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To go where no one has gone before: Toward a model of parliamentary diplomacy in the European Parliament

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Introduction

The theoretical concept of parliamentary diplomacy rose in the mid-2000s in part due to developments observed within the European Parliament. Since then, the literature on the influence of the EP in the EU's foreign policy has multiplied. However, the concept lacks empirical grounding. Moreover, the existing literature focuses on institutional novelties after consecutive treaty changes. Relying on multi-archival research, this paper seeks to propose a model for parliamentary diplomacy in the European Parliament. It aims at producing a model that is independent from institutional changes at the EU level and which relies on the EP's activities. Two cases have been chosen to demonstrate the pertinence of the concept and the importance of the European Parliament in the EU's foreign policy set up. Using the EP-USSR rapprochement in 1985 and the EP-Iran relations in 2003, the paper argues that the EP has the potential to become a mediator with sensitive countries and therefore holds a special place in the EU's diplomatic set-up. Despite occurring almost 20 years apart these two cases maintain striking similarities and highlight how the EP manages to establish diplomatic relations with difficult and opaque regimes. The first part of the paper maps out the debate about the EP that also lead toward the concept of parliamentary diplomacy. While the second part focuses on the two cases that constitute the basis of this paper. The corpus that constitutes the empirical basis of this paper was put together in during three different trips in the archives of the European Parliament in Luxembourg and the official archives of the EU in Florence. The starting point of the research were the Bureau minutes of the EP where traces of these trips could be found. The Bureau minutes are an important source of information about developments in the EP and unlike committee minutes that have shrunk over the years, Bureau minutes remain quite detailed and complete. Moreover, if an event or delegation trip makes it to the discussion in the Bureau it makes it important enough to pay attention to it.

Production of knowledge about the European Parliament

From the internal balance of power in the EP to EP's external activities

In this section, I will briefly present the different categories of literature that have been produced about the European Parliament which portray its development as occurring in

parallel to the actual institutional changes of the EU. What appears is that the existing literature is strongly influenced by treaty changes, particularly when new competences are given to the European Parliament. Thus, the literature focuses on the changes and comparisons with the previous era. This trend is also reflected in the literature that focuses on the role of the European Parliament in the external relations of the EU.

There are three different streams of approaches to the research on the EP. The first one is concerned with the behaviour of MEPs. How do they vote? How does decision-making take place in the EP? How does the EP work from an internal point of view? This stream of literature comes from political science. It underlines the importance of committees but has also uncovered that there are some clear left and right demarcations in voting patterns in the EP. Much of the empirical material used is based on roll call votes. It also explains the roles of all the different players in the EP, the secretariat of the groups, the committees, and secretariat of the European Parliament. In 1990 Attina studied the voting behavior of MEPs by analyzing roll call votes to inquire about political cleavages and the cohesion of the political groups in the EP (Attina, 1990, 562). Already then it was clear that members of the political groups shared ideological and political affinities. However, it appeared that political groups had some cohesion problems when it came to voting. In the late 1990s and early 2000s Hix modelled the party system of the European Parliament. Using the nominate scaling method (developed and applied to the US Congress) he mapped the political behavior of MEPs to determine if MEPs vote in according to national or transnational party affiliations. He also analysed the patterns of voting of political groups. His findings stress the fact that there is a left/right conflict that also characterizes domestic politics (Hix, 2001, 684). He argued that as the powers of the EP increased the competition between the two main political groups increased as well (Hix, 2003). The cohesion trend increased over the years making political groups in the EP far more internally coherent (Hix 2003, 318). Coalitions are flexible and depend on the policy area that is at stake (Hix, 2001, 685).

In the mid-1990s Bowler and Farrell (1995, 223) studied the internal structure of the European Parliament and more specifically they noticed the specialization that took place within committees. Costa (2003, 152) discusses the powers of the administration of the European Parliament and argues that compared to other parliaments, the EP administration is relatively weak because of the dependency on promotion and career advancement that exist for the EP staff on the MEPs. The administration however is unavoidable. The only empirical study of the staff of the EP by Egeberg et al. (2012) show the affiliations that exists within the

staff. Political party staff have the dual affiliation to their political groups but also to the committees they are working with.

The second stream of literature discusses the role of the EP within the interinstitutional triangle of the EU: how much power does the EP have vis-à-vis the European Commission and the European Council. In 1994, Tsebelis published *the powers of the European Parliament as a conditional agenda setter* in which he argues that under certain conditions within the cooperation procedure established by the Single European Act the EP can make suggestions where it is easier for the Council to accept that to modify (Tsebelis, 1994, 129). This article initiated an academic debate over the conditions in which the EP can have influence under the cooperation procedure between Tsebelis and Moser (Moser, 1996; Tsebelis 1996 and Moser 1997), where the authors argued about their interpretation of the procedures and the treaties. In 2009 Kardasheva discussed the influence of the EP within the consultation procedure. This stream of literature is also heavily influenced by political science, particularly by rational behavior theory and game theory. It seeks to argue that the EP is increasingly more powerful within the inter-institutional triangle with each treaty reform. It is clear that the models proposed here are heavily dependent on the inter-institutional relations as defined by the treaties. The stream of literature also poses the important question of the powers of the EP within the EU's legislative decision making. These debates occurred during and after the implementation of the Maastricht Treaty and the negotiation of the Amsterdam Treaty. The creation of the European Union was a critical juncture that increased the academic interest in the European Parliament. But it does suggest a linear interpretation of the power extension of the EP. Each treaty reforms changes slightly the power position of each player in favor of the EP. This became obvious when after the Lisbon Treaty the literature of the powers of the EP in the external relations of the EU skyrocketed.

The third approach to the EP discusses the role of the EP within the external relations set up of the EU. Academic interest in the European Parliament activities in foreign policy started only after the Maastricht Treaty created the new area of cooperation the CFSP and extended the formal powers of the EP in the co-decision and cooperation procedure. It starts from the premise that the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Defense and Security Policy are intergovernmental policies and therefore are only influenced by the governments of the EU. This stream of research wants to examine whether the EP has had an increasing role in this area. In the first publications that had this focus was strongly influenced by the the previous two categories because the authors were investigating political behavior and

interinstitutional relations using the case study of the European Common Foreign and Security Policy. In 2000 Donnatella Viola published her book *European Foreign Policy and the European Parliament in the 1990s: An investigation into the role and voting behaviour of the European Parliament's Political Groups*. She used two case studies, namely the Yugoslav wars and the Gulf War, to investigate the cohesion of the different political groups' positions to see whether a European interest could emerge. She uses quantitative (roll call votes) and qualitative methods (interviews). The book establishes the link between the European Parliament and foreign policy. The two case-studies were based on data from the 1990s, before the Treaty of Maastricht, but uses these like case study to investigate behavior and voting patterns of the different political groups. In that sense, the book could also fall into the first category mentioned in this literature review as it looks at the internal dynamics that exist in the European Parliament.

In the middle of the 2000s we see an increase in the literature about the European Parliament's control over the CFSP and the ESDP. Initially, we see authors examining the EP's scrutiny power over the CFSP (Dietrichs 2004); Crum (2006) investigates whether the EP has been able to increase its power in the Common Foreign and Security Policy by using its informal powers and the institutional novelties of the High Representative. This literature emerged after the creation of the CFSP and CDSP. In a sense, it looks at the balance of power within European governance, assuming that through a series of treaty revisions the EP expanded its powers over the years.

The aim of the Lisbon Treaty was to give institutional coherence and more transparency to an EU of 28. But it also had great implications to the EU's external policies by creating the position of the High Representative and the EEAS (Gebhard, 2011, 121) Experts also expected the Lisbon Treaty to give significantly more powers to the European Parliament, particularly in issues related to trade (Woolcock, 2008, 1). One particular example of this was the SWIFT vote that occurred weeks after Lisbon, where the EP vetoed a bilateral agreement between the US and the EU on example of data for the purpose of finding terrorist activities (Monar, 2010). CFSP. Raube (2011) uses the case of the creation of the EEAS to show how the European Parliament using its budgetary powers managed to influence the shape of the EU's diplomatic service.

Institutional novelties tend to naturally trigger interest in that new field. And more generally the history of the European Parliament is presented as the initial small and powerless assembly that managed to gain more power over the years. Starting with the Treaty of

Luxembourg that gave budgetary powers to the EP, the Single European Act that introduced the cooperation procedure, (Rittberger, 2003, 213-218), the Maastricht Treaty with the co-decision procedure and finally the Lisbon Treaty that expanded the powers of the EP in trade.

The rise of parliamentary diplomacy as a concept

In 2002 Stavridis introduced the concept of parliamentary diplomacy, albeit not with reference to the EP. Stavridis noticed the increasing emergence of parliaments as diplomatic actors. It appears that parliaments began to have a role in international politics only after the 1990s. Beforehand, the Cold War context and bipolarity did not allow for parliaments to get involved in external activities. Moreover, the dominant theoretical paradigms of that period meant that only the executive branch of the government was worth researching in terms of international relations (Stavridis, 2006, 1). As the Cold War period was characterized by the rise and dominance of realism and liberalism in International Relations theory. Therefore, the end of the Cold War not only changed the international structure but it also required a change of orientation from the academic world that had until then been operating within the Cold War context. Outside the academic debates, more actors came to challenge the realist assumptions and parliaments are one of them. Globalization, the rise of technologies and the end of the Cold War have been used as explanations for the reorientation towards a more prominent role for parliaments (and other actors) in the international sphere of politics. Parliaments have been more involved in external activities (Malamud&Stavridis, 2011, 101). It is this rise in the international presence of parliaments that Stavridis (2002) considers important enough to explore. These activities include MP's missions abroad, participation in transnational assemblies (like the European Parliament before 1979 or the Parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe), visits to other parliaments, parliamentary participation in election monitoring abroad and parliamentary questions or reports on foreign and security affairs (Stavridis, 2002).

Stavridis distinguishes between parliamentary accountability and parliamentary diplomacy. Parliamentary accountability refers to the role of parliaments to scrutinize the foreign policy actions of their respective governments while parliamentary diplomacy happens when parliamentarians 'go abroad'. What is also interesting is that parliamentary diplomacy recognizes different kinds of parliaments. Along with national parliaments Stavridis mentions sub-national parliaments that have an extensive international presence, but also transnational parliaments. There is a diversity of membership and composition in these transnational bodies reaching from the representatives of national parliaments to direct elections for the European

Parliament (Stavridis, 2002). This compositional diversity also creates diversity in the nature of the debates and the range of issues explored by these assemblies, with some of them being specialized on specific topics while others are more general. It is important to mention that some of these assemblies are still linked to more ‘traditional’ forms of diplomacy and closely linked to the will of governments (Stavridis, 2002). Others are more independent to act and take initiative. It appears as well that parliaments are more prone to take a more ‘moral’ stand in their actions. Parliamentarians have been more inclined to apologise for the past mistakes of their states. If the parliament’s role in international affairs has increased over the past decades the hegemony of the executives is in no way challenged by parliaments, as “executives remain the heart of foreign policy” (Malamud&Stavridis, 2011, 101). Democratization and popular legitimacy has been used by parliamentarians in order to justify their increased involvement in foreign policy. If sometimes parliaments have gone hand in hand with their governments, it is also the case the parliaments have expressed opinions and acted completely differently from their governments (Malamud&Stavridis, 2011, 103). Fiot assesses the role of political groups in the EP’s external activities. He differentiates between three forms of diplomacy when it comes to the EP and the political groups’ actions. Legislative diplomacy refers to the ability of political parties to directly shape the CFSP by using the formal powers of consultation (2015, 4). Rhetorical diplomacy refers to “debate and dialogue” (2015, 5) but is also expressed by “media appearances, campaign public statements and EP resolutions” (2015, 5). He also mentions the role of the EP’s delegations as an example of rhetorical diplomacy. Active diplomacy refers to “the ability of the political groups to engage in activities in third countries beyond debate and parliamentary contacts. (...) Active diplomacy is about making a material difference (e.g. establishing parliaments, training, election monitoring) in third countries” (2015, 5).

Parliaments in a sense conduct a parallel diplomacy that has contributed to the porosity of the nation-state and to the multiplication of actors that take part in global interactions. This may be referred to as globalization (Middell&Nauman, 2010). The emergence of the concept of parliamentary diplomacy took place at a historical moment when the spotlight moved on the EP. In 2015, Stavridis and Irrera published an edited volume specifically on the EP’s international relations that covers most policy fields from development policy and trade policy to security and military policy (Stavridis&Irrera, 2015). The book focused on post-Lisbon developments and establishes before-after comparisons (Irrera, 2015, 1). The grand narrative about the European Parliament is that it gained power over the years and through

consecutive treaty reforms (Irrera, 2015, 2). However, the paper challenges these claims (the end of the Cold War as the moment that initiated parliaments' increased activity in International Relations and the spillover narrative about the EP gaining more power over the years) by also looking at what happened during the Cold War. It argues that the European Parliament already had a diplomatic role then. This paper argues that the external and diplomatic activities of the European Parliament actually precedes the Maastricht Treaty.

It was the collapse of the domination of realists in International Relations that made the academic world more curious about other actors in the field of foreign policy. Therefore, the interest in parliamentary diplomacy and the role of parliament on the international scene is the consequence of the failure of some of the realist assumptions. Parliaments in general and the EP more specifically did not wait the end of the Cold War to engage into the global arena. Indeed, by being active in the international scene parliaments are taking part in the process of creating globalization. This paper intentionally chose a case in the middle of the Cold War to make this point. The international role of the EP is not related to how much power the treaties are granting it but rather to the ability of individual MEPs in mediating and using the opportunities and tools at their disposal. That makes the period between the direct elections and the Maastricht Treaty the perfect time to investigate for a model of parliamentary diplomacy that is not dependent on the extension of powers that the treaties gave the EP over the years.

EP-USSR

The EC and the USSR had no diplomatic relationship and officially ignored each other until the Comecon EC Cooperation Agreement in 1987. The political affairs committee of the European Parliament drafted the first and last report on the EC-USSR political relations in 1988. However, behind the scenes parliamentarians and USSR officials had been meeting since 1985.

It was at the initiative of the German Social-Democrats, Rudi Arndt and Willy Rothley that the first ever delegation from the European Parliament visited the Soviet Union. It was however, not an official delegation of the EP, but rather a delegation of the Socialist Group of the EP that worked as an intermediary between the EP and the Soviet Union. This trip is probably the best example of the European Parliament and parliamentarians acting as global actors and becoming diplomats practicing parliamentary diplomacy. It was repeated several times during the discussions with their Soviet counterparts that they were not negotiating but

rather establishing contact and trust between the two sides and consider the option to institutionalise the relations between the two (Gresch, 1986, 19).

The story of this delegation trip began because of the changing political context in the Soviet Union. Gorbachev rose to Secretary General of the Central Committee in March 1985 and he immediately changed the public tone of the USSR against the European Community. Previous attempts to mutual recognition between the EC and the Comecon had broken down in 1980 (Gresch, 1986, 19). It was when Craxi who hold the presidency of the Council, visited the Moscow in May that Gorbachev mentioned for the first time the possibility to officially recognise the European Community as a “political partner” (Gresch, 1986, 19) and reorganise the relationship between the EC and the Comecon (Gresch, 1986, 1). In June, the EC Commissioner for External Relation and Trade De Clercq received the letter from Sytchev, the Secretary of Comecon, to initiate the process of normalization of relations between the EC and Comecon. De Clercq replied favourably but made clear that the community would see individual agreements with the Comecon countries rather than a single agreement with Comecon as an organization.¹ When Sytchev replied in September, the answer partly confused the Europeans as it was not clear whether or not the Community would be able to conduct negotiations with individual Comecon countries. During the trip to Moscow, Rudi Arndt had the opportunity to express the European concerns to Sytchev himself. (Gresch, 1986, 48). This also allowed for the Europeans to find out about who was representing the different forces Moscow.

Like an initiation rite, the trip had a profound impact on the Arndt and the other members of the delegation. They were after all, in enemy territory, in Moscow in December. The delegation was constantly accompanied by Soviet guides and had to deal with great cultural differences and a different political culture. The Luxembourgish presidency of the Council provided support and meetings with the German Ambassador were also organised. At the end of the visit, the Luxembourgish embassy organised a dinner to which the European correspondent in Moscow were also invited (Gresch, 1986, 48).

Although, this ad hoc delegation was not an official EP delegation, it acted like one when they discussed under what modalities the Supreme Soviet and the EP could institutionalise their relations. And the MEPs certainly acted like diplomats when they conveyed European

¹ The previous negotiations between the EC and Comecon had fallen out in 1980 as Comecon insisted on trade provisions. From the Community’s perspective this was unacceptable as the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance had no common commercial policy nor commercial instruments. European Commission (1987) Press Release, Retrieved on 6 December 2016 from http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-87-29_fr.htm

concerns expressed in the EP report. Although at the time the delegation never considered the trip of a great political significance (Gresch, 1986, 58). However, from the negotiations that took place before to the events of the aftermath of the trip, it is clear that of great significance to the overall development of the European Parliament's international relations and to the role of parliamentarians as diplomatic actors. European Parliamentarians were the first to establish contacts with the Soviet Union, this was done in an informal way at the beginning (Stavridis, 2006, 6) as political groups were not constrained by the Bureau as were interparliamentary delegation or the Political Affairs Committee. The aim of this first visit was also to uncover the "black box" (Gresch, personal communication January 2017) that was the Soviet regime at that time for the West, find out who was who. However, this required to read under the lines of the statement from the Soviet side. An exercise in diplomacy to which Arndt and the other members of the delegations played perfectly.

The role of Rudi Arndt and Willy Rothley as individuals cannot be stressed enough. They negotiated the trip on behalf of their group (Stavridis, 2006, 7). Moreover, Rudi Arndt as leader of the socialist in the EP, promoted afterwards the institutionalization of the relations between the EP and the Supreme Soviet within the EP Bureau. Arndt's whose previous success was the construction of the Frankfurt Airport while he was mayor of the city made the continuation of Ostpolitik in the European Community is main objective. When Willy Rothley came back from a trip to Moscow in 1984, he suggested to Arndt that a delegation of the Group should go after he had established friendly contacts with a Soviet intermediary Rikin.² Arndt immediately took over the idea, and make the promotion of Ostpolitik within the EP his priority.

During the trip to Moscow, Rudi Arndt proposed the framework of interparliamentary delegations in order to institutionalise the relationship to the Supreme Soviet. The lines between an official EP delegation and political groups' delegations are in this case blurry. The rules for the differentiation of official EP delegation were introduced in the early 1990s. It clearly from the discussions that took place during this trip, that it was the relationship between the EC and the Soviet Union and the EC and the Comecon countries that was at stakes. On the 21 January 1987, the plenary of the European Parliament decided to create inter-parliamentary delegations of the countries of Eastern Europe and to the Soviet Union.

² I have looked everywhere but could not find who that person is. He seems to have been the first one who entered in contact with Rothley in November 1984. During the summer of 1985, Rothley secured the visit. Rothley and Rikin were the intermediaries between Arndt and Saglatin who met later.

However, it was clear that these delegations would not start their work as long as the former had not recognised officially the EC (European Parliament, 21 January 1987).

Over the next years, the informal contacts between the Soviet Union and members of the European Parliament would continue to take place. In March 1987, the Bureau of the EPP group headed by Egon Klepsch who had been convinced by Rudi Arndt visited the Soviet Union. The friendly relationship between Klepsch and Arndt, the leaders of the two biggest political groups of the European Parliament was crucial in enabling the issue to come to the agenda. That they were both Germans also played an important role. They both understood perhaps more than others, the importance of the reforms that were happening in the Soviet Union and their potential consequences for Germany but also for the whole continent. The EPP delegation met with the same individuals and institution as the socialist delegations. They met with Sytchev head of Comecon that informed the delegation that the organization had already asked the Brussels authorities for a building where they could set-up a Comecon representation to the European Community (Secretariat of the EPP, 1987, 11). The Soviets also informed the delegation about the possibility for the EC to have bilateral relations with the Comecon countries which was what the EC was aiming. While initially against this, the Soviets shifted their position and informed the EPP delegation. Like in the case of the socialist delegation, the parliamentarians acted more as representative of the EP and the Community with Klepsch stressing the importance for the Soviet Union to recognise the status of the European Community before the start of any diplomatic relations (Secretariat of the EPP, 1987, 11).

In October 1987, the socialist group invited a delegation from the Soviet Supreme to the EP. If the discussions were primarily focused between the socialist group and the Supreme Soviet, they were meetings and dinners organised also with the other political groups and with the Bureau of the European Parliament. The discussions were organised around four working groups: the International Situations, Security and Disarmament, Human Rights and Economic questions. During the first working group, they discussed about the arrangements that were still to be made about the setting up of the EP inter-parliamentary delegation (IPD) to the Soviet Supreme. At that point, political groups had already designated the members of the IPD although the delegation itself was not yet officially launched. At that point, and following travels of the Socialist delegation to East-Berlin and the other Eastern capitals, the European Parliament had decided to establish relations on a bilateral basis (Gresch, 1987, 4). The question of West Berlin was the only remaining issue to be solved between the Community

and Comecon and was left for end.³ This trip was an opportunity for the Soviets to present informally to the European Commission a proposal for the resolution of this remaining issue (Gresch, 1987, 36). The clause would specify that West Berlin was part of the European Community “political and economic sphere” (Gresch, 1987, 39) of influence but the status of West Berlin as defined by the 1972 would not be altered.

Risse (1994, 212-213) has argued for the conceptual importance of transnational networks of ideas exchange to explain western/European reactions to the End of the Cold War. He identified the importance of epistemic communities but also regular exchanges between SPD officials with the communist parties of the East to argue for a shift in ideas about international security. The European Parliament largely contributed largely into creating a favourable work climate that could establish trust between the two. Most of the historical research on the End of the Cold War, and European integration focused on the events after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the effects of German unification (Bozo, Rey, Ludlow and Nutti, 2008). However, to explain the largely favourable supportive environment of the European institutions toward German unification, the role of German parliamentarians in promoting West-East relations and a policy of détente in Europe has to be addressed. In that sense, the European Parliament and its members act within transnational networks like European political parties and can use both their national party’s status and the European status to promote policy ideas. Arndt, and Klepsch are typical examples of this.

EP-Iran

After the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, the Community and Iran had no diplomatic or economic ties. The regime isolated itself from the western world. In the mid-1990s a reformist movement started in the country and allowed for the opening of the country to the west. Within the Community it would be Elmar Brok who would become the principal mediator between the Islamic republic and the EU. Elmar Brok, rose to the chairmanship of AFET, after the elections of 1999. His career as AFET chair has been unusually long. He stayed in the position until 2007 and regained that post in 2012 until January 2017. This position allowed him to gain credibility and authority on the EU’s CFSP (Clark and Priestley, 2012, 195). Brok has not only contributed to the extension of the EP’s diplomacy but he has also proved himself to have participated to the conceptual thinking of European security policy (Brok and Gresch, 2005, 179-188). In the early 2000s, he paved the way for the EP to

³ The Soviets had always denied that West Berlin was a EC territory and therefore did not recognize MEPs coming from the West Berlin.

establish relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran; in a case, that bears many resemblances to the way the Socialist delegation established relations with the USSR in the 1980s.

Like with the start of the relations with the Soviet Union, our story starts with the election of a reformist at the head of Iran, Mohammad Khatami in 1997. His Foreign Minister, Kamal Kharazi would immediately soften his stand and welcome the EU ambassadors back to Tehran after tensions over terrorism allegation in Europe had led to their withdrawal. The following year a limited dialogue was installed. The European Commission presented a communication of the EU relations to Iran in early 2001 in perspective of an upcoming trade and cooperation agreement, which triggered a report from the AFET (Gahler 26 November 2001). Among the recommendations of the report, Gahler wanted to send an ad hoc delegation to Iran. Like for the Soviet Union in 1985, the Iranian regime and its internal dynamics were totally unknown in Europe, and the purpose of the delegation was to find out about to reform movement in Iran and who were the actors initiating it. Iran in 2002 was a black box that needed to be opened.

Brok, who supported the idea wrote to the Bureau in March 2002 to request its permission to travel (Brok, 4 March 2002). On the meantime, Brok and Gahler entered into contact with members of the Iranian Parliament, and the negotiations over the program of the visit were made by two members of the Secretariat of the EP, Norbert Gresch from the Deputy Head of the Foreign Affairs Division (who had also been closely involved in the socialist delegation to the USSR) and Hans-Herman Krauss responsible for the delegations. The preparation of such a delegation is a complex process, it required being in contact with the Iranian embassy in Brussels, but also the host, which in this case was the Iranian Parliament, and of course the Presidency and the Commission (Gresch, personal communication 16 January 2017). The means of communication between Brussels and Teheran were also restricted, which added to the complexity of the preparations.

Brok was in touch with the highest levels of the Iranian administration, he had received an personal invitation from Kharazi. He also secured for the delegation a meeting with President Khatami and the Iranian side insisted on Brok and Gahler being part of the delegation (Brok, 10 April 2002).

The delegation took place in July 2002, first the delegation who was composed by five MEPs including Brok and Gahler and the two administrators. When the delegation arrived, their first task was to debrief with the EU ambassadors. The ambassadors' role was to explain to the

delegations the functioning of the Iranian power structures (Brok, 2002). This meeting is also very important for the MEPs because they quickly realize with which ambassadors they can cooperate with, in the future. It was also important for the EU ambassadors, because the delegation has meetings with the top-level personalities of the Iranian government in a very short time. Access that not all EU ambassadors have. This delegation was also the opportunity for the EU ambassadors to get information about the attentions of the Iranians. The ambassadors who were in charge for implementing the negotiation between the EU and Iran on the trade agreement wanted to know how willing the Iranian interlocutors were into entering a dialogue on human right, weapons of mass destruction, the Middle East and terrorism, all pillars of the negotiation mandate they had (Bork, 2002, 2).

During their five days visit the MEPs went to the Iranian Parliament, met with Brok's counterpart, the Foreign Minister Kharazi, the President Khatami, religious leaders, but also members of the civil society like journalist associations, groups of women and even a human rights NGO. In many ways, this trip was a surprise for the members of the delegation. They found a more "liberal" (Brok, 2002, 12) society than what they had expected. During that trip Brok invited the Foreign Minister of Iran to a formal exchange of views with the AFET Committee.

A delegation like that one is always succeed by a multiplication of initiatives to establish a dialogue formally and informally. They are also very delicate matters. If the MEPs are relatively free in their actions and do not face any consequences for their actions, it is not always the case for their counterparts. Some days after the end of the visit, their host in Teheran the member of the Parliament Moshem Mirdamadi⁴ with whom Brok had had a joint press conference at the end of the trip was arrested by the Iranian police. He was released after pressure exercised by the President of the EP Pat Cox to the head of the Iranian Parliament. Mirdamadi later led the Iranian delegation that came to visit the EP in the summer of 2003 but was excluded from rerunning for the 2004 elections that saw a change of regime in Iran.

The decision to formally institutionalize the links between the two parliaments was taken shortly after the elections of 2004. Very quickly after the establishment of the delegation, the relationship between the two froze with the suspension of official delegation trips to Iran, due

⁴ Mirdamadi was elected member of the Iranian Parliament from 2000 to 2004 with the reform platform. He was banned from rerunning for elections along with other 80 incumbents. He is since 2006 the leader of the largest reformist party in Iran

to Iran's nuclear program. But what is interesting, is that this case confirms the diplomatic profile of the EP as a mediator between the EU and a 'difficult' and opaque regime.

Conclusions: Towards a model?

These two cases took place twenty years apart and within a very different European Parliament but also within very different world orders. While the European Parliament of 1985 was technically a consultative assembly with competences limited strictly to some areas of the EC budget, the European Parliament after the Maastricht, Amsterdam and Nice Treaties was an assembly with co-decision powers in the area of the single market and a consultative role within the CFSP. In terms of institutionalization, it is also clear that the EP in 2003 was far more institutionalized and formalized than in 1985. In terms of world orders, it also could not be more different. On the one hand, we were in the middle of the Cold War tensions with a bipolar world with elevated tensions after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. On the other hand, in 2003 we were facing a unipolar world with the emerging threat of transnational terrorism. Despite, these differences, the role of the EP as a mediator between the EC/EU and the USSR and Iran, was the same. The role of these MEPs was to assess the internal dynamics in regimes where little was known about them. It was to establish trust between both sides and find out with whom it would be possible to cooperate in the future.

It is possible to find similarities that can constitute the basis for our model. In both cases, the parliamentarians acted in countries where the EU had had limited contacts. In both cases these regimes were black boxes to which there was very little knowledge of the internal dynamics of the regimes. In a sense, these trips mapped these countries for the EC/EU. There were about collecting information about these regimes and but also about establishing contact and trust between the two entities.

Both trips happened at the fringe of the community, outside the traditional and existing institutional set up of the EP. There was an interparliamentary delegation to the countries of Eastern Europe but the Bureau never allowed the delegation to travel there despite numerous attempts. In the case of the trip to Moscow, the initiative came from the leader of a political group. The financing of this trip come from the budget of the socialist group in the EP and therefore there was no need for the permission of the Bureau. It was clear however from the minutes of the meetings that the parliamentarians who were in Moscow acted on behalf of the EP. The Soviets were interested in a relationship with the Community and the members of the delegation acted as such. In the Iran case, the trip had the approval of the Bureau of the EP but

as there was no interparliamentary delegation to Iran, it was an ad hoc delegation. It still acted within the fringes of the EP because the normal procedures that usually apply to delegation trips, in terms of selection of representatives for instance, did not apply in this case.

Another common point of the two cases is that it is clear that one or two individual MEPs were the central points of these trips, namely Rudi Arndt in the first case and Elmar Brok in the second. In both cases, they had their own contacts with Moscow and Iran and they were the people who led the meetings from the European side. Rudi Arndt had had contacts with the Soviets through the Socialist International while Elmar Brok had received the foreign minister of Iran in his office before he went to Iran.

Perhaps the most important point that really started both these stories is that the reform movements within those two regimes were outside the reach of the EU. In a sense both these cases started outside Europe. It was the arrival at the top leadership of reformist leaders that was the starting point of both these rapprochements. The EP (or more precisely MEPs) as mediators between the EU and third country is an aspect of parliamentary diplomacy that has not yet been explored sufficiently and this paper was an attempt to fill the gap with concrete empirical cases.

The calls for the increased powers of the EP in the European foreign policy apparatus did multiply over the years and for many the Lisbon Treaty was a partial concretization of these demands. It gave the EP more formal powers to influence the external policy of the EU. Now that the EP has left the shadows of the EU's external policy however, the question whether the EP will continue to hold this specific role needs to be posed. Although, during and after the trips, press conferences were organized, in both cases the negotiations that lead to the actual visit were confidential.

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