



Queen Mary
University of London

Parliaments in International Relations and Geopolitics: The EP as a Diplomatic Actor in EU-China Relations

Dr Davor Jancic

Senior Lecturer (Associate Professor) in Law

School of Law

Queen Mary University of London

d.jancic@qmul.ac.uk

**1st Austrian Day of
Parliamentary Research
26th June 2023**

Intro to parliamentary diplomacy



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

- **Evolution:** 1889 IPU, proliferation after WWII, now some 100 IPIs
 - **Phenomenon:** globalisation of role of parliaments due to transnationalisation of policy challenges & need to address intergovernmentalism
 - **Forms:**
 - > domestic parl influence on foreign policy, parl dipl, parliamentarisation of IOs
 - > unilateral / bilateral / multilateral
 - > relations with parliaments, executives and civil society
- ‘Individual or collective action by parliamentarians aimed at catalyzing, facilitating and strengthening the existing constitutional functions of parliaments through dialogues between peers on countless open policy questions across continents and levels of governance’

Functions of parliamentary diplomacy

- *Moral tribunes* (eg, human rights protection)
- *Democracy promotion* (eg, election observation missions)
- *Conflict resolution and mediation* (eg, facilitating dialogue and comm)
- *Interest promotion* (eg, gender equality in parliaments)
- *Capacity building* (eg, exchange of parliamentary know-how, technical and admin cooperation)

- **Benefits** v **Shortcomings**

“There is not always an immediate outcome to certain kinds of parliamentary dialogue. The impact of much parliamentary work is usually very difficult to assess. Such work is so often part of a movement or tide of influence rather than a single, measurable action”



Barbara
Prammer

“almost as
indispensable
as
democracy
itself”

“parliamentarians are ideally placed to build bridges between conflicting parties and [...] they are not bound by the positions taken by the government”



Baroness D'Souza



Ankie Broekers-Knol

EP institutional capacities for parl. dipl.

- EP President
- Committees
- Delegations to:
 - (a) parliamentary assemblies
 - (b) joint parliamentary committees
 - (c) parl. cooperation committees
 - (d) 3rd countries and entities
- Friendship groups to be banned
- Means: resolutions, missions, debates, hearings, studies
- Focus: value-oriented and region-oriented



EP in EU-China relations

- Why it matters:

- economic interdependence = each other's largest trade partners (2023)
- policy divergences and asymmetries
- value discrepancies
- global aspirations

Executive views of parliaments in EU-China relations

- Different constitutional positions of NPC and EP
 - Fusion vs autonomy/rivalry
- Different perceptions of parliamentary involvement
 - Chinese Government: *political role*
 - mutual understanding, exchanges
 - 'common ground while shelving differences' approach
 - multilevel cooperation: institutional + party political with EP and NPs
 - partisan debate and position-taking
 - European Commission: *marginal role*

EP in EU strategies on China

- **Strategic Partnership (2003)**, over 60 thematic dialogues
 - briefing EP after each session of the Human Rights Dialogue to increase transparency
- **EC ‘Closer partners, growing responsibilities’ (2006)**
 - Recognises EP-NPC relations as impetus to political and trade relations
 - Full range of people-to-people links (no longer only tourism, education, culture)
 - Mutual policy impact awareness
 - Change in approach:
 - End of honeymoon, China’s sustained rise
 - All EU institutional resources needed to complement traditional diplomacy
- **EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation (2013)**
 - Legislation and policy exchange (eg, energy)
 - P2P exchanges, no mention of parliaments

EP in EU strategies on China (cont'd)

- ***EC/HRVP 'Elements for a new strategy on China' (2016)***
 - Internally: takes EP views into account + 'joined-up'/'Whole-of-the-EU' approach (EC & EEAS to work closely with EP)
 - Externally: call for better networking, including between legislators
 - EP matters not only at consent stage but more upstream
- ***EC/HRVP 'EU-China – A strategic outlook' (2019)***
 - Partner -> competitor -> rival
 - Turn to EU law and politics
 - Fragility/complexity & EP involvement
- ***Ursula von der Leyen speech (2023)***
 - De-risk not de-couple approach

EP institutional capacities for EU-China parliamentary diplomacy

Delegation for relations with China

- Since 1979, interparl. meetings since 1980
- 38 full members
- Regular meetings + IPMs
- Liaison with NPC, Chinese Govt, SAR HK & Macao
- Industry links + external experts

Friendship Group on China (2006-2020)

- Unofficial, unregulated, unauthorised, 'propaganda proxy'

Bilateral forums

- EU-China High Level Political Parties and Groups Forum (2010)
- EU-China Legal Affairs Dialogue (2016)

Multilateral forums

- Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China (2020)



Diplomatic action in practice

- Consent right

- CAI (2020) -> mutual sanctions (March 2021) -> CAI frozen (May 2021)

- Resolutions

- **Moral tribune** (eg, reports of continued organ harvesting in China, May 2022; situation of the Uyghurs in the Xinjiang, Dec 2020)
- **Policy and norm entrepreneurship** (eg, Taiwan, Sept 2022; security threats re rising Chinese technological presence in the EU, Mar 2019)
- **Stock-taking and agenda-setting** (eg, new EU-China strategy, Sept 2021: “recalls and reinforces, in this context [CAI], the importance of parliamentary diplomacy in facilitating mutual understanding, transparent communication and honest dialogue”)
- **Trade advocacy** (eg, EU-China negotiations for a bilateral investment agr., Oct 2013)

- Missions

- INTA mission to Taiwan (Dec 2022) and to China (May 2018)

Diplomatic action

- **Interparliamentary meetings (IPMs):**
 - Visits, policy dialogue, claims-making
 - Greater EP visibility in China
 - Pressure (suspension in Sept 2016-Nov 2017)
 - Last one (41st) on 7-9 May 2018 (Beijing & Hangzhou)
- **Sakharov Prize**
 - 2019 Ilham Tohti (Uyghur economist and civil rights activist)
 - 2008 Hu Jia (Chinese civil rights activist and critic of CPC)
 - 1996 Wei Jingsheng (activist in Chinese democracy movement)
- **Interparliamentary Alliance on China (IPAC)** (June 2020)
 - Over 250 members, statements, Tokyo Symposium 2023

Conclusions

- Tension -> Values vs Economic interest
- Tension -> Institutionalisation vs Deterioration of bilateral relations
- Tension -> Sovereignty centralisation (China) vs Sovereignty sharing (EU)
- Tension -> Convergence on need for cooperation v Divergence on rationale
- EP contribution to constructive management of differences?
- Eur Comm & EEAS: Strategic reliance on / distancing from EP?
- Search for new avenues for action (eg, IPAC)
- Broader issues of the changing int'l role of parliaments in the modern age