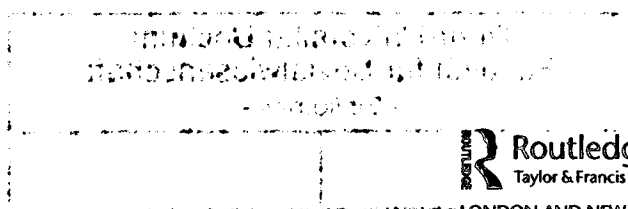# The Routledge Handbook of Gender and EU Politics

Edited by Gabriele Abels, Andrea Krizsán,
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Abbreviations and acronyms

ACP	Africa, Caribbean and Pacific
ACRE	Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists
AEMN	Alliance of European National Movements
AFCO	Committee on Constitutional Affairs, European Parliament
AfD	Alternative für Deutschland
AGRIFISH	Agriculture and Fisheries Council
AIDCO	EuropeAid Co-operation Office
ALDE	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
AP	action programme
APF	Alliance for Peace and Freedom
APPF	Authority for European Political Parties and European Political Foundations
AVFT	Association des victimes de harcèlement moral, psychologique, sexuel, dans le cadre du travail
BME	black and minority ethnic
CAHRV	Coordination Action on Human Rights Violations
CARD	Coordinated Annual Review on Defence
CDU	Christian Democratic Union of Germany
CEAS	Common European Asylum System
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, United Nations
CEDEFOP	European Center for the Development of Vocational Training
CEE	central and eastern Europe
CETA	Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement
CFR	Charter of Fundamental Rights
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CJEU	Court of Justice of the European Union
CoE	Council of Europe
CoFoE	Conference on the Future of Europe
COMPET	Competitiveness Council
COREPER	Comité des représentants permanents
CPCC	Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability
CPE	critical political economy

CRC	Combahee River Collective
CROME	Critical Research on Men in Europe
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
CSMM	Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities
CSO	civil society organization
CSPEC	Confederation of Socialist Parties in the European Community
CSR	country-specific recommendation
DEVAW	Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women
DF	Dansk Folkeparti, Danish Peoples' Party
DG	Directorate-General
DG CLIMA	Directorate-General for Climate Action
DG DEFIS	Directorate-General for Defence Industry and Space
DG DEVCO	Directorate-General International Cooperation and Development
DG ECFIN	Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs
DG EMPL	Directorate-General Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities
DG Justice	Directorate-General Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship
DG RELEX	Directorate-General for External Relations
DG RTD	Directorate-General for Research and Innovation
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
EAEC	European Atomic Energy Community
EASO	European Asylum Support Office
EC	European Communities
ECB	European Central Bank
ECD	European Consensus on Development
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Council of Europe)
ECJ	European Court of Justice
ECOFIN	Economic and Financial Affairs Council
ECPM	European Christian Political Movement
ECR	European Conservatives and Reformists
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
ECU	European Currency Unit
EDC	European Defence Community
EDF	European Development Fund
EDP	European Democratic Party
EDP	excessive deficit procedure
EEAS	European External Action Service
EEC	European Economic Community
EES	European Employment Strategy
EFA	European Free Alliance
EFDD	Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy
EFTA	European Free Trade Association

EGC	European Green Coordination
EGP	European Green Party
EIDHR	European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights
EIGE	European Institute for Gender Equality
EL	Party of the European Left
ELDR	European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party
ELSA	Ethical, Legal and Social Aspects
EMPL	Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, European Parliament
EMS	European Monetary System
EMU	Economic and Monetary Union
ENF	Europe of Nations and Freedom
ENoMW	European Network of Migrant Women
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
ENVI	Environment Council
EP	European Parliament
EPA	Economic Partnership Agreement
EPG	European party groups
EPLO	European Peacebuilding Liaison Office
EPO	European Protection Order
EPP	European People's Party
EPRS	European Parliamentary Research Service
EPSCO	Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council
EPSR	European Pillar of Social Rights
ERA	European Research Area
ERG	European Research Group
ERM	Exchange Rate Mechanism
ESC	Economic and Social Committee
ESDP	European Security and Defence Policy
ESF	European Social Fund
ESS	European Security Strategy
ESS	European Social Survey
ETF	European Training Foundation
ETS	Emissions Trading System
ETUC	European Trade Union Confederation
EU	European Union
EUCO	European Council
EUMC	European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia
EU OSHA	European Agency for Safety and Health at Work
EUPP	Euro Plus Pact
Euratom	European Atomic Energy Community
EUROFOUND	European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

EWL	European Women's Lobby
EYCS	Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council
FAC	Foreign Affairs Council
FEMM	Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, European Parliament
FGM	female genital mutilation
FI	feminist institutionalism
FP	Framework Programme
FPE	feminist political economy/feminist political economist
FRA	European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
GAC	General Affairs Council
GAD	Gender and Development
GAP	Gender Action Plan
GDP	gross domestic product
GER	gender equality regime
GFP	gender focal person
GIA	gender impact assessment
GM	gender mainstreaming
GSC	General Secretariat of the Council
GSP	Generalised System of Preferences
GUE	European United Left
HR/VP	High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/ Vice President
IcSP	Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace
ID	Identity & Democracy Group
ILGA	International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPU-PACE	Inter-Parliamentary Union and Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
ITC	International Trade Centre
JHA	Justice and Home Affairs Council
JRC	Joint Research Centre
LGBT	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender
LGBTI	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex
LGBTIQA+	lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans/transgender, intersex, queer/ questioning, and asexual
LI	liberal intergovernmentalism
LIBE	Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, European Parliament
MENF	Movement for a Europe of Nations and Freedom
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MP	Member of Parliament

MPCC	Military Planning and Conduct Capability
MTO	Medium–Term Objective
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NFMM	Nordic Association for Research on Men and Masculinities
NGL	Nordic Green Left
NGO	non-governmental organization
NI	new institutionalism
OLP	ordinary legislative procedure
OMC	open method of coordination
OJ	Official Journal of the European Union
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PES	Party of European Socialists
PESCO	permanent structured cooperation
PHARE	Poland and Hungary Assistance for Economic Reconstruction
PiS	Polish Law and Justice Party
PPEU	European Pirate Party
PPP	public–private partnerships
PTA	preferential trade agreement
PVV	Partij voor de Vrijheid, Dutch Freedom Party
QMV	qualified majority vote
R&D	research and development
RE	Renew Europe
RN	Rassemblement National
RRI	responsible research and innovation
RRP	radical right-wing parties
RRP	radical-right politics
RTD	research and technological development
RWP	right-wing populism
S&D	Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SEA	Single European Act
SEDE	Committee on Security and Defence, European Parliament
SGP	Stability and Growth Pact
SIA	sustainability impact assessment
SOTEU	State of the Union address
STOP	Sexual Trafficking of Persons
TCN	third-country national
TEU	Treaty on European Union
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
TRAN	Committee on Transport and Tourism, European Parliament
TSCG	Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance
TSD	trade and sustainable development
TTE	Transport, Telecommunication and Energy Council
TTIP	Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership

UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UKIP	UK Independence Party
UN	United Nations
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
V4	Visegrád countries
VAW	violence against women
WasH	Women against sexual harassment
WAVE	Women Against Violence Europe
WEU	Western European Union
WEUCO	Women's European Council
WID	Women in Development policy
WIDE	Women in Development Europe
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
WTO	World Trade Organization

Part II

Gendering the EU polity and structures of governance

Institutions and structures of governance have traditionally been at the centre of the study of European integration. Since the early days of neo-functionalist and intergovernmental analyses, mainstream scholars have investigated the powers of the various institutions and the ways in which these institutions interact with one another and the member states. Until the mid 1990s, both the gender of the individuals in those institutions, as well as the gendered practices of the institutions themselves went largely uninvestigated. However, as equality between women and men emerged as an important policy area for the EU, scholars began to dig more deeply into the gender aspects of the institutions themselves. Gender analyses have since highlighted that the dominance of men within the EU and EU studies has contributed to a hegemonic masculinity that permeates both the EU and its academic field of study. Considering these institutions and their powers through a gendered lens opens new avenues of inquiry and draws attention to different forms of power within and between the institutions.

Compared with some other aspects of gender and the EU that are addressed in this Handbook, the EU institutions have garnered a fair amount of attention from gender scholars over the years. Beginning with Catherine Hoskyns' 1996 work *Integrating Gender: Women Law and Politics in the European Union*, feminists have turned their attention to the EU institutions to show how they contribute to, and hinder, the development of women's rights. At least three themes are readily identifiable. First, many feminist scholars have looked at questions of gender and participation and representation in the individual institutions. This leads them to ask questions about where women are in the institutions, and what sort of power, women (and members of other marginalized groups) are able to exercise. From these observations, scholars have since begun to consider how diversity of representation may influence policy outcomes. In other words, they are interested in understanding how policy outcomes might change through the increased participation and inclusion of marginalized individuals. In the past decades, this strand of research has included a significant amount of research around gender mainstreaming, gender budgeting, positive action and gendered policy outcomes. Finally, in recent years gender scholars have increasingly turned their attention to the ways in which the institutions, rules, norms and processes of the EU are themselves embedded with an inherent masculinity.

The chapters in this part all focus on one or more of these themes. Chapters consider the three legislative institutions as well as the courts. Additionally, several authors pay attention to supporting institutions including agencies and the External Action Service. By considering the interaction between women and the structures, these chapters shed light on the institutional barriers to equality, as well as the ways in which these advocates use the structures to advance a gender-friendly agenda. It becomes apparent that, overall, the European institutions have generally been active advocates for gender equality, although the level of commitment varies among institutions and over time. Some bodies, like the Parliament were early adopters of institutionalized gender equality machinery, while other institutions such as the Council may be viewed as less gender-friendly. However, the chapters importantly also show where the EU institutions fall short of their formal commitment to gender equality.

Not surprisingly, there are still a number of avenues of inquiry that remain underexplored, both in this Handbook and in the broader field of gender and EU studies. In particular, scholars must continue to broaden their application of a gendered lens to the myriad of institutions in the European Union. Bodies such as Comité des représentants permanents (COREPER), expert networks, informal decision-making bodies and smaller, but extremely important bodies, such as the governing Council of the European Central Bank must be subjected to a gender analysis in order to gain a fuller understanding of the gender structures at play in the EU. Furthermore, the relationship between institutions, for example in the trilogue process, could be analyzed through a gendered lens to highlight systemic inequalities resulting from informal rules and norms. Finally, gender scholars need to continue to address intersectional inequalities and the role of intersectional politics in the institutions. While some scholars have started to look at intersectionality in the institutions, this research is mainly confined to the European Parliament. In coming years this needs to be broadened to include all of the European institutions.

The chapters in this part are a strong indication of how much headway gender analyses have made in field of EU studies. We hope that these discussions will continue to spark debate and spur on research across other bodies and institutions.

9

European Parliament

Petra Ahrens[1] and Lise Rolandsen Agustín

The first direct elections to the European Parliament were held in 1979. However, its predecessor, the Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community, dates back to 1951. This body was part of the European Economic Community and the European Atomic Energy Community and had nationally appointed, rather than elected, members. The first meeting of the current institution took place in 1958, when it was called the European Parliamentary Assembly; the name was changed to European Parliament in 1962. Since 1979, members of the European Parliament (MEPs) have been elected through nationally organized elections every five years, based on the 1976 European Electoral Act. The elections are governed by common European rules as well as specific national provisions (EPRS Briefing (2019) 642250). According to the former, European Union (EU) citizens are entitled to vote and run for European elections in their member state of residency even if they are not nationals of that country. For example, a German living in Spain can vote and run for office in Spain. Elections are based on proportional representation and member states decide whether to use an open or closed list system or single transferable vote system. Similarly, national provisions differ in terms of election days, thresholds, voting age, number of constituencies, and compulsory voting.

Competences have increased over time and the European Parliament is seen as a second, equally important channel for creating legitimacy within the EU. Arguably, increasing the power of the only directly elected EU institution has helped to diminish the infamous democratic deficit of the EU (see Moravcsik 2002). The changing powers and composition of the European Parliament has meant that the parliamentarization of EU politics has gained more scholarly attention over time (see Crum and Fossum 2013; Ripoll Servent 2018). With the introduction of the co-decision procedure in 1992 the European Parliament's powers have gradually evolved. In the Amsterdam Treaty, co-decision was expanded to an increased number of policy areas; in 2009, the Lisbon Treaty renamed the process, the ordinary legislative procedure (OLP), implying the new norm of including Parliament as co-legislator in most policy decisions. The European Parliament also shares budgetary authority to decide and approve the annual budget with the Council of the EU (see Abels in this volume).

The European Parliament is also involved in vetting and approving the European Commission (see Hartlapp et al. in this volume). Additionally, Article 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of

the EU (TFEU) specifies that the European Parliament and the Council "are jointly responsible for the smooth running of the process leading to the election of the President of the European Commission"; it specifically notes that the process shall take "account of the elections to the European Parliament". In practice, the Parliament votes to approve the Commission President and subsequently the entire College of Commissioners, as a collective body. It has objected individual Commission candidates several times. In 2004, for example, the conservative Rocco Buttiglione (EPP) was rejected due to his comments on the traditional role of women in households and homosexuality as a sin (Corbett et al. 2016, 344). After the 2019 elections, it rejected three candidates: French liberal Sylvie Goulard (Renew Europe), who responded too vaguely to the scrutinizing committee's questions on its ethical concerns about her conduct as former MEP and the broad nature of the Internal Market portfolio that she was foreseen for; the Romanian social democrat Rovana Plumb (S&D) and the Hungarian conservative László Trócsányi (EPP) were rejected before their parliamentary hearings due to potential conflict of interests assessed on the basis of their declarations of financial interests.

Over time, the European Parliament has developed new practices to further enact, sustain and extend its own powers. Beginning in 2014, it encouraged its political groups to nominate candidates for the position of Commission President, also known as the *Spitzenkandidatur* process. This contributed to actual campaigns for the Commission presidency as part of the European election campaign and included televised debates among pan-European candidates. However, there is no formal obligation for the European Council to accept this process, and the 2019 nomination of German conservative Ursula von der Leyen as Commission President, despite not being a *Spitzenkandidatin*, is an example of the power struggle among EU institutions.

This chapter considers the gendered nature of the European Parliament as an institution by accounting for recent gender research and relating this to mainstream EU literature. The first section addresses four key elements of parliamentary politics in the EU: candidates and MEPs, political groups, committees, and structures and policies. The second section focuses on research gaps and directions for future research on three selected areas: intersectionality; the role of the Parliament in relation to the other EU institutions; and national/transnational dynamics.

Gendering the European Parliament

Research on the European Parliament is rich and diverse (e.g. Corbett et al 2016; Ripoll Servent 2018), but gender aspects have been largely disregarded in mainstream literature. Research specifically on gender and the European Parliament has focused on the ways in which the institutions and its main components (elections, political groups, committees) are gendered and, moreover, how policies adopt, or fail to adopt, a gender perspective. The former relates mainly to descriptive and substantive representation (that is, how many women are represented and where their interests are represented), as well as to the gendered practices of politics. The latter concerns agenda-setting and policy-making processes as well as the structures hindering or facilitating gender awareness and implementation. The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE 2020; see Jacquot and Krizsán in this volume) builds upon this systematization in its "Gender-sensitive Parliaments Tool". The European Parliament is currently ranked number three in this tool (scoring 75.8 out of 100) compared to member states' national parliaments. In the following we address these various dimensions by presenting and discussing research on candidates and MEPs, political groups, committees, as well as structures and policies.

Candidates and MEPs

European elections have been often characterized as "second-order elections", implying they are less important than national elections (Ripoll Servent 2018). This is reflected in the argument that the electoral campaigns are not about European politics as such, but rather, a matter of voters evaluating national parties and punishing or rewarding these national parties for political decisions in the domestic sphere (Hix and Lord 1997). Indeed, electoral turnout has followed a downward development over the years, from 62% in the first direct elections in 1979 to an all-time low of 43% in 2014 (European Parliament 2019, 34). The 2019 elections showed a slight increase across member states, with an overall turnout of 51% and national differences ranging from a low of 28% in Slovakia to a high of 88% in Belgium (European Parliament 2019, 36). According to Kostelka, Blais and Gidengil (2019, 446–448), the gender gap in national elections has closed over time, but remains for supranational (and sub-national) elections. In 2019, the average turnout was still higher among men (52%) than women (49%), but the gap had narrowed considerably in all countries. Moreover, while more men voted in 15 countries, in 13 countries more women voted (European Parliament 2019, 38; Fortin-Rittberger and Ramstetter in this volume). A key reason is an "unequal psychological engagement in politics" that is amplified for "elections of lower importance" such as European elections (Kostelka et al. 2019, 452–456). Whether the recent changes mean that European elections are becoming more salient or whether women are becoming more politically engaged requires further research.

The number of MEPs has gradually increased to 751 due to the enlargement of the EU; this is the maximum number set in the treaties. However, due to the UK withdrawal the number
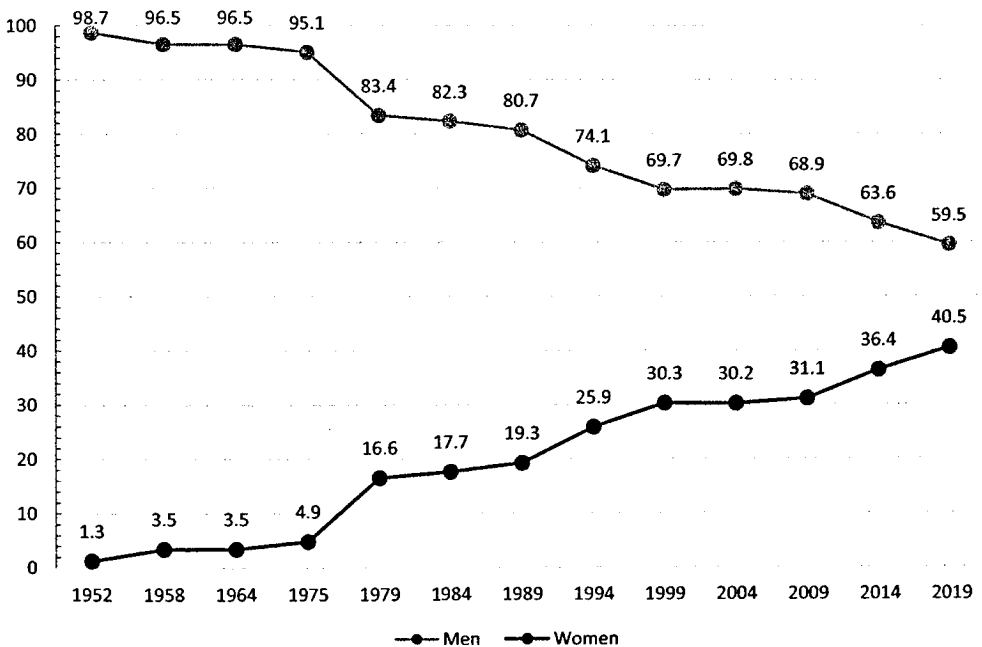

Figure 9.1 Members of the European Parliament, 1952–2019 (%)

Source: Graph and calculation by authors. Data from European Parliament 2018b, 5 and https://election-results.eu/mep-gender-balance/2019–2024/.

of MEPs has decreased by 46 seats so that the Parliament, as it stands right now (March 2020), is composed of 705 MEPs. The seats are distributed among the member states on the basis of the size of the population and the principle of degressive proportionality; accordingly, larger member states (Germany: 96) have proportionally fewer seats than smaller member states (Malta, Cyprus: 6). The gender gap among the elected MEPs has decreased over the years (see Figure 9.1); whereas only 15% women MEPs were elected in 1979, the results of the 2019 European elections showed the highest descriptive representation of women in the history of the institution, with 40.6% women candidates gaining a seat (39.5% after Brexit; European Parliament 2020). Often, "the European Parliament is heralded as one of the most gender-equal elected bodies in the world" (Fortin-Rittberger and Rittberger 2014, 1).

A study commissioned by the European Parliament shows that the remaining gender gap is largely due to underrepresentation of women candidates. National parties act as gatekeepers and the composition of electoral lists are to blame, rather than voter preferences (EPRS_BRI(2019)635548). Analysing the 2014 European elections, Aldrich (2018, 2) argues that party strategy and electoral rules matter to the gendered composition of electoral lists but "these effects are mediated by party organization … The nomination of women in parties utilizing centralized selection is much less likely to be affected by electoral conditions" and vice versa. This means that "party-level contextual factors" need to be considered when discussing the conditions leading to a more gender-balanced representation on electoral lists (Aldrich 2018, 2). A study conducted by the European Parliament itself also highlights the lack of encouragement by Europarties towards their national member parties to support measures enhancing women's representation on party lists (EPRS_BRI(2019)635548, 7). The Parliament itself has adopted several resolutions welcoming quota initiatives at national level; however, recent attempts to include gender quotas in reforming the European Electoral Act have been rejected by the Council (EPRS_BRI(2019)635548, 9), even though we have witnessed a "gender quota revolution" (Lépinard and Rubio-Marín 2018) at national level. Party and legislative quotas are on the rise in member states and such quota then also pertain to European elections (see EPRS Briefing (2019) 642250).

Currently, descriptive representation of women in the European Parliament is significantly above the national parliamentary average of 30%. Thus, one of the key questions addressed in the literature tries to understand this difference. Following the 2019 EU elections, women MEPs made up 40.5% of the representatives (Abels 2020). Sweden had sent the most women MEPs (55%), followed by Finland with 54% and several member states reached 50% gender representation (Austria, France, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands and Slovenia). At the bottom, we find Cyprus, with no women among the state's six representatives. Slovakia (15%), Romania (22%) and Greece (24%) also fared poorly (European Parliament 2019a). National variations make the European Parliament especially appropriate to look for explanations of the descriptive representation gap between the European and member states' parliaments. Two basic models, which distinguish between the supply-side, focusing on the candidates and their motivations and characteristics, and the demand-side, including recruitment patterns, electoral rules, party dynamics, etc., explain the gap (Krook 2010; Norris and Lovenduski 1995). Supply-side explanations suggest that women are more motivated to run for European elections (compared to the national level), whereas demand-side explanations look at electoral rules and the parties' role in recruiting women candidates for European elections. Fortin-Rittberger and Rittberger (2014) argue that electoral rules are not causally related to descriptive representation in the case of the European Parliament, refuting the claim that proportional electoral systems can explain the gender gap. Also drawing on a demand-side explanation, Chiva (2014) argues that the

electoral system or the left–right divide of the political parties, offer at best, limited explanations of the variations in women's representation in the new member states. Instead, she finds that the party's position on European integration is a key explanatory factor for gendered recruitment strategies. Accordingly, "political parties with a positive stance towards European integration are more likely to take the norms of equality they perceive as dominant in the European Union into consideration when selecting their candidates" (Chiva 2014, 461). Forest (2015) compares trends in the old and the new member states and finds that in central and eastern Europe, women candidates represent an intellectual political elite with stronger political capital and longer educational background than women candidates in the old member states.

Chiva (2019) further argues that, because the "rules of the game" differ between the national and European context, substantive representation of women is also different. Gender equality is an established norm in the EU treaties and policy-making, creating an environment more conducive to the participation of women MEPs. Moreover, she finds that there is "little evidence to suggest that the [European Parliament] has become more conservative after the Eastern enlargement" (Chiva 2019, 197); rather women MEPs from the central and eastern European member states seem to have been socialized into the gender equality norms of the EU institutions, and the European Parliament in particular. Further research is required to trace the origins of socialization pressures and whether they also operate for other groups of MEPs, for instance newly incoming MEPs from old member states.

Another hypothesis considers European elections as "second-order" and thus less important than national elections, because they are not about power politics in terms of forming a government. This suggests that women have easier access to this arena since the level of competition is lower (Vallance and Davies 1986). Hence, as the powers of the EU have gradually grown, we would expect the representation gap between national and European levels to decrease (Fortin-Rittberger and Rittberger 2014). Similarly, the representation of women should decrease as the Parliament's powers increase. This has not happened. Instead women's representation has grown along with the expansion of European Parliament powers. Consequently, Abels (2019, 19) suggests that the relationship between feminization and parliamentarization of the European Parliament is "highly complex".

Political groups

Candidates typically run for election as representatives of their national parties. As elected MEPs, they represent their national party and their electoral constituency and, at the same time, they organize as part of transnational political groups (see Ahrens and Rolandsen Agustín (European Parliament) in this volume). A political group is composed of at least 23 MEPs representing a minimum of seven member states. After elections each political group elects a chair or several co-chairs as well as a bureau and a secretariat. In the 2019–2024 legislature (post-Brexit) there are seven political groups representing a classical left–right spectrum of political affiliation and ideology: the European People's Party (EPP; 187 MEPs), the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D; 147 MEPs), Renew Europe (98 MEPs), Identity and Democracy (ID; 76 MEPs), Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA; 67 MEPs), European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR; 61 MEPs), and the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL; 39 MEPs). MEPs choosing not to belong to a political group are defined as "non-attached members" (29 MEPs).

The gender composition of these political groups varies between 32% in the ECR to almost 53% in the Greens/EFA group. Historically, the Greens/EFA have had the highest representation of women, with the exception of the 2014–2019 legislature (Kantola and Rolandsen Agustín 2019).

Renew Europe (formerly Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe) shows the steepest development from 8% in 1979 to 47% in 2019. The two largest groups, EPP and S&D, have followed similar development paths, with S&D typically having approximately 10% more female representation than the EPP. In the period from 1979 to 2019, women's representation increased from 8% to 34% for the EPP and 21% to 43% for S&D. Women's representation even grew in the Eurosceptic right-wing groups, starting at 13% in 2009 and currently at 32% (ECR group) and from 31% in 2014 to 40% in 2019 in ID (formerly ENF) (see Figure 19.1 in this volume). The development over time shows that all groups have contributed to the general increase in women's descriptive representation in the European Parliament. However, with very few exceptions, centre-left and leftist groups deliver higher percentages of female representation than centre-right and right-wing groups. Greens/EFA have consistently been at the top, except for the 2014 elections when the group was surpassed in women's representation by GUE/NGL and S&D.

This increase does not translate into leadership positions such as chairs and co-chairs in the same way. In the 2019–2024 legislature, only 30% of political group chairs are women. Yet, all political groups in the current legislature have an equal share of women and men among committee chairs, except for S&D (60% women) and Greens/EFA (100%, one woman) as well as GUE/NGL (100%, one man). Political groups usually assign leadership positions (including rapporteurships) to national delegation leaders or long-term MEPs, who are predominantly men, thus once more reproducing gender imbalances.

Substantive representative of women in the political groups can be understood by considering their positioning in different policy fields (see Ahrens and Rolandsen Agustín (Party politics) in this volume). Political groups follow the classic left/right divide with left-leaning groups demonstrating more gender equality and gender-sensitivity in their policies, and typically also showing a high degree of women's descriptive representation (Kantola and Rolandsen Agustín 2016; 2019). The right-leaning groups have weaker gender-awareness and gender equality policies. This is reflected in their voting patterns on gender equality proposals. However, gender equality issues can be highly controversial and the specific position of a political group is highly dependent on the context of the policy issue at hand. For example, policies such as sexual and reproductive health and rights can highlight large internal differences within the individual groups (Kantola and Rolandsen Agustín 2019). Mainstream literature argues that political groups are increasingly coherent with party discipline strictly enforced. Yet, Bowler and McElroy (2015) showed that divisive policy issues between political groups lower intra-group cohesion. Similarly, gendered analyses found that the politicized nature of gender equality results in lower intra-group cohesion in the 2009–2014 and 2014–2019 legislature (Warasin et al. 2019). Yet, the lower cohesion rates (compared to all policy areas on average) vary strongly between the political groups: they are lower for EPP, ALDE, EFDD, ENF and ECR and higher for S&D, Greens/EFA and GUE/NGL. This allows the latter to build a strong alliance in the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) (Warasin at al. 2019, 148–149).

Furthermore, gender research emphasizes the role of internal rules and networks within parties as a means of enhancing women's representation and supporting gender equality policies. For instance, in the European Parliament, the Greens/EFA, have rules in place to ensure a gender balance in appointments and elections. Several other groups have adopted various measures to support women candidates (EPRS_BRI(2019)635548). The EPP has the "W group" (for "Women"), which is an informal network pushing for more women in European Parliament leadership positions and coordinating efforts to put gender equality on the political group agenda (Kantola and Rolandsen Agustín 2019). Whether or not such measures improve substantive representation requires more research.

Committees

The largest portion of day-to-day work is carried out in committees consisting of between 25 and 73 MEPs, with groups represented proportional to their position in the Parliament. Currently, there are 20 standing committees divided into specific policy areas, plus two sub-committees. Each committee has a chair, a bureau and a secretariat, and MEPs acting as rapporteurs. In the committees, policy reports are drafted, debated, amended and voted upon before they reach the plenary where they are adopted or rejected. The committees are characterized by a rather trad-itional gendered division of labour with high representation of women in the FEMM committee and the committees on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL), and Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE), and low representation in Constitutional Affairs (AFCO), Security and Defense (SEDE), and Transport and Tourism (TRAN) (Abels 2020; European Parliament 2014).

Gender research has mainly focused on FEMM as the European Parliament's gender equality machinery, along with the High Level Group on Gender Equality and Diversity, the Gender Mainstreaming Network, and the Group of Equality and Diversity Coordinators as well as the Equality and Diversity Unit in the European Parliament administration. The FEMM committee, fully established in 1984, institutionalized earlier ad hoc committees initiated as early as 1979. It differs from most other parliamentary committees, because its membership is voluntary and "neu-tral" (i.e. MEPs can still be full member of another committee), and its output is predominantly non-legislative (Ahrens 2016). Renman and Conroy (2014) argue that European Parliament committees headed by women are weak in power terms; FEMM, in particular, is powerless and hardly involved in legislative procedures. Moreover, "men are significantly less likely to be on the FEMM Committee than women, and once on the committee are less likely to take an active role in the work of the committee" (Nugent 2019, 138). In contrast, Ahrens (2016) has found that FEMM has made cre-ative use of its power and institutional possibilities to the fullest, ensuring "institutional persistence", "thematic inclusion" and "networked integration". It has drafted own-initiative reports "in order to promote public debate on questions of gender equality in a range of areas" (Jacquot 2017, 38). Nonetheless, in 1998 and again in 2000, as gender mainstreaming initiatives led to the (presumed) inclusion of gender perspectives in other European Parliament committees, there was discussion as to whether FEMM ought to be abolished (Ahrens 2016; Lombardo and Verloo 2009).

The FEMM Committee is often characterized as a consensus-seeking, feminist-activist arena where important agenda-setting for EU gender equality policy takes place (Ahrens 2018a; Jacquot 2015; Rolandsen Agustín 2012). In recent legislatures, FEMM has also attracted MEPs of the right-wing groups, who denounce EU gender equality policy and the work of FEMM as "gender ideology" (Korolczuk and Graff 2018). Anti-gender attacks occur in FEMM and in plenary (Kemper 2014), even though MEPs from populist and radical right parties rarely engage as (shadow) rapporteur in any parliamentary committee or in inter-institutional "trilogues"[2] (McDonnell and Werner 2019; Ripoll and Panning 2019; including FEMM, see Ahrens 2018b). Thus, contestation over gender equality thrives both within and between political groups.

Additional formal and informal structures

Abels (2019) underlines that the European Parliament has not followed the expected dynamic of "power in, gender out", in other words, women's representation has increased as the European Parliament has gained institutional power. The share of women in parliamentary leadership positions has also steadily increased over time. At the top leadership level, the President of the Parliament along with the chairs of the political groups set the agenda and timetable of the

European Parliament; they agree on the committee setup. The first President of the elected European Parliament was Simone Veil (1979–1982); since then, however, only one of the following 16 presidents was a woman, namely Nicole Fontaine (1999–2002). In the 2019–2024 legislature, women provide 55% of the committee chairs (12 out of 22), and 57% of the vice-presidents (eight out of 14); this is a significant increase from the previous legislature (36% and 21%, respectively). Apart from data on descriptive representation, at present, no research investigates how gender equality inside the European Parliament is influenced by various political–administrative functions.

Mushaben (2019, 80), however, finds that the potential "critical mass" of more than 30% women within the European Parliament is undermined by "gender-blind institutional reforms". Here, she refers specifically to the new power balances emerging from the rise of intergovernmentalism and the increased use of trilogues to fast-track legislation, at the expense of transparency. Mushaben argues that women have increased their representation in the European Parliament, but have not experienced a similar rise in their influence. Hence, women have gained descriptive but not substantive representation.

So-called intergroups, i.e. informal groups with MEPs and external (informal) members from civil society organizations, are also 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 had an important role in mobilizing for LGBT rights, particularly during the enlargement to central and eastern Europe (Kristoffersson et al. 2016, 50–52). Other intergroups, such as the Intergroups on Anti-Racism & Diversity, on Disability, or on Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity, also draw attention to intersectional equality.

A wide variety of other administrative groups are important to the smooth operation of the European Parliament. This includes, for example, the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) and the secretariats supporting parliamentary committees. The EPRS, for instance, publishes fact sheets and reports on gender equality, often commissioned by FEMM. Yet, all of these structures are under-researched, particularly from a gender perspective.

European Parliament policies and gender equality

Gender research has also focused on specific policy areas, addressing the parliamentary policy processes as part of the bigger picture of EU integration. Policy areas such as employment, economy and gender-based violence have been analysed extensively (see Cengiz 2019; Jacquot 2017; Montoya 2013). These studies highlight that the EU is not a unitary actor; we must analyse and evaluate differences between and also within institutions, from a gender perspective. The European Parliament, or more specifically the FEMM Committee, typically acts as the main gender actor in policy-making and seeks to add a gender perspective on otherwise "ungendered" issues. FEMM, for instance, played an important agenda-setting role on the issue of domestic violence, leading the European Parliament to become a frontrunner on the policy issue in the 1980s, well ahead of many member states (Montoya and Rolandsen Agustín 2013). Through strategic framing the Parliament was able to maximize its policy-making influence. This illustrates the ways in which the institution has used its powers to the fullest. Accepting a de-gendered framing of violence against women as a public health problem, the European Parliament maximized its influence and took advantage of the fact that the issue fell under the co-decision procedure, giving the European Parliament more power than it may have otherwise had (Rolandsen Agustín 2013; see Roggeband in this volume). A similar strategic move secured the 1992 maternity leave directive. However, the European Parliament was unable to bring a revised version of the directive in 2015 (Kluger Dionigi 2017; Milner in this volume).

Another example of FEMM's agenda-setting and institutionalization power is the effort to adopt and implement gender mainstreaming in the European Parliament itself. To this end, FEMM engineered a system of monitoring and evaluation, which made "it almost impossible for the EP to forget about the new [gender mainstreaming] rules" and served to enhance its power (Ahrens 2019, 100). With respect to the economic and financial crisis, FEMM was agenda-setter again, emphasizing the gendered consequences of austerity policies (see Kantola and Lombardo in this volume). The Committee was also an important reflection of the contestation among political groups around the issue of solidarity. Attempts to influence policies and policy-making in the Commission and the Council were unsuccessful, and the overall EU policy remained quite gendered (Cavaghan 2017; Guerrina 2017; Jacquot 2017; Kantola and Rolandsen Agustin 2016). The European Parliament is characterized as an "institutional advocate of gender budgeting", but has been similarly unsuccessful in bringing about actual policy change, partly due to the "fragmented nature of the Parliament as an institution comprising of various committees and groups with varying priorities and interests" (Cengiz 2019, 104) and "its limited veto powers within the budgetary process vis-a-vis the national governments and the overarching neoliberal efficiency and competitiveness discourse dominating EU policies and politics" (Cengiz 2019, 119). The European Parliament's role in promoting gender equality in foreign affairs and development policy is even less pronounced; gender aspects are appended, treated in a narrow way, and typically addressed in separate institutional units instead of as a cross-cutting issue (Allwood 2013; Debusscher in this volume).

Without doubt, the European Parliament has played a prominent role in setting the agenda and advancing specific gender equality policies at the supranational level. It has been decisive in expanding the policy scope of the EU from gender equality related exclusively to the labour market to other areas including education, gender-based violence and migration (van der Vleuten 2019). Concurrently, the European Parliament has contributed to the re-interpretation of the EU's policy competences in the field of gender equality by articulating a supranational argument for the development of new policies and the expansion into new policy fields. Thus, in many regards the Parliament has driven gender equality policy and its Europeanization forward. In the process, the institution has also been active in branding itself as the key "equality promoter" of the EU (Ahrens 2019). In addition, a significant amount of gender knowledge is produced by the European Parliament through studies and reports. Despite this active role, recent research has questioned the notion of the Parliament as a consistently progressive gender equality actor. Van der Vleuten (2019) argues that the European Parliament's history and its development illustrates that women's substantive representation and support for gender equality policies has not increased in parallel with descriptive representation. Nonetheless, the norm entrepreneurship of "committed individuals" has been important and it has strengthened women's substantive representation, with the FEMM Committee working as "a node of a transnational 'velvet' network of engaged individuals, experts and femocrats, national MPs and non-governmental organizations", which was especially influential in the 1980s and 1990s (van der Vleuten 2019, 47). Finally, the European Parliament has made efforts to enhance EU legitimacy by emphasizing social policies, including gender equality policies. However, van der Vleuten (2019) finds that the legitimacy argument has become less powerful given the economic costs of gender equality policies along with the ideological contestation of gender ideology from the right-wing.

Moving forward: research gaps and directions for future research

Even though gender research into the European Parliament is growing, there are still numerous gaps that deserve more attention. In the following, we highlight three points

for future research: intersectionality, institutional interrelations and national/transnational dynamics.

There is a lack of research around the composition of the Parliament and its political groups from an intersectional perspective, e.g. including ethnic background, disability, sexual orientation. An intersectional approach could similarly offer insight into European Parliament policies and debates. Some light has been shed on how intersectionality was addressed in, for instance, internal struggles about whether to establish a specific gender equality agency, EIGE, or an integrated equality body (Lombardo and Verloo 2009; on EIGE see Jacquot and Krizsán in this volume) and to gender-based violence policies (Lombardo and Rolandsen Agustín 2011) as reflection of #MeToo in the European Parliament. Yet, overall research on its structures, policies and practices from an intersectional perspective is rare.

The relationships among the European Parliament and other EU institutions, stakeholders and civil society have also received considerably less attention than its internal dimensions and elements. There is a need to explore the Parliament's role in the broader context of today's EU gender equality policy-making, not least because the new provisions of the 2009 Lisbon Treaty, which provide the European Parliament with more power, are still changing existing practices and rules. Feminist institutionalism suggests that institutions and their formal and informal rules are gendered (see MacRae and Weiner in this volume); thus, the implementation of new treaties may create opportunities to reshape power balances into more gender-equal practices and rules. Moreover, previous (personal) networks of gender equality actors between the different institutions and civil society have been shaken up with gender equality currently institutionalized in different places (van der Vleuten 2019). How this institutionalization shapes and affects the work of parliamentary committees, political groups and individual MEPs requires attention from a gender perspective.

Finally, differences between various national and EU-level politics are largely neglected from a gender perspective. Scholars need to consider the ways in which different levels of governance relate to each other and become institutionalized at the EU level through the parliamentary arena. Research on how national parliaments are "Europeanized" and involved in EU politics, is still an emerging topic (Abels 2019; Crum and Fossum 2013; Hefftler et al. 2015; Högenauer et al. 2016), and its impact on supranational gender equality policies has not yet been addressed. Research into this area could include agenda-setting; gendered discourses (for example in parliamentary debates); party practices for selection and nomination of European Parliament candidates; as well as the translation of populism and radical politics from the national to the European sphere. Likewise, interparliamentary cooperation between the European Parliament and its national counterparts receives some attention in mainstream research (Brack and Deruelle 2016), but has not yet been addressed through a gendered lens. There is evidence of this interparliamentary cooperation. For example, the FEMM committee is actively organizing inter-parliamentary committee meetings with sectoral committees from national parliaments. Addressing the nature, dynamics and development of democracy in relation to the European Parliament from a gender perspective is crucial, not least given that the Parliament is highlighted as the most democratic institution of the EU and, as such, the democratic legitimacy of the EU itself largely depends on it.

Notes

2 Trilogues are informal meetings in the EU legislative process between European Parliament, Council and Commission representatives to speed up decision-making and to avoid time-consuming "third-reading" conciliation processes.

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