, the European Parliament does not act as a homogeneous entity and needs to reconcile the different opinions of national delegations and political groups before it can express a common position. As some studies on European foreign policy have pointed out, the European Parliament's inability to take a clear stance on past international crises is also due to its poor internal cohesion (Viola, 2000). The promotion of human rights and the rule of law, on the contrary, is a matter on which the body can easily build an internal consensus and show significant cohesion, enhancing its chances of playing a more effective role within the Union (Di Paola, 2003). Moreover, promotion of these values generally meets public opinion's concerns and allows the body to mobilise media attention, reinforcing the possibility of making its voice heard. This was the case, in fact, of the controversial cases behind the EP's refusal to give its assent to the agreements with Turkey.

Although it voiced its concerns in the two cases mentioned, the European Parliament has proved reluctant to enter into clear opposition with the Council, always preferring to adopt a constructive rather than a competitive approach (after refusing to approve Community agreements with Turkey, for example, the MEPs gave their assent even if their requests had not been substantially met). The EP's reluctance can be explained by its unwillingness to jeopardise the Union's credibility in the international arena. In addition, while voicing its foreign policy concerns, the European Parliament has to be careful not to create a climate of mistrust in the Council. In its decisions and the use of its powers, actually, the EP is aware that it is the Council that has the final say on EU treaty revision and, therefore, on the European Parliament's future role within the Union. That is why the EP may seem to be particularly cautious in the use of its more delicate powers (such as its power of assent in foreign policy or, in a different field, its right to censure the Commission).

With regard to the recent enlargement, it's not likely that the European Parliament's foreign policy will be radically changed by the reshaping imposed by the accession of ten countries of eastern, central and southern Europe. The European Parliament's future foreign policy will continue to be inspired by the fundamental values that underlie it today. Nevertheless, due to the historical and political background of the new entrants, liberal and democratic principles are likely to receive more attention than social ones. In the near future, finally, debates on the development of the European Security and Defence Policy and on the European financial perspectives will be an important test of the effects of membership on the political behaviour of new members.

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