24. The European Parliament as a gender equality actor: a contradictory forerunner

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INTRODUCTION

The European Parliament is considered to be the European Union (EU) institution that is most democratic and most supportive of gender equality of the EU institutions. In terms of democracy, it is the only directly elected decision-making body of the EU and it is an arena of deliberation and contestation. In terms of gender equality, women's representation has steadily increased (15 per cent in 1979, 20 per cent in 1989, 27.5 per cent in 1999, 35.5 in 2009 and 40 per cent in 2019) and the Gender Equality and Women's Rights Committee (FEMM Committee) has been an active supporter of gender equality policy initiatives within the European Parliament. This chapter addresses the question: to what extent are the European Parliament's political practices supportive of gender equality and feminist governance?

The chapter maps the formal institutional arrangements, which support gender equality within the institution and constitute important facets of feminist governance. This includes not just the FEMM Committee but also different gender mainstreaming initiatives in all parliamentary committees as well as gender action plans and sexual harassment policies for parliamentary staff. The chapter briefly looks at some key measures at the level of political groups too, including gender equality provisions for gender-balanced representation in political group statutes as well as key gender equality networks addressing the extent to which the European Parliament has been an arena for feminist agency and feminist alliances. The wide array of formal institutional arrangements for the advancement of gender equality provides a positive picture of the European Parliament as a gender equality actor and a success story for feminist governance. The parliament has also had some successes in inserting a gender perspective into EU policy.

At the same time, there are a number of informal practices in the parliament that have the potential to undermine the good formal practices and institutions for feminist governance. The chapter draws on research findings on opposition to gender equality in the European Parliament which slows down the good feminist governance practices and gender equality policies. These include, for example, opposition to sexual harassment policies (Berthet and Kantola, 2020); radical right populist groups and MEPs that directly and indirectly oppose gender equality and related policies in the plenary debates (Kantola and Lombardo, 2021a); and institutional resistance to gender equality among the parliament as a whole and among established mainstream political groups. Exploring both formal and informal institutions for gender equality within the parliament reveals the multiple struggles for feminist governance in the European Parliament and how making progress requires feminist actors to have the capacity to advance gender equality at the formal level as well as to develop informal strategies and broader alliances.

FORMAL INSTITUTIONS FOR FEMINIST GOVERNANCE IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

The formal institutional arrangements, which support gender equality within the European Parliament and advance gender equality policies, include the FEMM Committee and different gender-mainstreaming initiatives in all committees. Feminist governance practices extend to parliamentary staff in the form of sexual harassment policies and to the political groups of the parliament.

Committee for Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM)

The FEMM Committee is the focal point of the European Parliament's feminist governance in line with extant literature which suggests that gender-focused parliamentary bodies are important in ensuring that gender equality is included in parliaments' work (Grace and Sawer, 2016; see also Sawer, Chapter 12 in this *Handbook*). The committee was fully established in 1984, building on earlier ad hoc committees initiated as early as 1979. FEMM has had a rocky history, which includes successes in strengthening the position of gender equality in the European Parliament's work. It has also faced threats to its existence and funding. It has been chaired by a conservative and anti-feminist MEP and has attracted the interest of radical right populist MEPs opposed to gender equality in the 2010s and 2020s (see Ahrens and Rolandsen Agustín, 2021).

FEMM is in charge of gender equality issues and functions as a supervisory body for gender mainstreaming in the parliament (Ahrens, 2016, 2019). It has 35 members from all of the parliament's political groups – including the radical right populist groups European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR) and Identity and Democracy Group (ID) – and each of the political groups has a FEMM coordinator who acts as a focal point between the political group and the committee. Unlike other committees, FEMM has a status as a 'neutralised committee', which means that being a member of FEMM is voluntary and it is taken by the MEPs on top of other responsibilities (Ahrens, 2016; Nugent, 2019). FEMM issues opinions and statements on legislative proposals and puts forward own-initiative reports. Its impact is increased by the ways in which its members have been able to network across committees and pressure other committees to integrate gender perspectives in their work (Ahrens, 2016: 786–90). Unlike in the plenary debates and votes, in the FEMM committee, it is the gender progressive groups Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA) and the Left Group in the European Parliament (GUE/NGL) that are able to punch above their political weight and ally with the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament (S&D) and liberals Renew Europe Group (ALDE/Renew), whilst the biggest group in the parliament, the conservative Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) (EPP), is more divided (Warasin et al., 2019: 150). This results in progressive reports, which, on the downside, are not always adopted in the plenary as a majority in the FEMM committee does not necessarily reflect a majority in the plenary (Warasin et al., 2019: 153).

Despite its formal position, FEMM has fewer powers and less prestige than other committees and its work is hampered in many ways. It is rarely allocated legislative proposals to work on and hence mainly issues less significant own-initiative reports. In policy terms, too, the work that FEMM does is often bypassed by other committees. A recent example is

the economic crisis of 2008, where FEMM committee proposals on the gendered impacts of the economic crisis were largely ignored and failed to gender mainstream the EU crisis response (Kantola and Lombardo, 2017b). The FEMM Committee is also disregarded in the parliament's organisation, for instance in the planning of the parliamentary calendar where the lead committee's meetings often conflict with FEMM meetings, hindering participation of FEMM members (Ahrens, 2016: 784–5). This can explain the low mean attendance of MEPs in committee meetings (see Nugent, 2019: 125).

The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed some of these vulnerabilities and provided an important test case for feminist governance in the European Parliament. FEMM was one of the seven committees whose work was completely suspended initially and then the committee met less frequently than most other committees (Elomäki and Kantola, 2021). The result was that during the critical time, when the gendered impacts of the Covid-19 crisis became evident and the European Parliament began to formulate its stance on the EU's recovery measures, the FEMM committee hardly met (Elomäki and Kantola, 2021). The suspension measures thereby silenced a strong voice for women's rights and gender equality and the parliament's main site of gender expertise at a very moment of a crisis, with immense implications for gender equality in Europe.

The economic crisis of 2008 and the failure of the gender response to it in the EU (Kantola and Lombardo, 2017b) provides important background to the current crisis. The FEMM committee was determined to avoid some of the pitfalls and early on started to work on an own-initiative report on the effects of the Covid-19 crisis (Elomäki and Kantola, 2021). The report had strong sections on measures to combat the gendered impact of the crisis in health, gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), economic response, and recovery. It put forward an intersectional approach focusing on the impact of the crisis on LGBTQI+ rights, homeless women, migrants, disabled and other vulnerable groups (FEMM, 2020). Most significantly, the committee members – in a coordinated effort – were able to insert the gender-mainstreaming provisions in the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs (ECON) and Committee on Budgets (BUDG) proposals on the EU's Recovery Fund (Elomäki and Kantola, 2021).

GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Gender mainstreaming became an important feminist governance tool in EU policymaking towards the end of the 1990s and in the 2000s, travelling from one policy field to another and eventually becoming enshrined in EU treaties (Kantola, 2010; see also Guido et al., Chapter 3 in this *Handbook*). Its promise was to break deeply entrenched gendered structures by requiring all policies to be assessed from the perspective of their impacts on women and men. Since then, it has been critiqued in the EU context for the fact that it was adopted in a soft form, not implemented properly and not reaching beyond a technical exercise, hence not resulting in any meaningful change (Hafner-Burton and Pollack, 2009).

In this context, it becomes significant that the European Parliament has remained a strong supporter of gender mainstreaming and has institutionalised gender mainstreaming in its structures. As Petra Ahrens notes: the European Parliament 'is one of the few parliaments worldwide that committed to implementing gender mainstreaming and can therefore be characterised as a vanguard' (2019: 85). Between 2003 and 2019, the parliament adopted no

less than six resolutions and several reports on gender mainstreaming, representing significant efforts by the FEMM committee to institutionalise gender mainstreaming in parliamentary procedures (Ahrens, 2019: 85, 88). Ahrens shows how different framings of gender mainstreaming are put forward in the debates on the reports, and gender mainstreaming is argued to solve issues ranging from the parliament's internal organisation (committees, delegations, human-resources, administration) to various policy fields (Ahrens, 2019: 95). Important measures to achieve these goals include establishment of the gender-mainstreaming network across the parliamentary committees to ensure coordination of gender equality issues. A Standing Rapporteur on Gender Mainstreaming was nominated in 2016 and a second gender-mainstreaming network of administrators for each committee was set up. Nineteen of the 23 committees prepared a gender action plan following the 2019 resolution (Ahrens, 2019: 99).

In addition to gender mainstreaming, the FEMM committee and other gender equality advocates within the parliament have started to argue for gender budgeting, namely the need to take gender equality into account in the EU budgetary process (Cengiz, 2019; see also Costa and Sharp, Chapter 11 in this *Handbook*). Gender budgeting can be an important tool for feminist governance. In the European Parliament, however, its implementation suffers from the parliament's lack of powers in relation to the EU budgetary process (Cengiz, 2019).

Other Formal Institutional Structures

The European Parliament has developed a network of other actors in addition to the FEMM committee and the gender-mainstreaming network across committees. These include the High Level Group on Gender Equality and Diversity, the Group of Equality and Diversity Coordinators, and the Equality and Diversity Unit in the European Parliament administration. The precise impact and role of these is yet to be explored in feminist scholarship.

The MEPs can also organise themselves in so-called *intergroups* according to the European Parliament's Rules of Procedure (Rule 35), which state that these may be formed for the purpose of holding informal exchanges of views on specific issues across different political groups, drawing on members of different parliamentary committees, and of promoting contact between members and civil society. The intergroups can be important as they focus on specific political topics not directly covered by committees (Landorff, 2019). One of the longest-standing informal groups is the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Rights – LGBT Intergroup, established in 1997, which has an important role in mobilising support for LGBTQI+ rights (Ahrens and Rolandsen Agustín, 2021). Other intergroups, such as those on 'Anti-Racism & Diversity' (ARDI), 'Disability', and 'Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity', also draw attention to intersectional equality (Ahrens and Rolandsen Agustín, 2021). Whilst dependent on the commitment of individual members, they can push equality issues on to the political agenda through organising events, gathering and disseminating information and data, and providing an access point for civil society organisations.

Parliament as a Workplace: Gender Equality for Staff

Like all parliaments, the European Parliament employs a wide range of staff for its administration, maintenance and catering. Structures, actors and actions for feminist governance in parliaments can also be established and studied at the level of parliaments as workplace. On

the one hand, parliamentary staff can advance gender equality. For instance, the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) publishes fact sheets and reports on gender equality, often commissioned by the FEMM committee (Ahrens and Rolandsen Agustín, 2021). On the other hand, gender equality action plans for staff can help to pinpoint lack of gender equality and gendered power structures, and actions to overcome them. In the parliament, an important action on gender equality in relation to parliamentary staff was the adoption of the report 'Gender Equality in the European Parliament Secretariat – state of play and the way forward 2017–2019' in 2017 (Ahrens, 2019: 99).

Institutional practices for tackling sexual harassment within parliaments are a crucial test for feminist governance. In the European Parliament, as in most parliaments, sexual harassment is prevalent and attempts to tackle it predate the international #MeToo campaigns which made sexual harassment a massive topic. Yet, there too, the #MeToo movement – translated into the #MeTooEP campaign – exposed both the problem itself and the weakness of existing institutional responses (Berthet and Kantola, 2021). The European Parliament had had an Anti-Harassment Committee since 2014 which had jurisdiction over both 'psychological' and sexual harassment and was responsible for complaints against MEPs. It had not investigated a single case of sexual harassment prior to 2019 when #MeTooEP was at a peak (Berthet and Kantola, 2021). Both MEPs and staff were represented on the committee and a gender balance was respected; there was, however, no indication that members were trained to review sensitive cases. The Committee reported to the parliament's president, who made the final decision (Bureau decision 2018: article 11). The #MeTooEP campaign resulted in some institutional changes in the parliament. They included a voluntary pilot programme for training MEPs and a new institutionalised code of good conduct which included an explicit reference to sexual harassment (paragraph 5) (Berthet and Kantola, 2021). Using soft language, it specified that MEPs 'may not be elected' to certain positions if they do not abide by it, and 'should take part in specialized training' (paragraphs 5 and 7). Each MEP's declaration appeared on the parliament's website, along with their declaration of financial interests, in the 9th legislature (2019–24) (Berthet and Kantola, 2021). Some new rules were created in political groups too, including training, the appointment of confidential counsellors and new anti-harassment guidelines (Berthet and Kantola, 2021).

Advancing Gender Equality in Political Groups

The European Parliament's political groups are critical decision-making actors in the parliament. MEPs from member state political parties form political groups: for example, in the so-called 9th Parliament (2019–24), there were seven political groups. The biggest political group, the conservative EPP, had 187 MEPs (2020, after Brexit), followed by the social democratic S&D (147 MEPs), and the liberal Renew Europe (98 MEPs). The departure of the UK MEPs made the radical right populist ID (Identity and Democracy) group the fourth biggest in the parliament (75 MEPs) ahead of the Greens/EFA (69 MEPs). There is also another radical right populist group called the ECR (62 MEPs) and a group left of the social democrats called GUE/NGL (39 MEPs).

Although much of parliamentary work in the European Parliament happens in committees discussed above, the political groups exert power in setting the policy lines, negotiations for joint policy positions of the parliament, deciding on the leadership of the parliament, the committee chairs and members, and so on. From the point of view of gender equality, they

provide an important focus for feminist governance structures – just like national political parties. In many of the mainstream groups, advancing gender equality in policymaking is the responsibility of dedicated individual MEPs and staff, who are often members of the FEMM committee. The Greens/EFA group has advanced the furthest in formally institutionalising gender mainstreaming practices within the group (Kantola, 2022).

The political groups are indeed very differently positioned in relation to advancing gender equality. The green/left groups have the highest numbers of women MEPs and most women in key positions, whilst the conservative EPP has a more contradictory record, and the radical right groups may have women in their ranks but oppose gender equality (Kantola, 2022; Kantola and Rolandsen Agustín, 2019). The green/left groups have developed a number of practices to advance equality. These include the co-chair structure in Greens/EFA and left/green GUE/NGL, with leadership shared by a woman and a man. The Greens/EFA have explicit provisions for gender balance in their statutes, and the S&D has a quota provision for its bureau, which is implemented (Kantola, 2022). In contrast, the EPP has a quota provision for its presidency, which is not implemented. The green/left groups have developed other practices too. For example, in GUE/NGL, speaking time in group meetings is divided equally between genders, and women and men speakers are alternated on the list. The Greens/EFA has developed internal measures for ensuring gender mainstreaming of all policies, which includes training, and is looking into developing a gender action plan for the group. The radical right populist groups, by contrast, oppose gender equality, gender quotas and any 'programming' for gender equality, an issue we discuss in more detail in the next section.

INFORMAL POLITICAL PRACTICES IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: GENDERED NORMS, OPPOSITION TO GENDER EQUALITY

The feminist governance of actors and gender equality institutions is affected by existing informal gendered political practices, which can undermine gender equality progress achieved in formal political practices and institutions. We analyse such practices from a discursive feminist approach (Kantola and Lombardo, 2017a), asking the questions: to what extent are European Parliament political discourses and practices supportive of gender equality and feminist governance? And how does feminist agency counteract opposition that practices and discourses present to gender equality? In this section we address gendered discourses and practices that occur in the parliamentary 'workplace' (Erikson and Verge, 2022; Miller, 2021), as well as opposition to gender equality (Verloo, 2018), both of which slow down good feminist governance practices and gender equality policies. We also mention practices of feminist counter-resistance to informal gendered practices and opposition to gender equality in the European Parliament.

Gendered Practices as Informal Institutions in the European Parliament

Observed from the perspective of informal gendered norms developed by feminist institutionalism, the European Parliament enacts a variety of *informal gendered political practices* in the institution as a whole and in European Parliament's political parties and political groups (Berthet and Kantola, 2021; Kantola and Miller, 2021; Kantola and Rolandsen Agustín,

2019). Parliaments are gendered institutions. This genderedness is analysed by approaching parliaments not only as sites of democratic representation, but also as workplaces, whose organisational inequalities have gendered effects on descriptive, substantive and symbolic political representation. A number of scholarly works have studied the genderedness of parliaments by combining feminist institutionalism and Joan Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organisations that includes the dimensions of gendered division of labour, gendered interaction, gendered symbols and gendered subjectivities. This combination enables researchers to capture the production and reproduction of gendered norms and hierarchies in parliaments (see Erikson and Verge, 2022; Kantola and Rolandsen Agustín, 2019; Miller 2021). This involves enquiring into parliamentary practices such as those concerning recruitment and promotion of staff, work–family arrangements and anti-harassment policies, as well as observing gendered practices such as long-working-hours culture, hyper-masculine political performance, surveillance of women MEPs and 'burden of doubt' about their competencies, and prescription of behaviours considered acceptable for women and men or sanctioned for being inappropriate.

Research on the European Parliament shows that – despite the formal institutional structures for feminist governance outlined above – this institution is no exception among parliaments as regards the gendered division of labour based on seniority and gender stereotypes that symbolically associate women with less valued issues (that tend to include equality and 'soft' policies) and men with more important ones. The distribution of MEPs across committees shows that policy areas like economy and finance are still considered to belong to the competency of men, while women dominate in committees such as FEMM (Ahrens and Rolandsen Agustín, 2019; Kantola and Rolandsen Agustín, 2019; Nugent, 2019). This reveals the existence of informal norms of appropriateness in which gender marks the assignment of more prestigious and important committees to men, and less socially valued ones to women (Erikson and Verge, 2022).

Similarly, informal norms about politics as a full-time occupation and the lack of work–life balance structures and practices reward MEPs without care responsibilities – mostly men – and create hurdles for MEPs with caring responsibilities – mostly women – who find it difficult to attend late-hours meeting and participate in social events and thus be included in networking spaces that are important for political career, alliances and being perceived as legitimate 'insiders' (Erikson and Josefsson, 2022; Miller, 2021). Bodily performance and style of debate associated with hegemonic masculinity, including adversarial and aggressive style of speaking and loud voice, is another informal practice that rewards hyper-masculine men and tends to alienate women in parliaments (Erikson and Verge, 2022), creating affective atmospheres and 'tone of the office' that symbolically indicate women do not belong to the institution (Miller, 2021). In the European Parliament, this is the case especially for some committees related to economic policy (Elomäki, 2021; Kantola and Rolandsen Agustín, 2019).

We have discussed in the previous section how sexual harassment is formally addressed by the European Parliament's structures. Here we focus on the informal gendered structures which sustain it, despite the formal institutions. A number of factors make the European Parliament a workplace context exposed to sexual harassment. Gendered hierarchical distribution of power is a key factor in this respect. As Ahrens and Rolandsen Agustín (2019) state, men are overrepresented in top and middle management positions, while women are overrepresented in lower staff positions of the European Parliament; while data on intersections of gender with race, age and disability are lacking. Berthet and Kantola (2021) argue that the following elements create fertile ground for sexual harassment practices in the EP: existing inequalities,

hierarchy between staff and MEPs, the fact that MEPs enjoy parliamentary immunity that is interpreted in different ways in the European Parliament according to the different legislation and culture of the member states, the daily closeness of parliamentary assistants to their MEPs, and their dependence on MEPs for their job. In their analysis of sexual harassment in the European Parliament, Berthet and Kantola (2021) find that, while the issue is discursively contested in the institution, some actors resist sexual harassment policies by rejecting the fact that sexual harassment is an abuse of gender power and by framing it instead as a private and a cultural problem. They defend the European Parliament as a good institution and are more worried about the prestige of the parliament than the safety and well-being of harassed workers.

Polarisation Around and Opposition to Gender Equality

If the aforementioned informal practices manifest long-term resistance to gender equality policies not only typical of the European Parliament, the rise of populist and Eurosceptic MEPs and political groups in the European elections of 2014 has led to polarisation of debate and active *opposition* to gender equality and feminist governance. One such oppositional practice that has gendered dimensions and effects is the antagonistic norm of debate that is particularly employed by MEPs from radical right populist groups. A typical illustration is the radical right populist MEPs' use of hate speech against women and minorities in plenary debates. Hate speech – for example using racist or sexist stereotypes of women and minoritised people – seeks the silencing of political opponents by conveying a message of intimidation, discrimination and subordination of women and minorities to impose the domination of one social group over another (Mackinnon, 1979). In the European Parliament, the practice of hate speech is often conducted through the antagonistic use of 'blue-card questions' in plenary debates. This practice, which allows MEPs to ask direct questions of the speaker, has been employed by radical right populists to attack women and minorities through misogynistic, homophobic and racist speech and to make gender issues contentious (Kantola and Lombardo, 2021a; Kantola and Miller, 2021).

Antagonism implies treating opponents as enemies to be destroyed rather than as legitimate adversaries to argue with in agonistic ways (Mouffe, 2005). It is a key ingredient of populist ideology that opposes 'the elites' and defends 'the common people' (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013: 151). In addition, the populist political style tends not only to be adversarial, but also to be based on a performance and rhetoric of 'bad manners' that includes 'use of slang, swearing, political incorrectness' (Moffitt, 2019: 52). Scholarly works on gendering parliaments have shown that this adversarial norm of debate mimics and favours hegemonic masculinity and tends to 'alienate women MPs' (Erikson and Verge, 2022: 5). Research on gender and populism further exposes that antagonistic practices are detrimental to feminist politics, which rather privileges agonistic forms of political conflict based on the recognition of diversity and the questioning of power hierarchies (Caravantes, 2021; Kantola and Lombardo, 2019).

Opposition to gender equality and feminist governance in the European Parliament is also manifested through discursive strategies against gender equality and related policies expressed by radical right populist groups and MEPs in the plenary debates (Kantola and Lombardo, 2021a). These strategies can be both of direct opposition and indirect discursive opposition to gender equality and sexuality policies. However, they rarely have a specific impact on actual

legislative processes and rather serve to create a hostile atmosphere for gender equality. Direct opposition manifests itself through outright rejection of gender equality: questioning policy issues that are still controversial in the EU arena such as gender quotas and LGBTQI+ rights, as well as issues that have long been accepted in the EU (though not effectively implemented) such as equal pay and policies against gender-based violence. Direct opposition is also performed by denouncing gender equality policies and gender knowledge as 'gender ideology', that is, a form of indoctrination. This is part of anti-gender actors' process of resignification of the progressive concepts they oppose, with the aim of endowing them with negative meanings (see Kuhar and Paternotte, 2017). Radical right populist strategy of direct opposition discursively frames the EU and international actors as 'corrupt elites' supposedly seeking to impose a harmful 'gender ideology' on national politics, through policies such as sex education in schools or LGBTQI+ rights, interpreted as contrary to the supposedly natural categories of women, men and families (Kantola and Lombardo, 2021a).

Indirect opposition takes many forms. For example, Kantola and Lombardo's (2021a) study of opposition to gender equality in the European Parliament shows how it is embedded in Euroscepticism, with gender quotas and LGBTQI+ rights framed as being in the competency of national governments, not the EU. Another typical form of indirect opposition is the instrumental use of gender equality, bending it towards issues and goals other than gender equality. This is evident in ethnocentric and Islamophobic discourses that frame migrant people, especially Muslims, as a threat to national gender equality policies and native women. Other discourses of indirect opposition to gender equality in the European Parliament include the depoliticisation of gender by referring to biology – arguing, for example, that LGBTQI+ issues are a matter of biology rather than a matter of human rights.

Taken together, these practices of direct and indirect opposition to gender equality enacted by radical right populists in the European Parliament have consequences for feminist governance. The main effect is to make gender equality and feminist politics more contentious, as we have argued elsewhere (Kantola and Lombardo, 2021a). This polarisation shapes the meaning and borders of gender equality and gender equality policies and commitments in restrictive ways. Hate speech, misogynistic comments and 'bad manners' also contribute to create an aggressive and intimidating atmosphere that is not friendly to women MEPs and creates obstacles to feminist governance.

Formal norms were introduced in the European Parliament to address long-term gender inequalities as well as opposition to gender equality in the context of a more polarised European Parliament since 2014. This is the case of the amended Corbett report on the European Parliament's Rules of Procedure (P8 TA(2019)0046), prepared by an S&D MEP and adopted in plenary in 2019 (Kantola and Lombardo, 2021b). To address long-lasting inequalities, the Corbett report introduced gender-mainstreaming measures, parity democracy ('the diversity of Parliament must be reflected in the composition of the bureau of each committee; it shall not be permissible to have an all-male or all-female bureau' 204.1) and gender action plans for the parliament. In response to problems that have been put on the European Parliament's agenda in recent years, the report adopted provisions on hate speech (MEPs 'shall not resort to offensive language' such as 'defamatory language, "hate speech" and incitement to discrimination based, in particular, on any ground referred to in Article 21' 11.3c) and against sexual harassment (MEPs 'shall refrain from any type of psychological or sexual harassment' and 'respect the Code of appropriate behaviour for Members of the European Parliament' 11.3e).

Individual and collective feminist agency has developed to address informal gendered practices in the parliament. A good example of such feminist counter-resistance is the #MeTooEP movement that organised to demand policies against sexual harassment in the European Parliament. In their analysis of the #MeTooEP movement, Berthet and Kantola (2021) find that, although they did not achieve the transformation and policies they demanded, the #MeTooEP actors were effective in putting the issue on the agenda and articulating a 'harassed workers discourse'. Rather than employing the framing of sexual harassment more common in feminist circles as an abuse of gendered power, the #MeTooEP actors framed sexual harassment as a work problem, offering concrete and practical solutions to the problem based on the experience of the European Parliament's harassed workers. Also, transnational civil society organisations have readapted their feminist strategies to cope with the changed parliamentary context after the rise of radical right populist parties. Ahrens and Woodward (2020) find that, to bypass the decrease in their formal access to policymakers and funding, these organisations have devised new informal ways of accessing these resources, including the expansion of their network of alliances with civil society actors working on equality issues beyond gender, in an effort to promote gender equality policies in the European Parliament.

CONCLUSIONS

The European Parliament has created a series of formal institutions that support gender equality and feminist governance. The catalyst of feminist governance is the FEMM Committee, whose activity is essential to the integration of gender equality in parliament's work. Not only is FEMM the expert committee in charge of promoting gender equality issues, it also monitors gender mainstreaming in the EP, a practice that is uncommon among global parliaments. While the FEMM committee has been active in producing gender equality and gender-mainstreaming reports, effective implementation of its policies is hampered by its restricted formal powers and informal gendered norms about the limited importance of a gender equality committee as compared to other committees. The latter is shown both in routine activities such as the lack of consideration of FEMM meeting schedules in the organisation of the plenary calendar, and in moments of crisis, as the disregard of FEMM's recommendations on gender equality during the economic and Covid-19 crises. Feminist governance is also present in institutions to promote gender equality for staff, such as the Anti-Harassment Committee. In particular, the experience of #MeTooEP showed that collective mobilisation of staff is needed to activate and update existing institutions. Political groups of the parliament are important institutions for gender equality, as the difference in implementation of measures to advance gender equality between green/left and radical right groups shows.

Informal gendered political practices in the European Parliament are as important for feminist governance as the formal ones. Daily informal norms of parliamentary work tend to reward MEPs without care responsibilities, who tend to be men, or political performances associated with hegemonic masculinity, while generating resistance to consideration of women MEPs as legitimate 'insiders'. The rise of radical right populist parties in the European Parliament has intensified discourses and practices of opposition to gender equality, with the effect of making gender equality more contested and the environment more hostile to women MEPs, due to hate speech and other de-democratisation practices. Counter-resistance to such opposition has emerged, for instance through the #MeTooEP movement and the Corbett report's reform of

the EP rules of procedure, showing that the struggle for feminist governance in the European Parliament is ongoing and requires feminist actors to have the capacity to advance gender equality at the formal level as well as to develop informal strategies and broader alliances.[1]

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