

This is an accepted Manuscript of a book chapter published in Gabriele Abels, Andrea Krizsan, Heather MacRae, and Anna van der Vleuten (eds.): Routledge Handbook on Gender and EU Politics. Routledge, pp. 235-249.

Party Politics

Petra Ahrens

Department of Social Sciences, Tampere University, Finland

Correspondence details:

Dr. phil. Petra Ahrens

Tampere University

Department of Social Sciences

Kalevantie 4

33014 Tampere

Finland

Phone: +358 50 3182300.

E-mail: petra.ahrens@tuni.fi

ORCID: 0000-0002-1867-4519

Twitter: [@petrahrens](https://twitter.com/petrahrens)

Biographical note: Petra, Dr. phil., Senior Researcher, Tampere University, Finland; Research foci: gender equality policies and politics in the European Union and Germany, gendered power relations and political strategies like gender mainstreaming, and on civil society organisations and participatory democracy.

Funding: This work received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under grant agreement No 771676 of the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme.

Co-author: Lise Rolandsen Agustín, Aalborg University, Denmark

Party Politics

Petra Ahrens,¹ Lise Rolandsen Agustín

Researching transnational party politics is a quite recent addition to the scholarly debate on European integration (e.g. Andeweg 1995; Bardi 1994; Hix and Lord 1997). Mainstream research mainly focuses on formal institutions; it can be broadly divided into: (1) the analysis of parties and political groups as elements of a parliamentary party-based European Union (EU) democracy (Westlake 2019); (2) the electoral successes and failures of (Euro-)parties and voter-party congruence in the European Parliament (EP) (Mattila and Raunio 2006; Schmitt and Thomassen 1999; Stockemer and Sundström 2019); (3) political group cohesion and measures to ensure it (Hix et al. 2005, 2007; McElroy and Benoit 2007, 2010, 2012; Yordanova 2013); and (4) party positions towards European integration (Brack 2018; Almeida 2012). Gender perspectives have not played a role in mainstream research, except for studies of women's representation in the European Parliament (Fortin-Rittberger and Rittberger 2014; 2015; Stockemer and Sundström 2019).

Illuminating connections between Europarties, national parties, and European Parliament political groups, this chapter focuses on the latter and their performance regarding gender equality and gendered representation in the European Parliament. After describing the composition, powers, and position of political groups in the EU system, it attends to electoral systems, political recruitment, and gendered representation. This includes insights on (gendered) electoral support, electoral campaigns, political recruitment, and the gendered outcome of European Parliament elections and leadership positions. Next, we explore political groups' position on gender equality and anti-discrimination, as well as the resulting parliamentary output, such as legislation and reports. Finally, the chapter examines formal and informal working procedures in the European Parliament,

specifically those regarding group-cohesion rates (roll-call votes) and the left-right divide versus consensus-oriented practices of grand coalitions.” Particular attention is paid to the three major committees for gender equality policy: the Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM), the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL), and the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE). The final section highlights research gaps and directions for future research.

Europarties and European Party Groups – transnational and powerless?

At EU level, party politics are connected with two different, yet to a large extent overlapping party organizations for transnational democracy: Europarties and European Party Groups (EPGs, i.e. the political groups in the European Parliament). The former are transnational, extra-parliamentary parties composed of national parties from European states (sometime even including non-European parties), while the latter are the political groups in the European Parliament consisting of parties from EU member states and often subject to change after European elections (see Ahrens and Rolandsen Agustín in this volume). On this supranational level, party politics differs considerably from party systems and the role of parties at national and internal party level. Europarties and EPGs are less unitary in their formal structures, the EU itself has no government; hence, parties influence on policy outcomes is much weaker (Almeida 2012). Yet, EPGs perform a core role in the EU’s functioning, as stipulated in Art. 10 (4) TFEU: “political parties at European level contribute to forming European political awareness and to expressing the will of citizens of the Union.” Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) generally vote along EPG party lines when it comes to legislation and the budget (Corbett et al. 2016, 85). Simultaneously, national parties direct the recruitment of candidates for the European Parliament, and the composition of both Councils

(European Council, Council of the European Union; see Abels in this volume) as well as the European Commission through their governmental activities. Furthermore, EPGs select the Parliament's (vice)president(s), (co)chairs, committee (vice)chairs, rapporteurs, and so on (Corbett et al. 2016, 85; Ladrech 2006). Thus, EPGs have gained power over time and are crucial for democratic representation in the European Parliament (Brack 2018).

Over the decades, several changes shaped how Europarties and EPGs became institutionalized, resulting in the EU's unique supranational party politics. The first key historical change was the *introduction of direct elections to the European Parliament* in 1979. As an early response to these elections and the concomitant need for better coordination, national parties started founding Europarties in the mid-1970s. This resulted in the first three: Confederation of Socialist Parties in the European Community (CSPEC, 1974; since 1992 Party of European Socialists, PES), the European Peoples Party (EPP, 1976), and the Federation of Liberal and Democrat Parties in Europe (1976; renamed European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party, ELDR, in 2004, since 2012 Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, ALDE) (Ladrech 2006, 493; see Table 19.1). With growing importance of the European Parliament the need to formalize the status of and relationship between Europarties and EPGs increased. Following the growth of Green parties and social-justice movements across Western Europe in the early 1980s, the European Free Alliance (EFA, 1982) and European Green Party (EGP, 1983) were established, forming the joint Greens/EFA Group (with some intermissions) in the European Parliament. The collapse of the Soviet Union led to considerable growth of Europarty membership with new Central and Eastern Europe parties joining. After the 2004 enlargement the composition of EPGs changed accordingly (von dem Berge 2017). The new millennium witnessed new Europarties, such as the Party of the European Left (EL) and the Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists (ACRE), as well as new EPGs related to

them, such as the European United Left-Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) and European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) (see Table 19.1).

Approved at the Nice summit in 2000, the Statute on European Parties (Regulation (EC) No 2004/2003) entered into force in 2004, formally and spatially separating Europarties and EPGs: Europarties moved out of European Parliament offices; they received no further subsidies from EPGs, but operational grants from the European Commission instead (Ladrech 2006, 497). As of 2018, the distinct European Parliament Budget Line 402 was established; since then, Europarties receive contributions of up to 90% of their reimbursable expenditure, if they fulfill the following conditions: registering with the Authority for European Political Parties and European Political Foundations (APPF), having at least one MEP, external auditing, and registration in a member state. Furthermore, their parties must be represented in at least one quarter of member states and in different assemblies (Art. 3, Regulation (EC) No 2004/2003). Table 19.1 provides an overview of today's spectrum of Europarties, the composition of EPGs in relation to them, and further details.

Table 19.1: Overview of Europarties and EPGs

<insert table 19.1 about here>

Simultaneously, EPG formation follows the European Parliament's Rules of Procedure. Since 2009, an EPG must consist of a minimum of 25 MEPs (after Brexit 23 MEPs) originating from at least seven member states. MEPs not attached to EPGs belong to "Non-inscrit" (NI), receive fewer resources, and usually cannot perform core tasks such as rapporteurship. Since the individual EPG's compositions often change between (and sometimes even during) legislatures, the European Parliament party system is volatile. Whereas EPP, S&D, and Greens/EFA have remained stable EPGs since their early formation, as has ALDE (even though it changed its name to Renew Europe

(RE) after the 2019 elections to include the French La Republic en Marche with its large share of seats), other EPGs on the left and right have (dis)appeared or considerably changed over the years, due to lack of MEPs or conflicts about the group's political goals. On the left, GUE/NGL has existed since the 2004 elections, but its composition has changed depending on wins and losses in member states. On the right, EPG formation has been more volatile, not least because more center-conservative parties like UKIP refused alliances with nationalist and radical right parties (RRP) like the French Front National (today Rassemblement National, NN) or the Italian Lega Nord (today Lega). At the same time, these RRP parties either failed to fulfill the EPGs requirements or proved unable to find common ground. While ECR has been rather stable since 2009 with the British Conservatives and Polish Law and Justice Party (PiS) forming the core, other far right EPGs like Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD) (forming an EPG from 2009 to 2019)² and Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF) (formed in 2015) constantly reorganized. In 2019 RRP formed the new Identity & Democracy (ID) political group (consisting of RN, Lega, the German AfD and several small parties for seven more member states). Thus, the current 2019 European Parliament hosts a total of seven political groups, the size of which changed after the UK left the EU – and thus British MEPs the European Parliament – at the end of January 2020. Since then the number of seats was slightly re-distributed among member states and overall lowered to 705 MEP of which the EPP now holds 187 seats, the S&D 147, RE 98, ID 76, Greens/EFA 67, ECR 61, and GUE/NGL 29 seats, plus 29 non-inscrit MEPs (European Parliamentary Research Service⁶⁴⁶.184; February 2020).

According to Brack (2018, 56, 83), party competition within the European Parliament is today structured along two dimensions: “the left/right economic cleavage and the GAL/TAN (Green-Alternative-Libertarian versus Traditional-Authoritarian-Nationalist) dimension on noneconomic issues such as the environment, lifestyle and values.” It is important to note that the national level is

generally a poor predictor for party positions on EU integration; parties exhibit considerable cross-family variation (Almeida 2012). The social-democratic party family was internally divided about the future of the welfare state, for instance, and the liberal family about whether to take up a neoliberal or social liberal position. On the left, the party family is generally heterogeneous due to the varying national contexts (Almeida 2012, 153). The Christian democrat party family hold similar positions on EU integration, but CEE enlargement challenged its self-understanding by including “non-Christian but conservative” parties (Almeida 2012, 153; see also Put et al. 2016, 14). Only the RRP family maintained a homogeneous stance while turning away from their original Ethno-Europeanism to solid Euroscepticism (Almeida 2012, 154). Hence, EU party politics exhibits a clear divide between supporters and opponents of the EU as a polity (Wiesner 2019, 193). This has repercussions on party stances on anti-discrimination and gender equality policy (Falkner and Plattner 2018).

The 1993 Maastricht Treaty introduced the second decisive historical change to the EPGs’ role: the *co-decision procedure*, which put the European Parliament and the Council on equal footing in legislation. The 2009 Lisbon Treaty turned co-decision into the Ordinary Legislative Procedure (OLP) and expanded its application to almost all policy fields, including those important for gender equality: employment, social policy, and justice and home affairs (Abels 2019). Moreover, given that the Parliament obliged itself to implement gender mainstreaming, this would potentially offer fertile ground for EPGs to promote gender equality in all policy fields. As a legislator, it thus became more important which political group and rapporteur were in charge of a legislative proposal. As most parliamentary work is done in the committees, political groups shape the European Parliament’s output by assigning MEPs as (vice)chairs, coordinators, and (shadow) rapporteurs. The EPGs assign these tasks as a measure of recognition to enhance group discipline (Yordanova 2013). In the absence of a European “government,” the EPP and S&D often formed a

decisive “grand coalition,” guiding (legislative) proposals through the European Parliament legislative process (Abels 2019; Corbett et al. 2016). With the 2019 electoral losses for the EPP and S&D, this grand coalition ended, emphasizing the need for more ideology-driven coalition-building (centre/left versus centre/right) (Yordanova 2013).

A third key historical development came in 2003 with the adoption of the Nice Treaty, which aimed to bring Europarties and EPGs further in line with *fundamental rights and values enshrined in EU treaty bases*. Already in 2001, the European Commission had proposed a Council regulation on Europarties, with the aim of linking funding for Europarties to Art. 2 TEU, which contains the EU’s legal and political foundations (Moriijn 2019). Requiring unanimity, the Council originally blocked the proposal, adopting it only after tweaks in 2014 together with the European Parliament (Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 1141/2014) and amending it in 2018(Regulation (EU/Euratom) 2018/673; . This “EU-values compliance mechanism” (Moriijn 2019, 617) requires Europarties to adhere to fundamental values, among them gender equality, anti-discrimination, and tolerance for minorities. Populist and right-wing parties immediately complained it was targeting them unfairly (Moriijn 2019, 619). The EU required Europarties striving for EU funding to register with the newly created authority APPF; the Commission, the Council, the European Parliament, or a member state where the Europarty resides could now ask the APPF to check for the party’s value compliance. As of 2018 even citizens can request the European Parliament to act (Moriijn 2019, 629). If compliance cannot be verified, the Europarty is deregistered and loses its funding. Apparently, the requirement of a written pledge of allegiance to Art. 2 TEU (including gender equality and non-discrimination) was too much to ask of some right-wing and populist Europarties; they decided not to register with APPF (Moriijn 2019, 631-633; see Table 19.1).

The 2014 European elections witnessed a fourth landmark development: the first *Spitzenkandidatur* process for the European Commission presidency, invented by Europarties, stipulating that the European Council should be “taking into account the elections to the European Parliament” in the nomination (Art. 17 (7) TEU). Historically, however, supranational party programs had not been common in the electoral campaigns, and only in 2009 did EPGs start to prepare joint election programs (Wiesner 2019, 190). In the 2014 elections, five Europarties – EPP, PES, ALDE, EGP, and EL – each selected one (or two) lead candidates running for Commission presidency. Eurosceptic parties “saw this development as too ‘federalist’ and refused to appoint Spitzenkandidaten” (Lefkofridi and Katsanidou 2018, 1469). The selection process differed considerably between Europarties. Among the five, only the EL formally subscribed to gender equality, committing to a 50% share of women (and men) in all organs. The EGP was the only party practically committed to equal representation by selecting two lead candidates – one woman and one man; all other EPGs nominated only men (Put et al. 2016, 12-16). In 2019, the same Europarties plus ACRE participated in the *Spitzenkandidatur* process, but this time women were slightly better represented. EPP, PES, and ACRE nominated men, ALDE nominated five women and two men, and EL and EGP nominated duos. Yet, famously in 2019 the lead candidate procedure failed; in the end the European Council nominated a non-Spitzenkandidat, the German conservative Ursula von der Leyen, who was then elected by the European Parliament in July 2019 (see also Hartlapp et al. and Abels in this volume).

Gendered representation, gender equality policy, and gendered working procedures

Although research on Europarties and EPGs is still developing, it has received more attention over the past decade; gendered perspectives are no exception. Furthest evolved are comparative studies

on gendered representation in parties and among MEPs. There is a growing literature on EPG (and Europarty) positions on gender equality and anti-discrimination, and how this plays out in the European Parliament's everyday work, mostly in the committees. Recently, research attends to the EPGs, covering gender aspects of their policies, their formal and informal procedures (groundbreaking is the EUGenDem project, <https://research.uta.fi/eugendem/>)

European Parliament elections and gendered representation

As MEPs are still elected from national party lists through different national voting systems (European Parliament Research Service PE 635.515, 6), political recruitment and gender quotas are not homogenous across the board (Praud 2012). Some MEPs are subject to electoral gender quotas, some national parties use voluntary party quotas, and some countries have no gender quotas at all.³ Moreover, quotas allow no straightforward prediction about gender balance: For example, in the 2014 European Parliament election Finland, operating without any quota, had 76.1% women MEPs, while Portugal, with a 33% legislative quota, had 28.6% women MEPs (European Parliament Research Service PE 635.515, 5). European elections thus display gender gaps that mirror those in national parties. In representative terms, EPGs translate the election outcome also differently into the core functions they assign, like political group leaders, European Parliament (vice-)presidents, committee leadership, group coordinators, and rapporteurs.

Figure 19.1 EPGs and share of women MEPs 1979-2019

<insert figure 19.1 about here>

The share of women MEPs in EPGs varies, ranging after the 2019 elections from 32.3% in ECR to 52.7% in Greens/EFA (Abels 2020, 415). Figure 19.1 illustrates the differences as well as the steadily increasing numbers for all EPGs. A closer look nevertheless reveals important differences.

While many green and left-wing parties work with quotas to reach gender balance, this is uncommon for right-wing populist and radical right parties. Hence, women MEPs are unequally distributed across EPGs (cf. Figure 19.1). Some RRP, however, have considerable numbers of women MEPs because of national quota legislation. For instance, the Italian Lega and French RN delegations belonging to the new ID group are gender-balanced because of national quotas, whereas women are clearly underrepresented in the German AfD party (only 18.2%; cf. Abels 2020, 416). Similarly, the German CDU only sends 21.7% women MEPs to the EPP, while the overall share of women MEPs 40.4% respectively 39.5% after Brexit (Abels 2020, 408, 413).

Based on the analysis of how gendered EPGs' everyday activities are, Kantola and Miller (2019) conclude that EPGs present a unique and complex transnational setting where negotiations need to attend to political as well as state-specific dividing lines. The latter is articulated through national party delegations, which are characterized as "mediating structures": "informational flows from the bureau ... are disseminated down and the NPD [national party delegations] can be a filter. This matters for gender experts and civil society organizations who may seek to lobby political groupings more holistically." (Kantola and Miller 2019, 23) When Kantola and Rolandsen Agustín (2019, 774) investigated EPG practices for advancing the position of women MEPs, they found that "unequal gendered norms and practices continue to exist" and "relate to gendered divisions of labor, interaction, symbols, and subjectivities." If we take a closer look at EPGs' current composition, GUE/NGL and Greens/EFA, followed by S&D and ALDE, were the most gender-equal EPGs. ECR and EPP range at the lower end, even though the latter recently did develop steps towards enhancing women's representation and tackling gender inequality internally (Kantola and Rolandsen Agustín 2019).

Recently, the #MeToo campaign also reached the European Parliament, and parliamentary staff set up #MeTooEP (see www.metooep.com). The discursive constructions around sexual harassment in the Parliament further showed the differentiated positions on gender equality issues. While many MEPs advocate legal action or structural reforms, others show resistance either by calling the problem an individual or cultural one, or they defend “the EP as a ‘good’ institution by emphasizing the need to protect its reputation” (Berthet and Kantola 2020).

The unequal share of women MEPs and the EPGs’ diverging positions on whether intra-group gender equality promotion is necessary both effect how the EPGs distribute intra-parliamentary and EPG leadership positions. Manon Aubry (GUE/NGL), Iratxe García Pérez (S&D), and Ska Keller (Greens/EFA) (co-)chair their EPGs, yet theirs are only three out of ten available chair positions (Abels 2020, 417). After the 2019 elections, the 22 committee chairs were for the first time equally distributed from the beginning of the legislature. EPP, RE, and ECR delivered an equal number of women and men, S&D three men out of five chairs, GUE/NGL one male chair, and Greens/EFA two women chairs (Abels 2020, 417-418). Committee coordinators were not equally distributed in the last legislature, though they became more balanced over time: the highest level of women’s representation was found for GUE/NGL (58%), S&D (57%), and Greens/EFA (56%), then ALDE (43%) and EFDD (35%), and very low shares for ECR (22%) and EPP (13%) (Kantola and Rolandsen Agustín 2019, 771).

EPG positions on gender equality and anti-discrimination

Research on the EPGs’ gender equality and anti-discrimination positions on European Parliament output, such as legislation and reports, sheds light on substantive representation. Party groups are divided on gender equality in relation to substantive representation along the left/right axis.

Analyzing the 8th legislature (2014–2019), Kantola and Rolandsen Agustín (2019) find that S&D,

ALDE, GUE/NGL and Greens/EFA all maintain relatively strong pro gender equality policy profiles. The latter two also have a high level of women's descriptive representation among MEPs, both at leadership level and regarding committee coordinators. EFDD, EPP, and ECR show weak gender-equality profiles and a mixed picture of descriptive representation (see above). Analyses of EPGs' internal cultures show that gender stereotypes around the division of labor or policy areas are still existing, and that perceptions about MEPs' interests and competences remain gendered. Stereotypical perceptions – for instance, women MEPs as not interested in or capable of taking key positions in economic policy-making – do still persist, as do expectations around visibility and (lack of) presence, which to some women MEPs translates into perceived irreconcilable spheres of politics and motherhood (Kantola and Rolandsen Agustín 2019).

Though EPGs' policy-making takes place in a broader context of lobbying, the relations between party groups and interest groups in the field of gender equality have remained underexplored. Kluger Dionigi (2017) provides an instructive case of party politics related to the negotiations on the maternity-leave directive, which failed in 2015. Though the Parliament's FEMM Committee had the lead on this directive, the European Women's Lobby and trade unions successfully lobbied the S&D rapporteur and other FEMM members to extend the Commission's proposal, thereby increasing controversies among member states in the Council (Kluger Dionigi 2017, 129-130, 135; see also Ahrens and Abels 2017). Meanwhile, employer's associations and member states lobbied MEPs in center-right EPGs, particularly EPP, to vote against the FEMM committee report. EPP hesitated to do so, both because they lacked a majority and because voting against improving women's rights was inopportune (Kluger Dionigi 2017, 132). While the European Parliament in the end adopted its position with a slim majority, several national delegations in EPP and ALDE voted against the proposal, departing from their official group line, which is quite unusual (Kluger Dionigi 2017, 137). Thus, EPG party positions on gender equality depend on the context and political

constraints, making them highly issue-specific and marked by divergent opinions. This especially comes to the fore around controversial policy debates, such as abortion and the financial crisis (see also Kantola and Rolandsen Agustín 2016).

Committees are an important arena of party politics. The FEMM, LIBE, and EMPL committees are usually considered progressive regarding gender equality and anti-discrimination policies. The research on other committees' gender equality policy and gender mainstreaming does not show differences between EPGs (see Ahrens and Rolandsen Agustín this volume). Since 2019, the FEMM Committee is led by Evelyn Regner (S&D), EMPL by Lucia Duris Nicholsonová (ECR), and LIBE by Juan Fernando López Aguilar (S&D). This means that one of the most important committees, EMPL, is chaired by an MEP from an EPG which often holds conservative positions on gender equality issues. How this impacts committee work has not yet been investigated, though gender equality and anti-discrimination in all three committees is expected to be contested by right-wing and populist EPGs (Abels 2020; Kantola and Rolandsen Agustín 2016, 2019; Krizsan and Siim 2018). Previously, the three Eurosceptic political groups – ECR, EFDD, ENF – within the FEMM Committee usually voted against committee compromises, while not taking up any proposals themselves (Ahrens 2018). Furthermore, the intersection of gender equality with migration policies exacerbated tensions within and between EPGs (Nissen and Rolandsen Agustín 2018). In the 7th European Parliament legislature (2009-2014), ALDE, EPP and S&D shared the conviction that intertwining labor market mobility with gender equality will trigger economic growth; yet, this consensus was founded on silencing other conflicts around the transferability of social rights (Nissen and Rolandsen Agustín 2018).

While EPG cohesion in voting terms is usually high (Hix et al. 2018; see also <https://www.votewatch.eu>), this is not the case in the FEMM Committee, which has recently shifted

from a consensus orientation (based partially on feminist alliances) to conflictual inter-group relations, not least because it has inter-group coalitions and intra-group cohesion than the plenary (Warasin et al. 2019). While in the 7th legislature EPP, S&D and ALDE aligned, FEMM's agenda was disproportionately influenced by a coalition among S&D, ALDE, Greens/EFA and GUE/NGL. Furthermore, gender equality policies have become increasingly politicized. This is visible in intra-group cohesion, which is lower than average on gender equality issues compared to other sectors. In the EPP, for instance, internal cleavages are common and some MEPs frequently vote against the party line; this is also the case, to some extent, in ALDE (Warasin et al. 2019). The politicization of equality policies not only occurs in FEMM, but also in the LIBE and EMPL Committees. Engaging with the literature on norm dynamics, Ahrens and van der Vleuten (2019) illustrate how MEPs from ECR, EFDD, ENF and EPP pulled the "subsidiarity card," i.e. they used the subsidiarity principle to avoid effective actions by the EU against actors attacking gender equality in the member states. Until recently, the European Parliament hardly ever referred to the subsidiarity principle, because of its overarching institutional interest in expanding its competences. However, MEPs from the right-wing conservative groups begin to strategically use subsidiarity to delegitimize engagement with the EU values enshrined in Art. 2 TEU: human rights, gender equality and democracy (Ahrens and van der Vleuten 2019). Analyzing MEPs' voting behavior, Mondo and Close (2018) uncovered that morality issues such as abortion and human embryonic stem-cell research are increasingly politicized. Among the interviewed MEPs, "cohesion was perceived as a strength, excess of party discipline was negatively assessed, revealing some EPGs' incapacity to build a common position, but also impeding MEPs to express their own convictions"; however, when religion and personal values are at odds with their EPG position, "most respondents emphasized the great degree of freedom that the European parliamentary arena usually offers" (Mondo and Close 2018, 1014).

MEPs' national origin also affects their engagement in gender equality and anti-discrimination policy-making – regardless of their EPG's position. Cullen (2018, 2019) traced the activities of female Irish MEPs; she observed that the national political context, including party political discipline, limited female political agency. While some Irish female MEPs acted as gender-conscious actors in committees other than FEMM, centrist and right-wing MEPs have been especially constrained; they refused membership in the FEMM Committee due to the issue of abortion (*ibid.*). Chiva (2019), however, found no fundamental differences in voting patterns along EPG lines among female MEPs from “old” and “new” member states. Overall, female MEPs from Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries are better represented in the European Parliament than at national level. Since gender equality issues are less contested in the European Parliament, this indeed enhances their possibilities to act in favor of women's interests. Thus, MEPs from CEE are socialized into a gender equality mindset rather than influencing the European Parliament in a conservative direction (Chiva 2019).

The literature on Eurosceptic and populist parties has expanded considerably over the last decade, not least in response to their growing numbers and electoral support in EU member states (see Siim and Fiig in this volume). Falkner and Plattner compared the claim coherence of populist RRP's regarding EU integration in the fields of foreign policy, security and defense, the single market and anti-discrimination (including gender equality). Regarding the latter, they found that only ENF directly positioned itself in this policy field, but there was “no absolute coherence and no goal coherence” (Falkner and Plattner 2018, 18). As for EFDD and ECR, even though the EPGs themselves took no positions, their national parties show clear opposition and the wish to dismantle EU anti-discrimination policies (Falkner and Plattner 2018, 17-18). Looking at same-sex unions as a specifically salient issue, Lefkofridi and Katsanidou (2018, 1173-1174) track down that for the last two legislatures the EPGs covered the full spectrum of the left–right divide (pro vs. contra

legalizing same-sex unions); yet, all differed regarding intra-party coherence. Only the Greens/EFA (pro) and EFDD (contra) were coherent in both elections, while national parties within the other EPGs formed no majority on either the pro or the contra side (Lefkofridi and Katsanidou 2018, 1175-1176).

The arrival of Eurosceptic and far-right conservative nationalists since the late 1990s brought about two fundamental changes in the European Parliament: “outspoken essentializing views on women were voiced” and “subsidiarity, respect for sovereignty, and cultural differences were used as arguments to undermine initiatives for the supranational promotion of gender equality” (van der Vleuten 2019, 45; see also Siim and Fiig in this volume). Zacharenko (2019) calculated anti-gender MEPs numbers as clearly above 170, with additional EPP MEPs from the Hungarian Fidesz and the Polish PiS possibly supporting such positions, too. This “could represent a strong front against the alleged threat of ‘gender ideology’.” (Zacharenko 2019) Yet Abels (2020, 419) points out that some outspoken feminists also took up important positions in the European Parliament. The literature thus reflects the way in which the Parliament and its political groups constitute sites of gender struggle where divergent norms and values around gender equality and anti-discrimination clash. In recent years this struggle has become accentuated and intertwined with opinions and positions for and against European integration, thus combining nationalist and anti-feminist agendas in the opposition to the EU and its transnational articulation of gender equality policies.

Conclusions

Engaging with European party politics clearly benefits from integrating a gender perspective. We gain better insights about differences between Europarties and EPGs regarding gendered

representation and policy positions, about cohesion, consensus and contestation dynamics in the European Parliament and its committees as well as about national peculiarities and traditions in dealing with gender equality. Nevertheless, we observe a range of gaps in the mainstream literature as well as in the gender and anti-discrimination research, revealing underexplored potential for innovative insights on party politics on gender equality and anti-discrimination, and thus on key issues of European integration in general.

The EU and many member states are amidst a crisis of representation, and some parties face a legitimacy crisis as Eurosceptic, populist, and right-wing parties gain support. Although these parties increased their number of seats in the 2019 elections, they do not strictly verify older findings according to which the number of women among their ranks and in their intra-party leadership positions is low, that is their “*Männerparteien*” image (Abels 2020; Ahrens 2018; Meret et al. 2017; Meret and Siim 2013; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2015). Whether or not this is simply an effect of national quota legislation or a general trend requires more research. Studies also need to address the question of how national electoral systems disrupt the possibilities in reaching parity. Connected to this, it would be worthwhile to investigate EPGs’ internal recruitment procedures for positions such as committee coordinators and chairs, and to study in which EPGs women are either sidelined or recognized.

The Eurosceptic, populist, and right-wing EPGs usually have no particular rules on parity or gender equality in place. Some of them are outspoken critics of gender equality, anti-discrimination and multiculturalism (Krizsan and Siim 2018; van der Vleuten 2019). Yet, mainstream EPGs are also not free from internal struggles around promoting gender equality, showing low levels of intra-group coherence (Warasin et al. 2019). Fascinating examples show, for instance, the utilization of the subsidiarity principle against gender equality within the EPP (Ahrens and van der Vleuten

2019), and reveal opposition by national delegations against the EU's ratification of the Council of Europe's Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention; see Roggeband in this volume) in the S&D (Hein 2018). How will EPGs' decision-making processes change when single party delegations speak up against EU equality norms, when they want to limit marriage to heterosexual couples, or even constitutionally ban same-sex marriage (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017; Roggeband and Krizsan 2018; Verloo 2018)?

Future research needs to decipher EPGs' internal struggles and policy position-formation regarding complex gender equality issues. A change in the majority position will probably bring fundamental changes to the overall majority in the European Parliament – regardless of existing anti-gender mobilization in other EPGs. Cullen (2019) and Chiva (2019) demonstrate that national origin and parliamentary culture are important and that we need to better understand how this impacts upon supranational gender equality policy.

Finally, the connection between EPGs and “the people” requires more attention: Who can mobilize which parts of the population? Here, EPGs' relationships to civil society and other organized interests are key, such as anti-gender and anti-LGBT movements. Do we see these movements gaining influence via EPGs? More informal modes of exchange between EPGs come into play here: European Parliament intergroups such as “Anti-Racism and Diversity” and “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex rights” have received almost no attention in terms of their involvement and impact in this policy field. They cut across EPGs and could be fruitful to further explore coalition formation, be it in favor of gender equality or against, but also broader issues of anti-discrimination and intersectional politics in European politics.

References

Abels G (2019): The Powers of the European Parliament. Implications for Gender Equality Policy, in Ahrens P, Rolandsen Agustín L (eds.): *Gendering the European Parliament. Structures, Policies and Practices*, London: Rowman & Littlefield, 19-34.

Abels G (2020): Gender and Descriptive Representation in the 2019–2024 European Parliament, in: Kaeding M, Müller M, Schmälter J (eds.): *Die Europawahl 2019*, Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 407-421.

Ahrens P (2018): Anti-feministische Politiker*innen im Frauenrechtsausschuss des Europäischen Parlaments. Wendepunkt oder Resilienz in der EU Gleichstellungspolitik?, *Feministische Studien* **36** (2), 403-416.

Ahrens P, van der Vleuten A (2019): The strategic use of the subsidiarity argument in the European Parliament in debates about gender equality, *Paper for General Conference of the European Consortium on Political Research*, Wroclaw, unpublished.

Ahrens P, Abels G (2017): Die Macht zu gestalten. Die Mutterschutzrichtlinie im legislativen Bermuda-Dreieck der Europäischen Union, *Femina Politica* **26** (1), 39–54.

Almeida D (2012): *The Impact of European Integration on Political Parties. Beyond the Permissive Consensus*, London, New York: Routledge.

Andeweg R (1995): The reshaping of national party systems, *West European Politics* **18** (3), 58-78.

Bardi L (1994): Transnational party federations, European parliamentary groups and the building of Europarties, in: Katz RS, Mair P (eds.): *How Parties Organize. Change and adaptation in party organizations in Western Democracies*, London: Sage, 46-76.

Berthet V, Kantola J (2020): Gender, violence and political institutions. Struggles over sexual harassment in the European Parliament, *Social Politics*, forthcoming.

Brack N (2018): *Opposing Europe in the European Parliament. Rebels and Radicals in the Chamber*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Chiva C (2019): Overcoming Male Dominance? The Representation of Women in the European Parliament Delegations of the Post-Communist EU Member States, in: Ahrens P, Rolandsen Agustín L (eds.): *Gendering the European Parliament. Structures, Policies and Practices*, London: Rowman & Littlefield, 177-197.

Corbett R, Jacobs F, Neville D (2016): *The European Parliament*, London: John Harper.

Cullen P (2019): The European Parliament and Irish Female MEPs. Female Political Agency for Gender Equality, in: Ahrens P, Rolandsen Agustín L (eds.): *Gendering the European Parliament. Structures, Policies and Practices*, London: Rowman & Littlefield, 159-175.

Cullen P (2018): Irish Female Members of the European Parliament. Critical Actors for Women's Interests?, *Politics & Gender* **14** (3), 483–511.

Falkner G, Plattner G (2018): Populist Radical Right Parties and EU Policies. How coherent are their claims, *Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies Research Paper* No. RSCAS 2018/38.

Fortin-Rittberger J, Rittberger B (2014): Do electoral rules matter? Explaining national differences in women's representation in the European Parliament, *European Union Politics* **15** (4), 496-520.

Fortin-Rittberger J, Rittberger B (2015): Nominating women for Europe: Exploring the role of political parties' recruitment procedures for European Parliament elections, *European Journal of Political Research* **54** (4), 767-83.

Hein M (2018): Bulgaria. I·CONnect-Clough Center Global Review of Constitutional Law.

Hix S, Lord C (1997): *Political Parties in the European Union*, London: Macmillan.

Hix S, Noury A, Roland G (2005): Power to the Parties. Cohesion and Competition in the European Parliament, 1979–2001, *British Journal of Political Science* **35**, 209–234.

Hix S, Noury A, Roland G (2007): *Democratic Politics in the European Parliament*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hix S, Noury A, Roland G (2018): Is there a selection bias in roll call votes? Evidence from the European Parliament, *Public Choice* **176** (1-2), 211-228.

Kantola J, Miller C (2019): Everyday activities of the European Parliament's political groupings: Gendered dynamics and practices, *Paper prepared for European Conference on Politics and Gender (ECPG)*, Amsterdam, unpublished.

Kantola J, Rolandsen Agustín L (2019): Gendering the representative work of the European Parliament. A political analysis of women MEP's perceptions of gender equality in party groups, *Journal of Common Market Studies* **57** (4), 768–786.

Kantola J, Rolandsen Agustín L (2016): Gendering Transnational Party Politics: The Case of European Union, *Party Politics* **22** (5), 641–51.

Kluger Dionigi M (2017): *Lobbying in the European Parliament. The Battle for Influence*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Krizsan A, Siim B (2018): Gender Equality and Family in Populist Radical Right Agendas. Similarities and Differences in European Parliamentary Debates 2014, in: Knijn T, Naldini M (eds.): *Gender and Generational Division in EU Citizenship*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Kuhar R, Paternotte D, eds. (2017): *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe. Mobilizing against Equality*, London: Rowman & Littlefield.

Ladrech R (2006): The European Union and Political Parties, in: Katz RS, Crotty W (eds.): *Handbook of Party Politics*, London: Sage, 492-498.

- Lefkofridi Z, Katsanidou A (2018): A Step Closer to a Transnational Party System? Competition and Coherence in the 2009 and 2014 European Parliament, *Journal of Common Market Studies* **56** (6), 1462–1482.
- Mattila M, Raunio T (2006): Cautious Voters and Supportive Parties. Opinion Congruence between Voters and Parties on the EU Dimension, *European Union Politics* **7** (4), 427–449.
- McElroy G, Benoit K (2007): Party Groups and Policy Positions in the European Parliament, *Party Politics* **13** (1), 5–28.
- McElroy G, Benoit K (2010): Party Policy and Group Affiliation in the European Parliament, *British Journal of Political Science* **40**, 377–398.
- McElroy G, Benoit K (2012): Policy Positioning in the European Parliament, *European Union Politics* **13** (1): 150–167.
- Meret S, Siim B (2013): Gender, Populism and Politics of Belonging: Discourses of Right-Wing Populist parties in Denmark, Norway and Austria, in: Siim B, Mokre M (eds.): *Negotiating Gender and Diversity in an Emergent European Public Sphere*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 78-96.
- Meret S, Siim B, Pingaud E (2017): Men's parties with Women leaders. A comparative study of right-wing populist leaders Pia Kjaersgaard, Siv Jensen and Marine Le Pen, in: Lazaridis G, Campani G (eds.): *Understanding the populist shift*, London, New York: Routledge, 122-149.

Mondo E, Close C (2018): Morality politics in the European parliament. A qualitative insight into MEPs' voting behaviour on abortion and human embryonic stem cell research, *Journal of European Integration* **40** (7), 1001-1018.

Morijn J (2019): Responding to the “populist” politics at EU level: Regulation 1141/2014 and beyond, *International Journal of Constitutional Law* **17** (2), 617-640.

Mudde C, Rovira Kaltwasser C (2015): Vox populi or vox masculini? Populism and gender in Northern Europe and South America, *Patterns of Prejudice* **49** (1-2), 16-36.

Nissen A, Rolandsen Agustín L (2018): Rights for Women, Migrants, and Minorities. Consensus and silences in the European Parliament, in: Knijn T, Naldini M (eds.): *Gender and Generational Division in EU Citizenship*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 21-38.

Praud J (2012): Introduction: Gender Parity and Quotas in European Politics, *West European Politics* **35** (2), 286–300.

Put G-J, Van Hecke S, Cunningham C, Wolfs W (2016): The Choice of Spitzenkandidaten. A Comparative Analysis of the Europarties' Selection Procedures, *Politics and Governance* **4** (1), 9-22.

Roggeband C, Krizsan A (2018): *The Gender Politics of Domestic Violence. Feminists Engaging the State in Central and Eastern Europe*, London, New York: Routledge.

Stockemer D, Sundström A (2019): Do young female candidates face double barriers or an outgroup advantage? The case of the European Parliament, *European Journal of Political Research* **58**, 373–384.

Schmitt H, Thomassen J (1999): *Political Representation and Legitimacy in the European Union*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

van der Vleuten A (2019): The European Parliament as a constant promoter of gender equality. Another European myth?, in: Ahrens P, Rolandsen Agustín L (eds.): *Gendering the European Parliament. Structures, Policies and Practices*, London: Rowman & Littlefield, 35-49.

Verloo M, ed. (2018): *Varieties of Opposition to Gender Equality in Europe*, London, New York: Routledge.

von dem Berge B (2017): Europarty Eastern enlargement. An empirical analysis of Europarty influence on Central and Eastern European parties and party systems, *East European Politics* **33** (4), 472–495.

Warasin M, Kantola J, Rolandsen Agustín L, Coughlan C (2019): Politicisation of gender equality in the European Parliament: Cohesion and Inter-Group Coalitions in plenary and committees, in: Ahrens P, Rolandsen Agustín L (eds.): *Gendering the European Parliament. Structures, Policies and Practices*, London: Rowman & Littlefield, 141-158.

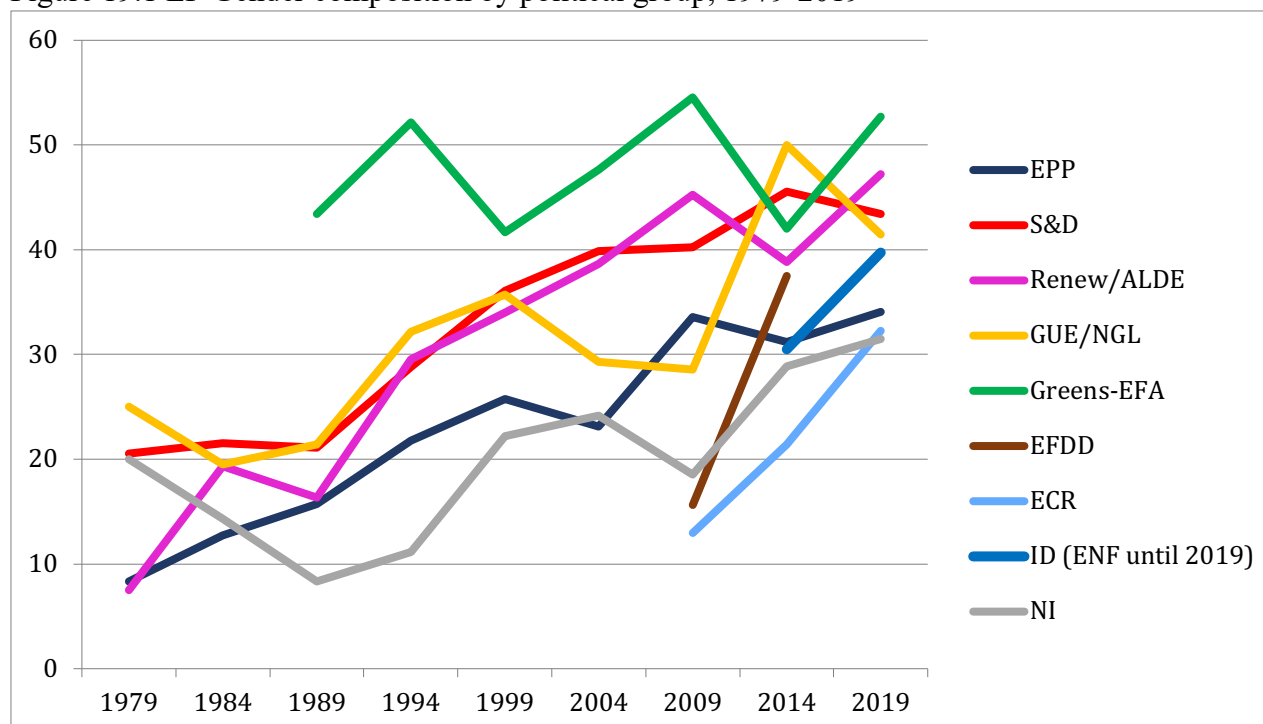
Westlake M (2019): Possible Future European Union Party-Political Systems, in: Costa O (ed.): *The European Parliament in Times of EU crisis. Dynamics and Transformations*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 321-340.

Wiesner C (2019): *Inventing the EU as a Democratic Polity*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Yordanova N (2013): *Organising the European Parliament. The Role of Committees and their Legislative Influence*, Colchester: ECPR Press.

Zacharenko E (2019): Political reshuffle of European Parliament. What Consequences for Gender Equality in Europe? URL: <https://www.fes.de/themenportal-gender-jugend-senioren/gender-matters/artikelseite/politische-umstrukturierung-der-europaeischen-kommission-und-des-europaeischen-parlaments> (download: 12 June 2020).

Figure 19.1 EP Gender composition by political group, 1979-2019



Source: Own calculation on the basis of EP data. Please note party name changes: until the 2019 election, RE operated as ALDE and ID operated as ENF.

¹ Petra Ahrens' work received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under grant agreement No 771676 of the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program.

² EFDD was closely related to the Europarty Alliance for Direct Democracy in Europe (ADDE, founded 2014), with main member being the UK Independence Party (UKIP). ADDE legally dissolved in 2017 after misusing EU funds.

³ In 2019, legislative electoral quotas are in place in Belgium, Croatia, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain. Voluntary party quotas are in place (2019) in Austria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden, United Kingdom. Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia have not quotas at all.

Table 19.1: Overview Europarties and EPGs

Name as of 2019 election	Founding Year	Previous party names	Number national parties	Country representation	Relationship to EPGs	APPF registered	EU funding 2017 in €
Alliance for Peace and Freedom (APF)	2015	-	13	9 EU	Only non-inscrit	No (removed by APPF)	-
Alliance of European National Movements (AEMN)	2009	-	6	5 EU	No MEPs	No (removed by APPF)	342,788
Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)	1975	Federation of Liberal and Democrat Parties in Europe (1976); European Liberals and Democrats (ELD, 1977); European Liberal Democrats and Reformists (ELDR, 1986); European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party (ELDR, 2004)	52	38 European	Renew Europe (RE)	Yes	2,449,108
European Christian Political Movement (ECPM)	2002	-	19	18 European	2 ECR, 1 EPP	Yes	499,993
European Conservatives and Reformists Party (ECR)	2009	Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists (AECR) (2009–2016); Alliance of Conservatives and Reformists in Europe (ACRE) (2016–2019)	44 (24 none-European)	39 worldwide	ECR	Yes	1,439,310
European Democratic Party (EDP)	2004	-	20	16 European	Renew Europe, 2 S&D	Yes	532,072

European Free Alliance (EFA)	1981	-	47	21 European	Greens-EFA, 1 GUE/NGL, 3 ECR	Yes	779,408
European Green Party (EGP)	1984	European Green Coordination (EGC, 1984); European Federation of Green Parties (1993)	41	34 European	Greens-EFA	Yes	1,865,999
European People's Party (EPP)	1976	-	84 (37 non-EU)	43 (16 non-EU)	EPP	Yes	8,018,034
European Pirate Party (PPEU)	2014	-	21	20 European	Greens-EFA	No, in preparation	-
Identity and Democracy Party (ID)	2014	Movement for a Europe of Nations and Freedom (MENF; 2014-2019)	12	11 European	Identity and Democracy (ID)	Yes	-
Initiative of Communist and Workers' Parties (INITIATIVE)	2013	-	30	27 European	Non-inscrits	No	-
Now the people!	2018	-	6	6 European	GUE/NGL	No	-
Party of European Socialists (PES)	1974	Confederation of the Socialist Parties of the European Community (CSPEC, 1974)	33	29 (EU, UK, Norway)	S&D	Yes	6,901,688
Party of the European Left (EL)	2004	-	27	25 European	GUE/NGL	Yes	1,342,594
VOLT Europa	2017	-	Pan-European, no national parties	n.a.	Greens-EFA	No	-

Source: Data compiled from Europarty websites, EP website (https://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/grants/funding_amounts_parties_01-2019.pdf, accessed 6 November 2019), APPF website (<http://www.appf.europa.eu/appf/en/parties-and-foundations/registered-parties.html>, accessed 6 November 2019), and Morijn 2019, pp. 631-633.