The Role of the European Parliament in the Political System of the European Union After the Treaty of Lisbon

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MASTER'S THESIS

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Zagreb
June, 2024

I declare that I have independently written my master's thesis titled *The Role of the European Parliament in the Political System of the European Union After the Treaty of Lisbon*, which I submitted to my mentor, dr. sc. Hrvoje Špehar, for evaluation, and that it is entirely in my authorship. I also declare that the paper in question has not been published or used to fulfil teaching obligations at this or any other institution of higher learning, and that I did not obtain ECTS credits based on it.

Furthermore, I declare that I have respected the ethical rules of scientific and academic work, particularly Articles 16-19 of the Code of Ethics of the University of Zagreb.

Leon Žilić

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1. INTRODUCTION

The European Union represents a unique, supranational partnership, positioned between an economic and political union. As such, it embodies three main political institutions which form its executive and legislative branches, namely the European Commission, the Council of the European Union, and the European Parliament, respectively. The Union further includes a number of institutions crucial to its success, those being the European Council, the Court of Justice of the European Union, the European Central Bank, and the European Court of Auditors. These institutions have not all existed since the conception of the European Union's first predecessor, the European Coal and Steel Community, and those that did were granted very limited powers. Among the main institutional giants, the European Parliament was granted the least power whereas the driving influence was in the hands of the institutional predecessors to the Commission, the Council, and the Court of Justice. The European Parliament came into existence namely due to the influence of a limited number of respected political actors of the time, today known as the Founding fathers of the European Union.

Over time, the European Parliament enjoyed a major increase in its significance and in the scope of its powers during the following decades, culminating in the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon fifteen years ago. Henceforth, this thesis aims to explore the role of the European Parliament in the political system of the European Union as it developed, examining its historical development, institutional powers, and the transformative changes introduced by each treaty, leading up to the current times.

The first part of this thesis titled *The European Parliament during the history of European integration* offers a historical and theoretical perspective on the Parliament's development. It begins with an exploration of functionalism and neofunctionalism as the relevant theoretical approaches for the incremental and cooperative aspects of European integration within the European Parliament. Moreover, it transitions to the Parliament's inaugural session, marking the beginning of its formal role in the EU's institutional framework. The evolution of its powers is further examined chronologically, from the Treaties of Paris and Rome, through the Parliament's first direct elections in 1979 and the Spinelli Draft which followed, to the Single European Act and the Treaties of Maastricht, Amsterdam, and Nice, culminating in the Constitutional Treaty.

In the second part titled *Internal structure and powers of the European Parliament*, the focus shifts to a detailed examination of the Parliament's current powers and its internal structure. This section delves into the internal organisation of the Parliament, including the roles and functions of its various committees, political groups, the President, the plenary, et cetera. It also discusses the Parliament's composition, touching upon the distribution of seats between member states, reflecting the balance between population size and political equality, and the European political parties and political groups, which are composed of members of the European Parliament, the only directly elected political actors of the European Union. Finally, the second part will also analyse the institutional position of the European Parliament in relation to other EU bodies.

The final part of this thesis titled *Key aspects in the work of the European Parliament after the Treaty of Lisbon* examines the transformative impact of the Treaty of Lisbon on the Parliament's functions and political influence. The Treaty of Lisbon, which came into force on December 1, 2009, introduced significant procedural reforms, particularly the ordinary legislative procedure, which elevated the Parliament to a co-legislator on equal footing with the Council in most policy areas. This section also discusses the special legislative procedures, which apply to specific policy domains allowing more limited parliamentary involvement.

Moreover, the final part analyses enhanced budgetary powers granted under the Treaty of Lisbon, demonstrating how the Parliament's role in the EU's financial governance has been strengthened. The control and supervision of other EU bodies is explained, highlighting the Parliament's increased oversight capabilities. The discussion concludes with an exploration of the concept of the democratic deficit, with respect to its possible solutions.

To summarise, this thesis seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the European Parliament's role within the political system of the European Union, particularly in the context of the changes brought about by the Treaty of Lisbon. By examining the historical evolution and the increase of its institutional powers, the thesis aims to contribute to the broader discourse on European Union integration, offering insights into its ongoing development.

2. THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT DURING THE HISTORY OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

To start, the first of three successive parts will focus on historical development of the European Parliament, mainly from the end of World War Two onwards, touching on the main integrationist concepts which steered the development of the European Union with regards to their impact on European Parliament's development. Furthermore, I will give an overview of the historical development with regards to relevant treaties, how they incrementally increased the functions of the European Parliament, and which important powers were granted under which treaty reform. Lastly, this part will finish with the unratified 'Draft Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe', thus leaving space to independently cover the ultimate treaty reform, the Treaty of Lisbon, in part three.

2.1 The European Parliament's historical development with regard to the functionalist theoretical perspective

The historical development of the European Parliament and successive increasement of its functions is closely linked with the relevant theoretical approaches which aimed to gradually magnify the scope of European integration in the aftermath of war-torn and politically divided Europe; primarily, the appearance of functionalism, federalism, and intergovernmentalism. The importance of the aforementioned concepts can be seen in their implementation in the development of European Union's first predecessor, the European Coal and Steel Community (*abbr.* ECSC), established under the Treaty of Paris six years after the end of World War Two. Focusing on three of the EU's founding fathers, Jean Monnet, Robert Schuman and Altiero Spinelli, a connection can be made between the above stated theories with the subsequent development of functions and powers of the European Union.

Firstly, functionalism was developed prior to World War Two. "Functionalism results from a belief that if national institutions are not able to deal satisfactorily with the challenges they face, an international institution might be able to do so. If so, states will cooperatively transfer some of their sovereign power to the international institution for the greater good." (Saunders, 2020). Its creator, David Mitrany, believed that public policies are too susceptible to the influence of political games to satisfy the needs of individuals" and that "strong supranational

institutions are needed, which would perform the functions that individuals expect (Saurugger, 2013). According to Mitrany, territorial and national limitations should be omitted in purpose of achieving goals (Saurugger, 2013). A decade later, Mitrany's theory proved significant to the founding fathers of the modern-day European Union, importantly Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman.

Functionalism greatly contributed to the way the European Coal and Steel Community was set up. "When [Monnet] created the European Coal and Steel Community, he assigned specific and relatively narrow "functions" to the Community, fully expecting that the integration that they represented would eventually "spill over"" (Saunders, 2020). Importantly, "[i]ncremental decision-making is given primacy over grand designs" (Bergmann and Niemann, 2015: 6). In the second half of the 1950s, Ernst Haas's neofunctionalism emerged as its successor, as the chain of integration had already started. Visibly, "neo-functionalism contended that when integration took place, unexpected beneficial and self-reinforcing results might occur, such as the creation of groups that might encourage more integration" (Saunders, 2020). Henceforth, the desire for integration leads to the creation of political authorities which then extend the integration process. This proved to be the case within the European Coal and Steel Community, as Monnet desired to increase the authority of its institutions.

2.1.1 Treaty of Paris

In a letter to Robert Schuman, Monnet elaborated that among the Community's institutions (The High Authority, The Special Council of Ministers, and The Court of Justice), an additional institution called The Common Assembly should be included, which would be made up of Member States' representatives (Čepo, 2013: 17). These four institutions were in the forefront of the signing of The Treaty of Paris in 1951, and Monnet's interference proved to be crucial for the establishment of European Parliament's precursor and it indirectly laid ground for future democratic legitimacy of the Union. Importantly, "[t]he Assembly had the right to dismiss the High Authority (precursor to today's Commission)" ("Treaty of Paris"). Here, the Assembly's oldest and, for a long time, only authority can be seen (Čepo, 2013: 17). As to its composition, the Assembly was not a directly elected body until 1979; its members were "selected by their national parliaments" ("Treaty of Paris"). Similarly, the Assembly's functions were greatly limited, and other Community institutions enjoyed greater influence.

Unlike The Common Assembly, Monnet was pressured to include the creation of The Special Council of Ministers in the contract, which were to act as a brake for more significant federalist tendencies that could come from The High Authority and The Common Assembly (Čepo, 2013: 17). Moreover, the Assembly's powers were specifically weak and strictly prescribed, and they relied mainly on the right of supervision and deliberation (Čepo, 2013: 18). Nonetheless, the symbolic value of the Common Assembly was in the fact that it introduced a democratic element into the joint decision-making process; further powers were not as important, as long as the reason for its establishment was fulfilled (Čepo, 2013: 18, as cited in Nugent, 2006: 39). The further strengthening of the Assembly was to be achieved through cooperation with the High Authority, which tried to strengthen its position and provide additional powers to its members by encouraging further supranational development (Čepo, 2013: 19).

2.2 Incremental strengthening of the European Parliament's powers and its changing institutional position

2.2.1 Treaty of Rome and subsequent changes until the first direct elections

"On 10 September 1952 the first session of the Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community was held" ("The first session", 2017). At the first session in Strasbourg, the national parliaments delegated 78 representatives, mostly supporters of the idea of European unification, who immediately began to encourage further integrative activities (Čepo, 2013: 19). Only five years later, The Treaty of Rome which established two new communities, the European Economic Community (*abbr*. EEC), and the European Atomic Energy Community (*abbr*. Euratom), was signed.

The success of this treaty partly lies on the members of the Common Assembly, which were initially approached by the Council of Ministers with the aim of strengthening integration (Čepo, 2013: 19). Under this treaty, the European Parliamentary Assembly was constructed as the Common Assembly's successor. Its size increased to 142 members ("Treaty of Rome"). The new assembly took over the authorities of the presupposed assemblies of the EEC and Euratom (Čepo, 2013: 20, as cited in Nugent, 2006: 39). On 30 March 1962, the Assembly was renamed the European Parliament (Bux and Maciejewski, 2024). In the following decade, the executive bodies of the three communities merged as well. As a result, The European

Communities were established, with the Merger Treaty entering into force in 1967 ("Merger Treaty").

Furthermore, the first important increase of Parliament's authorities came with the power of discharge. "In 1971, it secured the power to grant discharge together with the Council. Since 1 June 1977, when the Treaty of 22 July 1975 entered into force, it alone has the power to grant discharge, once the Council has given its recommendation" (Haase, 2024). The discharge procedure "aims to verify whether implementation [of the EU's annual budget] was in accordance with relevant rules (compliance)" (D'Alfonso, 2016). Additionally, the Parliament could, with certain limitations, make changes in expenditures without the approval of the Council, and could also redistribute funds among different budget items" (Čepo, 2013: 23). Moreover, in June 1979, the Parliament held its first elections.

2.2.2 The first European Parliament elections

The first European Parliament elections proved to be crucial for further development of its powers and for further democratic legitimisation of the Union. Nonetheless, some member states' representatives believed that, in case of low turnout, the Parliament would not have the legitimacy to demand the strengthening of its powers and the key role of the Council of the European Union would be preserved (Čepo, 2013: 40, as cited in Lodge, 1978: 220). Whilst the Parliament suffers from low voter turnout today, this line of thinking was not justified in the aftermath of the first elections because not only were they a great success, demonstrating strong public interest, but a relatively large number of citizens were interested in participating in the elections of the Parliament's members before the first direct elections (Čepo, 2013: 40). As such, the fears of its lack of legitimacy post-election implementation were side-lined.

A year after the Parliament held its first elections, the Parliament was indirectly granted another power – the power of delay – due to a ruling made by the European Court of Justice (*abbr*. ECJ). "During the first elections of the European Parliament in 1979 the Council had adopted a piece of legislation without consulting the European Parliament. The European Parliament challenged the Council before the ECJ, which annulled the legislation on the grounds that the treaty required the Council to 'consult' the European Parliament." (Hix and Høyland, 2011: 52). Importantly, this meant that the Parliament had the 'power of delay' i.e., the Council

cannot act without Parliament's opinion being issued (Hix and Høyland, 2011: 52). This ruling was just the beginning of upcoming changes which followed in the same decade.

2.2.3 Spinelli Draft

Two years after the first elections, a significant number of Members of the European Parliament (*abbr*. MEPs) established a permanent body called the Committee on Institutional Affairs, with the aim of changing existing treaties (Čepo, 2013: 24, as cited in Dinan, 2005: 90). The Committee was led by the aforementioned Altiero Spinelli, a prominent Italian federalist and one of Union's founding fathers. Unlike the gradual integration preferred by neofunctionalists, Spinelli's federalist vision for Europe "involved the transformation and integration of the nation states and a strong role of the European Parliament (EP) to achieve a true federal democracy" ("Spinelli's legacy", 2014). The pinnacle of his ideas is seen in the Spinelli Draft, officially titled the Draft Treaty establishing the European Union, as presented and approved by the Parliament on Valentine's Day 1984.

"The Draft Treaty consisted of 87 articles that sought to supplement and amend the previous treaties establishing the European Communities with regard to its institutions, policy and financial management, in addition to determining the aims, methods of action and powers (competences) of the European Union. The resolution introduced the very concept of European Union, a union vested with legal personality" ("The role of Altiero Spinelli", 2016). Even though the Spinelli Draft "was not accepted by the Member States as the basis for negotiations on then-upcoming Treaty changes, many of its proposals found expression in the Single European Act, the Maastricht Treaty and finally in the Lisbon Treaty" ("Spinelli's legacy", 2014).

2.2.4 Following treaty reforms until the Constitutional Treaty

Soon after, the greatest changes to the Parliament's functioning of the time came in the form of the Single European Act (*abbr*. SEA). Firstly, the SEA made the name 'European Parliament', which had been used since 1962, official ("Single European Act"). Moreover, a significant change came in the form of the cooperation procedure. "The procedure allowed the European Parliament a second reading, after the Council had adopted a common position, and reduced the ability of the Council to overturn European Parliament amendments made in the

second reading" (Hix and Høyland, 2011: 53). While this was applied only to ten treaty articles which made up around one-third of entire legislation, it included "most areas of the single market programme, specific research programmes, certain decisions related to structural funds, and some social and environmental policy issues" (Hix and Høyland, 2011: 53). Thirdly, the SEA introduced the assent procedure, today known as consent. Under assent, "the approval of the European Parliament was required before the Council could act" (Hix and Høyland, 2011: 53). It was introduced in two areas: "association agreements and agreements governing accession to the European Union" ("Legislative powers").

Beside strengthening European institutions, the SEA impacted European integration by strengthening "the treaty base for policy activity, most particularly in respect of the completion of the internal market where a deadline of December 1992 was set for its completion" (Nugent, 2017: 80). Importantly, the SEA formalised political agreements and established a coherent relationship between the Communities within the framework of European political cooperation, which represented an important step towards the creation of the European Union (Beširević, 2013: 32). It seemed that the European Communities caught momentum for greater integration and stronger institutional authorities, which soon benefitted the Parliament.

Only half a decade later, yet another significant treaty was signed. The Treaty on European Union (*abbr*. TEU), colloquially known as Maastricht Treaty, was signed in the Dutch city on 7 February 1992, entering into force on 1 November 1993. It was signed "in the presence of the President of the European Parliament, Egon Klepsch" ("Treaty on European Union"). Its importance is multifaceted. Firstly, besides strengthening the assent procedure, it introduced the co-decision procedure (Hix and Høyland, 2011: 53). "This procedure introduced the rule that if the European Parliament and Council disagreed on a piece of legislation, a conciliation committee would be convened, consisting of an equal number of representatives of the European Parliament and the Council. After a conciliation committee had reached an agreement, the deal would then have to be approved by both the Council and the European Parliament" (Hix and Høyland, 2011: 53). Importantly, unlike the cooperation procedure, the Parliament was granted the right to veto legislative proposals it did not want to accept (Nugent, 2017: 83). Besides internal market legislation which was previously covered by cooperation, the co-decision procedure also applied to public health, consumer protection, education, and culture (Hix and Høyland, 2011: 53).

Furthermore, the Parliament was granted "the right to invite the Commission to present a legislative proposal on matters which, in its view, call for a Community act to be drawn up" ("Treaty on European Union"). Additionally, the Parliament "was to appoint an Ombudsman to receive complaints from citizens 'covering instances of maladministration in the activities of the Community institutions or bodies, with the exception of the Court of Justice and the Court of First Instance" (Nugent, 2017: 83). Finally, the Commission "must also now be approved by the EP" ("Treaty on European Union"). Taking everything into consideration, the Maastricht Treaty proved to be the EU's greatest achievement of the time, but the need to revisit it came soon after.

Henceforth, on 2 October 1997, the Treaty of Amsterdam was signed, entering into force on 1 May 1999, extending the co-decision procedure. Here, most areas previously covered by the cooperation procedure were now under co-decision; therefore, Maastricht's version of co-decision is referred as 'co-decision I', while its updated version is known as 'co-decision II' (Hix and Høyland, 2011: 53). As such, "the cooperation procedure was virtually abandoned" (Nugent: 2017: 87). Moreover, legislative proposals could now be adopted at first reading in case of Parliament's and Council's joint agreement, whereas the conciliation committee became the final stage of the process; the inability to reach an agreement meant that the legislative proposal would not pass (Hix and Høyland, 2011: 53). Yet another important treaty came two years after Amsterdam took effect.

In 2001, the Treaty of Nice was signed, taking effect on 1 February 2003. The importance of this treaty lies in its aim to "reform the institutional structure of the European Union to with stand the challenges of the new enlargement" ("Treaty of Nice"). Here, the Intergovernmental Conference (*abbr*. IGC), the body which prepared treaty reforms since the Single European Act, aided the preparation for enlargement by setting the cap on Parliament's size to 732 MEPs on a gradual basis (Nugent: 2017: 80, 89). Regarding enlargement, while the membership procedure is dominated by the Commission and the Council, the Parliament is to be regularly informed about the negotiation process, and it has the right to give or withhold consent to the future acceding country and ratify the Accession Treaty with all national parliaments (Beširević, 2013: 46).

Regarding decision-making procedures, Nice renamed the 'flexible cooperation procedure' (as created under Amsterdam) to 'enhanced cooperation'; its purpose is to permit Member States

to engage in policy activity without every Member State having to participate, and the changes implemented under Nice were lowering the minimum number of participating Member States to eight, and changing the veto option for enhanced cooperation to an appeal option, thus increasing this procedure's usability (Nugent: 2017, 90). Additionally, this treaty extended the co-decision procedure, thus giving the Parliament the liberty to veto proposals, and the assent procedure (Nugent: 2017, 90). While this is the last ratified treaty until the Treaty of Lisbon, covered in the third part of the thesis, there is an important, unratified draft treaty worth mentioning.

2.2.5 Draft Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe

To overcome the limitations of the Nice Treaty, another IGC convened in 2004, for which the European Council issued the 'Laeken Declaration on the Future of the European Union', providing the establishment of a Convention on the Future of Europe (Nugent: 2017, 93 as cited in European Council: 2001). The Convention's final document was titled 'Draft Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe' (Nugent: 2017, 94 as cited in European Convention: 2003). Most notable changes for the Parliament included having equal legislative power under co-decision, having the final word over the annual budget, and having the final word and electing the President of the European Commission ("Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe"). Furthermore, by including the Parliament in EU's foreign, security, and judicial policies and by permitting equal legislative power, an effort was made to contribute to the strengthening of EU's democratic legitimacy (Čepo: 2013, 33). "[T]he Constitutional Treaty was formally signed in Rome on 29 October 2004" (Nugent: 2017, 96). Nonetheless, mainly due to the rejection of the Constitution via referendums in France and the Netherlands, the Draft Treaty was rejected. The topic was set aside and the 'period of reflection' took place (Nugent: 2017, 98). Thus came the next and ultimate treaty reform: the Treaty of Lisbon.

3. INTERNAL STRUCTURE AND POWERS OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Part two of this work will focus on the Parliament's internal structure, functioning and organisation, its legislative powers and procedures, European Parliament elections, and the institutional position of the European Parliament with regards to the European Union as a whole, as well covering its organisational position with its co-legislator, the Council of the European Union, the executive (European Commission), the European Council, and with other relevant bodies and actors in the Union. Lastly, this part will touch on the potential future of the institutional structure within the Union.

3.1 European Parliament elections, its composition, and its members

To start, the European Parliament is a co-legislative body alongside the Council of the European Union. It is important to highlight its peculiar interinstitutional position with regards to the executive. Unlike national parliaments, the European Parliament does not 'create' executive bodies, since the College of Commissioners and its President are proposed by national governments via the European Council instead of the parliamentary majority (Čepo, 2013: 65).

In its most recent composition post 6-9 June 2024 elections, its plenary will count 720 Members of the European Parliament (*abbr*. MEPs), an increase from 705 which it counted after United Kingdom's withdrawal from the Union. The distribution of seats ranges from 96 German MEPs to six Cypriot, Luxembourgian, and Maltese MEPs each, six being the minimum limit of MEPs, regardless the Member State's population size. Currently, France counts 81, Italy 76, Spain 61, Poland 53, Romania 33, the Netherlands 31, Belgium 22, Greece, Czechia, Sweden, Portugal, and Hungary 21, Austria 20, Bulgaria 17, Denmark, Finland, and Slovakia 15, Ireland 14, Croatia 12, Lithuania 11, Slovenia and Latvia nine, and Estonia seven ("Distribution of seats", 2024).

As such, elections have been held since 1979. There is a lack of standardisation of the date of the elections across the continent and of the voting system in place; therefore, they are held for four days in June and, depending on the Member State, MEPs can be elected via preferential

vote, closed list vote, mixed list voting, or via single transferable vote ("Specific Rules", 2024). Moreover, the number of constituencies varies, with all countries except Belgium, Ireland, Italy, and Poland being a single constituency ("European Parliament constituency"). The vote distribution system, the minimum vote percentage threshold, and the minimum required age vary as well. This system results in a colourful representation, with MEPs from 27 Member States being elected for a five-year term, majority of them belonging to European political parties which further adhere to political groups; nonetheless, there are certain issues to be raised.

The Parliament experiences a weak link to its voters, and further problems include low voter knowledge and participation, the elections being fought on national issues instead of European, and a little possibility of MEPs improvement of chances for being re-elected (Hix and Høyland, 2011: 54). Therefore, "MEPs' behaviour is driven less by re-election than career incentives and policy objectives that can be achieved" (Hix and Høyland, 2011: 54-55). Low voter turnout can mainly be explained by the fact that EP elections do not offer any change in national government or policy alteration, thus resulting in low popular interest, by the lack of coherence and harmonisation of the election campaigns across the Union, which serve more as secondary national contests, and by the fact that national political actors usually approach EP elections in a 'half-hearted manner' (Nugent, 2017: 211-213). Furthermore, an issue which is continuously raised is the democratic deficit present in the Parliament and the EU as a whole. Critical aspects of the democratic deficit, including its supporting and opposing opinions will be explained in part three.

Historically, being an MEP was considered as either a practice field for a later position in national politics, or as a retirement of previous political career; as the Parliament's scope gradually increased, MEPs are typically led by two types of ambitions: office ambitions, including party leadership promotion or a senior post in the EP, or policy ambitions, including the pursuement of ideology- or constituency-related interests via their influence in the Parliament on legislative processes (Hix and Høyland, 2011: 55).

3.1.1 European political parties and groups

Within the Parliament, MEPs typically belong into one of European political parties, which serve as a building block for European political groups. European political parties are

composed of Member States' national parties, which should adhere to the same or very similar ideology to its European counterpart. Similarly, there are MEPs which do not belong to any political party nor group; they are called Non-Inscrits. Furthermore, European parties are positioned on a left-right political spectrum, and another dimension worth noting is their stance on European integration, ranging from pro-Europeanism to Euroscepticism. There are certain benefits from group and party membership, such as the obtainment of administrative and research funds, allocation of committee chairmanships, and arrangement of plenary session agendas (Nugent, 2017: 214). Therefore, political groups are paramount to Parliament's success.

Importantly, there are key weaknesses to European political parties, namely their lack of involvement in day-to-day political activity, limited resources, loose organisational structures, and lack of adherence to a larger organisational framework with strong notions of responsibility and accountability, as it is with national parties (Nugent, 2017: 213). Furthermore, "MEPs have claims on their loyalties and votes that sometimes compete with the claims of the political groups. One source of such claims is the numerous interest groups with which many MEPs are closely associated" (Nugent, 2017: 215).

Currently, there are ten registered political parties on supranational level. Ranked from strongest to weakest in terms of MEPs-elect, those are: European People's Party (*abbr*. EPP), a Christian democratic, centre-right, and pro-European party, Party of European Socialists (*abbr*. PES), which is social-democratic, centre-left, and pro-European, then the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party (*abbr*. ALDE), a centrist to centre-right, liberal and pro-European party ("European political party"). These three parties carry the centrist, pro-European majority coalition, and they form the EPP Group, the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, and Renew Europe, respectively.

Oppositely, the Parliament includes the European Conservatives and Reformists Party (*abbr.* ECR), which is right-wing to far-right, national conservative and softly Eurosceptic, then the Identity and Democracy Party (*abbr*. ID), far-right, populist, and Eurosceptic party, the European Green Party (*abbr*. EGP), centre-left to left-wing pro-European party, the Party of the European Left (*abbr*. PEL), left-wing to far-left, democratic socialist and communist, softly Eurosceptic party, the European Free Alliance (*abbr*. EFA), regional and pro-European party which forms a political group with the Greens, the European Democratic Party (*abbr*. EDP),

centrist, pro-European party belonging under the Renew group, and the European Christian Political Movement (*abbr*. ECPM), a minor right-wing, softly Eurosceptic party ("European political party").

As to the interconnectedness of MEPs and their connections with respective members of national parliaments, a study on "multilevel party interactions across the EP and NPs and how these relations played out in EU trade policy" found that the "default of multilevel party relations seems to be an information exchange among MEPs and MPs" with "remarkably little conflict or competition" (Meissner and Rosén, 2021: 472). The study observed "several instances of cooperation – positive or negative coordination and information exchange – where groups of the same party family, across the supranational and national levels, actively coordinate their preferences and launch joint strategies such as events or press releases", and that "party relations between the EP and NPs would be more active in the context of politicized trade agreements compared to less salient ones" (Meissner and Rosén, 2021: 469, 473).

3.2 Internal structure of the European Parliament

Regarding the Parliament's internal structure, besides the previously mentioned political parties and groups, the Parliament's hierarchy begins with the President, continuing with 14 Vice-Presidents, numerous political bodies, committees and delegations, foundations, the plenary, and the Secretariat. Full plenary meetings are held every month except August, plus an extra meeting in autumn when MEPs work on the annual budget, and are held in Strasbourg from Monday to Thursday; additionally, six mini-plenaries are held annually in Brussels (Nugent, 2017: 223). Moreover, the agenda is drafted by the Conference of Presidents and the President of the Parliament who are in consultation with the Secretariat and the Conference of Committee Chairs, and there are unbending rules on the duration of speeches, as well as who can speak and when (Nugent, 2017: 223). This is repeated annually during the five-year term.

The president is elected by the MEPs, and their main task is to manage the affairs of the Parliament, distribute resources, organise the agenda, open and chair the plenary session, and control the debate in compliance with the rules of procedure (Čepo, 2013: 65 as cited in Judge and Earnshaw, 2003: 168). Moreover, the President represents the Parliament in interinstitutional relations, and has an important authority in enacting the budget, signing it at the end of the legislative process; if the process of adopting the budget ceases due to

disagreements between the Parliament and the Council, the President of the European Parliament chairs the Conciliation Committee (Čepo, 2013: 65). Additionally, "[t]he Presidents of both Parliament and the Council of the European Union sign all legislative acts adopted under the ordinary legislative procedure" (Pavy, 2024: 2-3). Finally, the President can be replaced by one of their 14 Vice-Presidents (Pavy, 2024: 3).

To continue, the Parliament is composed of various political bodies. These include the Bureau, as composed of the President and 14 Vice-Presidents, the Conference of Presidents, the Conference of Committee Chairs, the Conference of Delegation Chairs, and five Quaestors (Pavy, 2024: 3). The Bureau is in charge of internal financial and administrative issues, it appoints the Secretary General of the Parliament, and approves special hearings and studies of interest for topics on the agenda (Čepo, 2013: 66 as cited in Corbett et al., 2005: 117-118).

Moreover, The Conference of Presidents includes the President of the Parliament and presidents of political groups; it manages the internal work of the Parliament, making agenda-related decisions, appointing members to standing committees, resolving inter-committee disputes, and more (Čepo, 2013: 66). To continue, the "Conference of Committee Chairs brings together the chairs of EP committees on a monthly basis to undertake such tasks as arranging for necessary liaison between committees, settling inter-committee disputes, and generally monitoring the progress of business through the committee system." (Nugent, 2017: 221). Similarly, the "Conference of Delegation Chairs, which meets monthly to discuss common organisational and planning matters, brings together the chairs of nearly EP 35 delegations (Nugent, 2017: 221). Last, but not least, the five Quaestors are "responsible for Members' administrative and financial business" (Pavy, 2024: 3).

Taking parliamentary committees into account, MEPs "sit on 20 committees, four subcommittees and 44 delegations (interparliamentary delegations and delegations to joint parliamentary committees, parliamentary cooperation committees, and multilateral parliamentary assemblies)" (Pavy, 2024: 3). There are two types of committees: standing committees which are permanent, count 40 to 60 members, and perform a multitude of duties, such as examining Commission's legislative proposals, fostering initiative reports, being in contact with the Commission, and ad hoc committees, which are created to investigate specific topics or issues (Nugent, 2017: 221). Immediately after the elections, it is decided on the number, size, and responsibilities of the committees, which further leads to nominations and

allocations of MEPs within committees (Čepo, 2013: 67). The political groups are responsible for nominations, and are led by two principles: the principle of expert knowledge, and the principle of seniority, advantaging the MEPs with a long career in the Parliament (Čepo, 2013: 67). Further on, the Conference of Presidents submits a proposal to the Parliament, making sure that the composition of each committee reflects the composition of the Parliament, but also the national balance in the committees (Čepo, 2013: 67 as cited in Judge and Earnshaw, 2003: 185).

Finally, the Secretariat is led by the Secretary-General, and its composition is decided by the Bureau; momentarily, it composes of 13 Directorates-General (*abbr*. DG) and the Legal Service (Pavy, 2024: 5). The Secretariat coordinates legislative work, organises plenary meetings, assists in technical, legal, and expert fields, supports the MEPs in their work, and provides translation and interpretation for documents and meetings (Pavy, 2024: 5).

3.2.1 Committee's examination of a legislative proposal

The standard procedure of a standing committee's examination of Commission's legislative proposals begins with each proposal being directed to an appropriate committee; in case the proposal overlaps with multiple committees, only one committee is delegated as responsible, and up to three can be asked for their stances (Nugent, 2017: 221-222). Then, the committee entrusts a rapporteur to construct the report, being able to assist themselves via the Parliament's Secretariat, their own research, or the research from their political group, various institutes, or even the Commission (Nugent, 2017: 222). Furthermore, the committee produces the first draft with the rapporteur acting as its spokesperson in the plenary, and the ordinary legislative procedure further applies for passing or rejecting the proposal (Nugent, 2017: 222). Regarding voting on a proposal, even though the pro-European coalition of Christian democrats, social democrats and liberals is in place, it is not fixed; coalitions are formed vote by vote and, on many issues, the Parliament acts jointly to promote its own interests against the agenda of the Council or of the Commission (Hix and Høyland, 2011: 59).

4. KEY ASPECTS IN THE WORK OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AFTER THE TREATY OF LISBON

As seen in part one, the European Parliament enjoyed an incremental strengthening of its legislative powers and procedures under the development of treaty reforms, especially towards the end of the twentieth century. Today, the Parliament is a co-legislator alongside the Council of the European Union, whilst the power of legislative initiative still belongs to the executive, the European Commission. "The EP is an extremely active legislator. During the 2009-14 Parliament a total of 1,071 legislative acts were voted on in plenary session (Nugent, 2017: 201 as cited in "European Parliament", 2014).

Nonetheless, the strengthening of Parliament's powers before the Treaty of Lisbon, concretely under the treaties of Rome and Maastricht, did not result in a uniform legislative procedure, meaning that the instruments and procedures with which the Parliament had at its disposal were severely fragmented (Voermans, 2011: 165). This meant that "[t]o know the applicable procedure and the instrument prescribed, one always had to consult the individual articles governing the relevant subject" (Voermans, 2011: 165). Importantly, the Treaty of Lisbon which was born from the failed Draft Treaty resulted in unforeseen standardisation of Parliament's powers, making it an equal to the Council of the European Union.

As it resulted from the Draft Treaty, certain changes had to be implemented when constructing the novel Treaty. As such, the flag, state symbols of the EU, national anthem, and the words 'constitution' and 'minister', were erased (Grubiša, 2023: 463). Furthermore, the new Treaty implemented 'qualified majority voting' in both the Parliament and the Council (Grubiša, 2023: 464). This means that, to adopt a proposal, 55% of Member States (15 out of 27) which represent at least 65% of the total population of the Union must vote in favour; both conditions must be met parallelly ("Qualified majority"). To continue, the Parliament received the right to co-decision in 19 new areas of public policies, in which its role was previously limited, and the number of areas on which it can equally decide has grown to more than 80 (Čepo, 2013: 36). Therefore, it can be concluded that the Parliament came out as a winner after the Lisbon Treaty was ratified, precisely because of the drastic expansion of the co-decision procedure and its transformation into the 'ordinary legislative procedure' (Čepo, 2013: 36 as cited in Craig, 2010: 36).

Additionally, The Treaty of Lisbon amended the Rome and Maastricht treaties, and its consolidated texts are called the "Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) and the Treaty on European Union (TEU)" (Voermans, 2011: 166). The mentioned standardisation came in the form of grouping all Parliament's legislative procedures and instruments, titled 'legal acts', into Chapter 2 of the TFEU (Voermans, 2011: 166).

Although the Commission acts as a sole legislative initiator, the Parliament can "formally adopt its own ideas for suggested legislation" (Nugent, 2017: 201). Except adopting its own initiative reports, the Parliament has another way of adopting its legislation ideas under Article 225 TFEU which states that 'The European Parliament may, acting by a majority of its component members, request the Commission to submit any appropriate proposal on matters on which it considers that a Union act is required for the purpose of implementing the Treaties' (Nugent, 2017: 201-202).

Additionally, the Parliament can influence the nature of EU's legislation by participating in "policy discussions with the Commission at the pre-proposal legislative stage" (Nugent, 2017: 201). Here, the Commission can "float a policy idea before an EP committee, or committee members themselves may suggest policy initiatives to the Commission" (Nugent, 2017: 201). Besides the above options, the Parliament can influence Commission's legislative programme via the annual budgetary cycle by opening new budget lines which previously had no legal base, but the Commission and the Council would seek to provide the legal base (Nugent, 2017: 202). Lastly, the Parliament can indirectly influence the Commission's annual work programme by dedicating committee-member MEPs to negotiate with Commission representatives before the resolution on the programme is voted on in the Parliament towards the end of the year (Nugent, 2017: 202). Further considering the complexity and relevance of further legislative procedures, the Parliament's role as a co-legislator is significant.

4.1 Special legislative procedures

The result of the institutional development today makes for two distinct types of legislative procedures within the Parliament: the ordinary legislative procedure, also known as co-decision, and the special legislative procedures, which include consultation and consent ("Legislative procedures", 2017). As noted in part one, the Parliament previously enjoyed the cooperation procedure, which appeared under the Single European Act but was virtually

abandoned under the Treaty of Amsterdam. To continue, I will cover the legislative procedures as they appeared under treaty reforms.

4.1.1 The consultation procedure

Firstly, the consultation procedure appeared at the very beginning of Parliament's existence (then called the Common Assembly), when the only authority the representatives had was to give opinions on certain issues which were discussed in the Council at Commission's proposal; their opinion was nonetheless often disregarded when the act was being adopted (Čepo, 2013: 52). Furthermore, it was legally granted to the Parliament in 1980, a year after its first elections, as a result of an ECJ ruling which determined that the Council of the European Union must consult the Parliament when adopting legislation (Hix and Høyland, 2011: 52). Nowadays, the consultation procedure falls under the special legislative procedures, which are an exception to the OLP and are used for delicate policy areas ("Legislative procedures", 2017).

The consultation procedure obliges the European Commission to request an opinion from the European Parliament on a specific legislative proposal, but on a limited number of policy issues; after the Parliament presents its opinion, the Council of the EU can make an independent decision on the proposal, regardless of whether the MEPs' opinion is positive or negative (Čepo, 2013: 52). Therefore, "once that opinion is given Council may take whatever decision it wishes" (Nugent, 2017: 202). Nonetheless, in case the Council "acts prematurely and does not wait for Parliament to make its views known, the 'law' will be ruled invalid by the CJEU" (Nugent, 2017: 202). Importantly, this means that the European Parliament has an important power, the power of delay, which is not infinite. This power lasts up to about three months (Nugent, 2017: 202).

Furthermore, it is up to the Parliament's competence what use they can make of the consultation procedure; under Article 293 TFEU, the Commission may alter its proposals leading to the adoption of an act as long as the Council has not acted, meaning that the Parliament has the option to persuade the Commission to alter a proposal by including its views prior to giving its opinion, which then enhances the possibility of Council's approval of the Parliament-approved act (Nugent, 2017: 202). "The usual way in which plenaries act to bring influence to bear is to vote on amendments to the Commission's proposal, but not to vote on the draft legislative resolution – which constitutes the EP's opinion – until the Commission states … whether or

not it will change its text to incorporate the amendments that have been approved by the EP" (Nugent, 2017: 334-335).

While the Commission is usually sympathetic to Parliament's views and accepts around three quarters of its amendments, there is not a lot the Parliament can do if the Council rejects its opinion, except hope for a conciliation meeting with the Council; additionally, there is an understanding between the co-legislators that the Council will not make substantial changes without noticing the Parliament (Nugent, 2017: 335-336).

4.1.2 The consent procedure

To continue, the second of the two special legislative procedures is the consent procedure, introduced under the Single European Act and further expanded under Maastricht and Amsterdam treaties. "According to the Treaty of Amsterdam, the European Parliament must be consulted through the consent procedure in cases where the fundamental principles of the European Union (freedom, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms) have been violated" (Čepo, 2013: 56). It has been, under the Treaty of Nice, further "extended and refers to all situations in which there is a suspicion that a country will violate the fundamental principles" (Čepo, 2013: 56 as cited in Nugent, 2006: 112). This procedure is applied in the ratification of international agreements and contracts, which were signed by the European Commission on behalf of the Member States or agreed by the Member States on behalf of the European Union, and whose possibility of change after initiating is extremely small or non-existent; therefore, it is reasonable that this procedure does not give the Parliament room for procedural manoeuvring, as it is prevented from submitting amendments to the proposal (Čepo, 2013: 56)

Furthermore, the consent procedure is used for the sanctioning of Member States, for the actions of the European Central Bank, and for the rules for electing the European Parliament (Čepo, 2013: 56). Nonetheless, the Council must act by consensus here, meaning that it is obliged to adopt joint positions unanimously (Čepo, 2013: 56). Similarly, if the Parliament does not approve the position by a simple or absolute majority of votes, depending on the type of the act, it automatically falls since the Council cannot act independently while voting on the act (Čepo, 2013: 56 as cited in Corbett et al., 2005: 223). As such, consultation and consent procedures are full of specificities as they are used only in highly specific areas; oppositely,

the ordinary legislative procedure covers the majority of legislative acts and is as such more standardised.

Before diving into the ordinary legislative procedure, it is relevant to mention the cooperation procedure, also introduced under the Single European Act but further abandoned under Amsterdam and Lisbon treaties. This procedure permitted the Parliament to use the right of a second reading in a variety of legislative fields; after the Council submitted its joint opinion on Parliament's amendments after the first reading, the Parliament was enabled to bring forth additional amendments to the Council's joint opinion or dismiss it, voting by absolute majority (Čepo, 2013: 54). While the Council still had the power to unanimously vote in the Commission's proposal, it was highly unlikely to be able to do it considering its heterogeneity; therefore, making a compromise with its co-legislator was welcomed (Čepo, 2013: 54 as cited in Corbett et al., 2005: 206). This procedure was finally dismantled under the Treaty of Lisbon as the Parliament's powers became more systemic under the codecision procedure, now known as ordinary legislative procedure (*abbr*. OLP).

4.2 Ordinary legislative procedure

Moreover, "[t]he codecision procedure was introduced by the Maastricht Treaty on European Union (1992), and extended and made more effective by the Amsterdam Treaty (1999). "With the Lisbon Treaty that took effect on 1 December 2009, the renamed ordinary legislative procedure became the main legislative procedure of the EU´s decision-making system" ("Legislative powers"). It gives "the same weight to the European Parliament (EP) and the Council on 85 policy areas covering the majority of the EU's areas of competence (for example, economic governance, immigration, energy, transport, the environment and consumer protection)" ("Ordinary legislative procedure", 2017). The main difference between the Maastricht and Amsterdam versions of the OLP lie in the fact that under the revised Amsterdam Treaty, the Council does not anymore have a possibility to give the final say on the legislative proposal if the same was dismissed by the Parliament (Čepo, 2013: 58). The main feature of this procedure is that it turns the European Parliament into a true veto player in the legislative process (Čepo, 2013: 58 as cited in Nugent, 2006: 243).

Nonetheless, Tsebelis believes that under the OLP, the Parliament lost the agenda-setting possibility which it had under the cooperation procedure, given that the Parliament was the one

to send the proposal for adoption to the Council, which could more easily adopt it than reject it, considering that rejection required unanimity while adoption only required a qualified majority (Čepo, 2013: 60 as cited in Tsebelis, 1995: 5). On the other hand, Crombez, Steunenberg and Corbett emphasised the increase in the number of accepted parliamentary amendments and the Council's willingness for a compromise with the Parliament instead of overvoting it, thus proving that the Parliament was not weakened by the OLP (Čepo, 2013: 60 as cited in Crombez et al., 2000: 374). The ordinary legislative procedure is the pinnacle of European Union's institutional complexity, given its duration and structure, as it composes of three separate readings, with the third reading relying on an *ad hoc* body, the Conciliation Committee, to reach consensus (illustration 1).

The ordinary legislative procedure begins when the European Commission submits a proposal to the co-legislators, after which the first reading begins. The proposal is usually a regulation, directive or decision ("Ordinary Legislative Procedure"). During the first reading, it is up to the co-legislators to examine the proposals parallelly, with the Parliament acting first by voting via simple majority, typically on the basis of a report prepared by any of its adjunct committees ("Ordinary Legislative Procedure"). The Parliament can either accept the proposal as it is, vote in the amended version or reject it. Afterwards, the Council of the EU must either accept the Parliament's position, thus adopting the proposal altogether, or adopt a different position which then leads to the second reading at the Parliament ("Ordinary Legislative Procedure"). The time limit to conclude the first reading is non-existent for both institutions ("Ordinary Legislative Procedure").

"[T]he number of legislative proposals agreed at first reading has steadily increased, to the extent that around 85 per cent are now agreed at this stage" (Nugent, 2017: 340 as cited in "European Parliament", 2014). Factors explaining the high number of agreements in the earliest stage include high inter-institutional cooperation and the institutionalisation of the procedure taking the shape of trilogues, tri-party meetings bringing together representatives from the Commission, Parliament, and Council (Nugent, 2017: 340). Importantly, Roederer-Rynning argues that "[t]rilogues must become more transparent; the EP must define better procedures that ensure a more open and pluralistic debate, even before the trilogue process begins, and the Council must become more open to public scrutiny in its engagement in trilogues" (Roederer-Rynning, 2018: 970).

The second reading follows a similar logic as the first one: the Parliament can approve, amend or reject the Council's position, and it can also take no action (Nugent, 2017: 340). "If the EP and Council can negotiate an agreed text after the former's first reading but before the latter's first reading, an early second reading agreement can be reached. If the EP approves or takes no action on a common position the Council can … adopt it as a legislative act (Nugent, 2017: 340). The difference here is that each co-legislator has three months, extendible by one month, to adopt a position ("Ordinary Legislative Procedure"). Besides, the Parliament "rejects or amends the Council's first-reading position by an absolute majority … rather than by a simple majority" ("Ordinary Legislative Procedure"). In case the Parliament amends the Council's first reading position, and the Council does not approve of those amendments during its second reading, the Conciliation Committee takes place to strike a consensus, leading to the third reading.

The final reading opens "within six weeks of the Council failing to approve the text supported by the EP, with the contested proposal being referred to a conciliation committee is "composed of an equal number of representatives of the Council and the EP" (Nugent, 2017: 341). In about half of such cases, the trilogue meeting agrees on the joint text, therefore leaving the Conciliation Committee to simply approve it without much debating; once the Committee agrees on the text within six weeks, it is referred back to the Parliament, voting by majority of votes cast, and Council, voting by qualified majority voting of at least 55% of the countries representing at least 65% of the population, for final adoption within another six weeks (Nugent, 2017: 341). Finally, this marks the end of the OLP, the standard procedure applying to most areas of EU legislation.

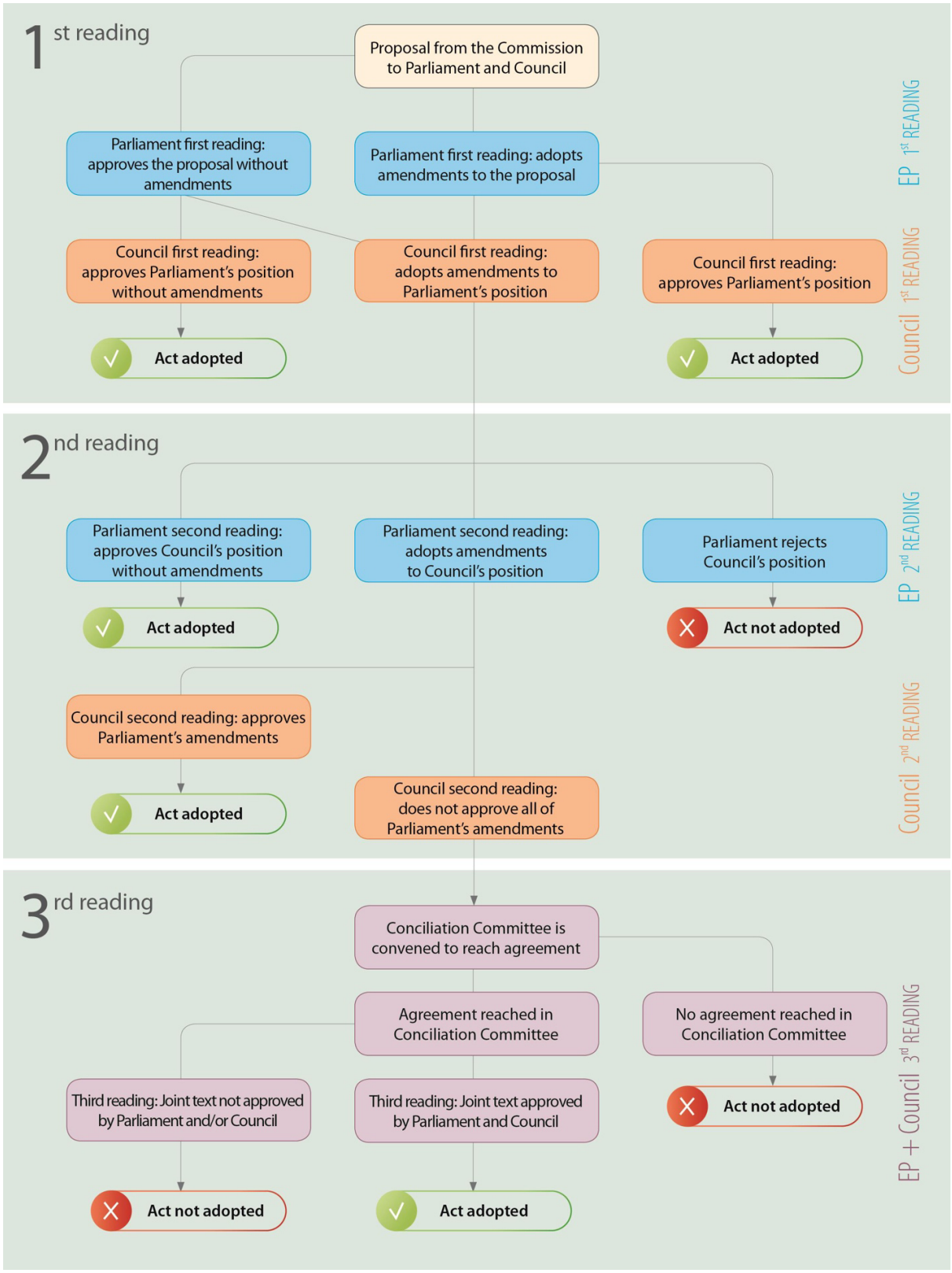

Illustration 1: Ordinary Legislative Procedure

("Ordinary Legislative Procedure")

4.3 Types of legislation within the European Union

There are five different types of legislation that the EU bodies may adopt under the ordinary legislative procedure or special legislative procedures. The acts adopted using these procedures are called legislative acts; these are "regulations, directives, decisions, recommendations or opinions" (Voermans, 2011: 168). The main difference is that regulations, directives, and decisions are binding, while recommendations and opinions are not. Nonetheless, the three binding acts have crucial differences.

Firstly, a regulation is binding "not only on the Member States but it also applies to all individuals and legal entities in the Member States" ("European Union law"). Furthermore, a directive is binding only on the Member States and not on individuals, and it is "entirely up to the state to develop its own methods or forms of regulation to achieve the goal ("European Union law"). Finally, a decision is "an individual act that is binding only on the Member State, legal entity or individual to whom it is addressed" ("European Union law").

Moreover, after adopting legislation, further legislative or regulatory measures are needed for its successful implementation, and these represent the vast majority of all EU legislation; they vary from circumstantial measures which adapt the legislation to changing conditions, further policy legislation which details the manners required for implementation, and so on (Nugent, 2017: 342). This second type of EU law is called non-legislative acts, which account for delegated and implementing acts; these are inferior to legislative acts (Voermans, 2011: 168).

To continue, delegated acts "are defined as non-legislative acts of general application, adopted by the European Commission on the basis of a delegation contained in a legislative act. They may supplement or amend the basic act, but only as to non-essential aspects of the policy area" (Del Monte and Mańko, 2021: 1). Importantly, the imposed delegation can be revoked by the co-legislators, but neither of the co-legislators may submit amendments to the delegated act (Craig, 2013: 10, 17). Finally, "the delegated act may enter into force only if no objection has been expressed by the European Parliament or the Council within a period set by the legislative act" (Craig, 2013: 10).

Opposite from the delegated acts, the implementing acts are invoked when "uniform conditions need to be established for the implementation of law" ("European Union law"). Similarly, the

implementing act can under no conditions modify the main act (Del Monte and Mańko, 2021: 1). To summarise the main difference of their procedural aspects, delegated acts are adopted once Member States' experts are consulted, with their opinion being not binding, while implementing acts are adopted under the comitology procedure under which Member States designate experts to special committees (Del Monte and Mańko, 2021: 1).

4.4 Budgetary authorities

The OLP is also enacted when the Parliament adopts the budget. Ever since the 1970s, namely due to the "1970 Treaty Amending Certain Budgetary Provisions of the Treaties and the 1975 Treaty Amending Certain Financial Provisions of the Treaties, the EP enjoyed from the 1970s considerable treaty powers in relation to the EU annual budget" (Nugent, 2017: 206). Since the Lisbon Treaty's entry into force in 2009, the Parliament enjoys full parity with the Council on passing the budget (Nugent, 2017: 206). Nonetheless, "[t]he prime responsibility within the Commission for drawing up the draft budget falls to the Budget Commissioner and the Budget DG" (Nugent, 2017: 428). Before the draft budget is concluded, "the College of Commissioners, the Ecofin Council, and the EP each specify their political priorities for the budget" (Nugent, 2017: 428).

Besides the annual budget, the EU enacts the Multiannual financial framework (*abbr*. MFF) for a period of seven years, the current one lasting from 2021 until 2027. These are agreed upon between the co-legislators and the Commission, but the Parliament "has not been able to exercise as much influence on the contents of MFFs as has been sought" (Nugent, 2017: 205). The MFF's key actors are the Commission, which uses proposals to set the broad agendas, and the Member States' governments; oppositely, the Parliament exercises its influence through reports and recommendations, carrying out debates and votes, and questioning the Commission and its co-legislator, the Council (Nugent, 2017: 205-206).

4.5 Interinstitutional dynamics and the European Parliament's authorities over the other political institutions of the European Union

The Parliament's crucial aspect of the control of the Commission and other executive bodies concerns policy implementation; this includes the work of outside agencies, which are typically disinclined to assist the Parliament's investigators and are unwilling to 'open the books'

(Nugent, 2017: 206). Nonetheless, the Parliament's powers over the Commission have been improved under the Lisbon Treaty, and now include eight supervisory powers (Nugent, 2017: 207). Akbik concludes that, "given the structure of the EU political system, the interactions between the EP and the Commission come closest to the relationship between a legislative and a cabinet in parliamentary systems" (Akbik, 2022: 61). Under Akbik's classification, there are six scenarios which study accountability of political actors. On the topic of the relationship between the Parliament and the Commission, the concluded relationship would be 'high control/responsiveness', occurring when "parliaments ask stronger questions as part of legislative oversight, requesting the executive to change its decisions or apply sanctions, while the executive answers through rectification, acknowledging that something needs to be changed or sanctions should be applied to the responsible parties (Akbik, 2022: 57).

Regarding the supervisory powers, the European Council's candidate for the President of the European Commission is 'elected' by the Parliament, and the European Council must take Parliament elections into account when proposing their candidate; in case the parliamentary majority is not reached, the European Council must propose another candidate, and once the Commissioner-designate is elected, the Parliament votes on the College of Commissioners as a whole (Nugent, 2017: 207-208). Moreover, the Parliament can "dismiss the College – but not individual Commissioners – by carrying a motion of censure by a two-thirds majority of the votes cast, including a majority of all MEPs" (Nugent, 2017: 208). Furthermore, following powers include the discussion of the Commission's annual report, the power of discharge to the Commission after it submits the accounts of the former financial year regarding the budget implementation, the ability to exercise supervisory functions by the Parliament's standing committees, the power to establish inquiry committees on whichever subject, and the power to ask the Commission questions, wherein 12,000 of them are, on average, asked annually (Nugent, 2017: 208-209).

Unlike the Commission, the Parliament is less able to supervise its co-legislator, the Council of the EU; the main reasons are that the national governments would find it intolerable if any of the Council's members were directly responsible to the Parliament as it would be a breach of the current division of powers and, secondly, national ministers in the Council are usually cautious about being transparent with the Parliament on certain delicate policy areas, namely the freedom, security and justice, monetary union, and the Common Foreign and Security Policy, as the decisions here tend to be secretive and quickly decided upon (Nugent, 2017:

210). Under Akbik's classification of the relationship between political actors, the relationship of the co-legislators falls under 'answerability', meaning that "parliaments ask stronger oversight questions, requesting executive actors to change their decisions or impose sanctions, but executive actors answer through justification rather than rectification" (Akbik, 2022: 57).

To continue, the Parliament's possibility to scrutinise is most limited for the European Council, which consists of Member States' heads of state or government. Members of the European Council "not only have no great wish to be accountable to MEPs but can also ensure that they do not become so since it is at European Council meetings that final decisions on the contents of the treaties … are taken" (Nugent, 2017: 210). Nonetheless, these two bodies come into regular contact twice: at the European Council's opening session of its meetings, and after each European Council meeting, when its President must present a report on the meeting to the Parliament (Nugent, 2017: 210).

Finally, the Parliament has certain supervisory powers over other EU bodies; regarding the European Central Bank, the Parliament "must be consulted on the nominees for the Bank's President, Vice-President, and Executive Board members", and it also has a presence in the nomination process of the executive boards of certain agencies, such as the European Environment Agency or the European Medicines Agency (Nugent, 2017: 210). To conclude, "[t]he more independent the executive agency, the more unfeasible the possibility for political control or 'responsiveness' to an accountability forum" (Akbik, 2022: 62).

4.6 Democratic deficit within the European Parliament and the European Union

Last, but not least, I will touch upon the concept of democratic deficit in the Parliament and the Union as a whole, briefly mentioned in part two. On the Parliament level, the democratic deficit is manifested in the gap between the MEPs and their constituencies, typically seen in the 'negative selection' of MEPs wherein more competent representatives compete for national parliament, while the rest try to gain a foothold in the Union (Grubiša, 2012: 44). Moreover, the Parliament's bad reputation also comes from it being held in three different locations – Brussels, Strasbourg, and Luxembourg (Grubiša, 2012: 44).

Furthermore, from the citizen's perspective, the democratic deficit comes down to the fact that the powers of the Union still do not match what the public believes they should be, as well as

to the fact that the citizen remains on the periphery of the decision-making process (Grubiša et al., 2012: 44). Similarly, Under Hix's interpretation, it is stated that the European Parliament is too weak, since the increase in its authority did not compensate for the loss of control of national parliaments, because the Council of the EU still dominates the legislative process, while the citizens are, parallelly, poorly connected to their representative MEPs (Grubiša et al., 2012: 45). There is also a negative connotation of the elections for the European Parliament, because the parties and the media treat them as second-class elections compared to the more relevant national elections, wherein national parties are, at the same time, unwilling to implement the EU-related topics to their agendas and political campaigns (Grubiša et al., 2012: 45).

As expected, there are opposing opinions of the idea of the democratic deficit's existence within the Union. Firstly, those arguing against usually rely on explaining the democratic aspect within the Union as arising from its economic efficiency; the additional element supporting this claim states that some (mainly) economic issues were consciously depoliticised by transferring them to the supranational level of the Union, thus saving them from being compromised by the growingly incompetent national democratic systems (Grubiša et al., 2012: 46 as cited in Milev, 2004: 12 and Mair, 2005: 20). Besides these arguments, another relevant claim comes from Giandomenico Majone. Majone argues that the EU is a regulatory state which is responsible for producing efficient, and not redistributive policy outcomes; as such, it is not advisable that decisions on certain policies which were transferred to the Union become democratic, since the political majorities would choose the policy outcomes in accordance with their short-term political preferences (Grubiša et al., 2012: 46 as cited in Follesdal and Hix, 2005: 7).

To conclude, the issue of the democratic deficit can be overcome through numerous ways, ranging from 'euro-optimistic', through 'eurorealstic', to 'eurosceptic'. 'Euro-optimistic' authors believe that the democratic deficit can be overcome by further empowering the European Parliament as the main source of Union's political legitimacy; under this model, the EU would be pushed on the path of federalism, where its citizens would have a more active say in policy-making (Grubiša et al., 2012: 47 as cited in Milev, 2004: 12 and Maduro, 2009: 61). Furthermore, 'eurorealistic' authors state how the EU's political system cannot be radically changed at the moment, but are willing to accept the democratisation of the EU's political system as a long-term process whose ultimate outcomes cannot be fully seen from today's

perspective (Grubiša et al., 2012: 49). Finally, ‘eurosceptic’ authors support the idea of giving certain powers already granted to the Union back to its Member States, given that the EU is not a state, with neither the public sphere nor the linguistic community existing within it (Grubiša et al., 2012: 47). Whether any of these three possible solutions will be advocated by the Union’s political actors will greatly depend on the new power balance in the Parliament, resulting from this June’s elections.

5. CONCLUSION

The European Parliament has played an increasingly pivotal role in the political system of the European Union, particularly following the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon. As such, this thesis has explored the multifaceted development and influence of the European Parliament under three different parts, each focusing on a different aspect of its historical evolution, institutional position, and accrued powers.

In the first part titled *The European Parliament during the history of European integration*, the historical trajectory of the European Parliament was examined, beginning with the theoretical approaches to devising the European Union's predecessor with respect to the granted powers, following with the European Parliament's substantive and incremental increase of functions and authorities during the following decades, concluding with the Draft Treaty establishing a constitution for Europe.

We can conclude that the Parliament has strengthened its previously undesirable institutional position within the Union, starting with the increase of its size, followed by the introduced 'power of discharge' and the first direct elections in the 1970s, further continuing with the consequentially introduced 'power of delay'. In the same decade, the Single European Act reshaped the balance of powers by introducing the cooperation and assent procedures within the Parliament. This institutional reshaping continued in the 1990s, firstly with the Maastricht Treaty which strengthened the assent procedure, and, more importantly, introduced the co-decision procedure, setting the foundation for the today-relevant ordinary legislative procedure by which the majority of acts are decided. Moreover, the Amsterdam Treaty strengthened co-decision, while the following Treaty of Nice prepared the institutions for the 2004 enlargement. Last, but not least, this part explains how the changes which were to be implemented had the Draft Treaty been ratified further immensely influenced the last treaty reform, known as the Treaty of Lisbon.

Part two of this thesis, titled *Internal structure and powers of the European Parliament*, thoroughly explains the institutional set-up of the European Parliament, explaining its intricacy and highlighting the balance of powers between its political bodies, the distribution of seats among Member States and political groups, also examining their positions. The Parliament's

ability to influence legislation, its interaction with other EU institutions, and its critical position in ensuring democratic accountability within the EU were also explored in depth.

Finally, the last part of this thesis named *Key aspects in the work of the European Parliament after the Treaty of Lisbon*, focused on the transformative impact of the Treaty of Lisbon. The treaty's distinction between the ordinary and special legislative procedures has cemented the Parliament's position of a co-legislator besides the Council of the European Union, and has fundamentally altered the legislative and political dynamics both between the co-legislators, and also with other political institutions. Importantly, this part explains how the enhanced budgetary powers and strengthened control and supervision over other EU bodies have further augmented Parliament's authority. Last, but not least, the discussion on the democratic deficit highlighted ongoing challenges and opposing stances within the Union, which grow in significance as the results of the most recent European Parliament elections prove.

In conclusion, the European Parliament's journey from a consultative, indirectly elected assembly to a robust legislative and supervisory body reflects the dynamic nature of European integration. The incremental changes over the decades, carried by major treaty reforms and culminating in the Treaty of Lisbon, have significantly enhanced the Parliament's powers and its role within the EU. The Parliament's evolution underscores the EU's commitment to democratic principles and the continuous effort to improve its governance structures.

This thesis has aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the European Parliament's role in the post-Lisbon European Union. As the European Union continues to evolve, the European Parliament must remain at the heart of its democratic processes, driving forward the integration project and ensuring that the European Union remains responsive to the needs and aspirations of its citizens.

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7. Summary and Keywords

The European Parliament enjoyed a major increase in its significance and in the scope of its powers during the previous decades, culminating in the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon fifteen years ago. This thesis provides a comprehensive understanding of the European Parliament's role in the post-Lisbon European Union, as well as its position during previous treaty reforms, and its internal structure, powers, and procedures. Due to numerous treaty reforms and other hard efforts by political actors within the European Union, we can conclude that the European Parliament has strengthened its previously undesirable institutional position. Its journey from a consultative, indirectly elected assembly to a robust legislative and supervisory body reflects the dynamic nature of European integration.

Keywords: European Parliament, Treaty of Lisbon, European Union, Ordinary legislative procedure, Special legislative procedures, European integration, Committee.