

INTERPRETING PARLIAMENTARY DIPLOMACY: THE CASE OF EU-UK RELATIONS

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Abstract

Parliamentary diplomacy has historically existed to tackle global, rapid and seismic changes in societies, but has garnered an increased academic focus since 2010 (Stavridis, 2021). This paper examines how parliamentary actors interpret parliamentary diplomacy, focusing on that practised in the EU-UK Parliamentary Partnership Assembly (PPA). The analysis is based on parliamentary debates, four sittings of the PPA, interviews conducted between January and June 2024 and a fieldwork trip to the PPA in December 2023.

The paper supports existing literature, showing that parliamentary diplomacy is an essentially contested concept. However, the paper makes four original findings: (1) that the dissensus about whether parliamentarians can perform diplomatic work varies by function; (2) that interpretations of parliamentary diplomacy are situated; (3) that those involved in the European Parliament delegation are more likely to use the term ‘parliamentary diplomacy’ than their UK counterparts; and (4) that participants interpret that the PPA as a parliamentary body is not performing these diplomatic and parliamentary functions as well as it could do.

1. Background

Parliamentary diplomacy is an essentially contested concept – at first glance, for some, even oxymoronic. However, parliamentarians have historically played a role in diplomatic interchange and parliamentary diplomacy is a key part of modern international governance. Parliamentary diplomacy has been developed first in practitioner dialogues (Weisglas and de Bouer, 2007) and then in academic discussion since 2010 (Stavridis, 2021). As a testament to the growth of this term, the Inter-Parliamentary Union had ‘parliamentary diplomacy’ as a key debate item in its 2024 General Assembly. A broad definition of parliamentary diplomacy is:

‘any declaration, action or activity of a diplomatic nature that involves at least one parliamentary actor, and which tries to impact on a particular international issue (or an internal one with international implications)’ (Stavridis, 2021, 235)

From this definition, the ‘parliamentary actor’ could be a collective actor – for example, a committee, as well as an individual. Parliamentary diplomacy could inhere in a single act or in aggregate practices. Whilst Stavridis’ definition – tells us about different actors and acts of parliamentary diplomacy, less is said about what is meant by ‘diplomatic nature’, referring instead to the ‘means utilized’ (2021, p.235).

Parliamentary diplomacy is a multi-faceted concept and therefore how parliamentary actors interpret it and their agency within it, is important for how it is actualised. Furthermore, from a macro perspective, literature on international parliamentary communities can ‘benefit from a bottom-up perspective that explores how national parliaments and MPs position in the emerging relations’ (Giesen and Malang, 2022, p.527). Therefore, this paper seeks to ask two research questions:

- (1) How do parliamentary actors construct EU-UK parliamentary diplomacy vis-a-vis diplomatic functions?
- (2) What is the relationship between diplomatic functions and parliamentary functions in these constructions?

2. Theoretical framework

The term diplomacy refers to a given system of interactions between interlocutors to solve problems and to avoid conflict, through many activities. Article three of the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations outlines five diplomatic functions. These are *inter alia*: (1) state representation, (2) protecting nationals, (3) negotiation, (4) information seeking and (5) building friendly relations. The non-exhaustiveness of these functions is acknowledged in the *inter alia* of the article. Alongside these traditional functions, there is a range of interpretivist and post-classical scholarship in diplomacy (Watson 1982; Der Derian 1987; Constantinou 1996; Sharpe 1997; Banai 2016) that foregrounds the contested and expandable nature of these functions. In addition, recent empirical research (Hart and Siniver, 2021) has explored the multiple meanings of diplomacy interpreted by state ambassadors. Together, these literatures show how (parliamentary) diplomacy is an essentially contested concept.

Turning to parliaments, an interpretivist literature on International Parliamentary Institutions (IPIs) highlights the role of ideas, beliefs and norms (Šabič, 2008) of individual parliamentarians who may work in IPIs as norm entrepreneurs (Cofelice, 2023, p.53) and the role of emotional norms in IPIs (Gurkhan, 2021). Delputte (2012) explored the ACP-EU assembly from the view of its members. She found that ACP members interpreted a *de facto* disparity between the two delegations, due to asymmetrical staffing resources and the ability of the EP delegation to coordinate together in Brussels (2012, p.257). When writing about the European Union’s broader institutional missions, Duquet (2018) finds that delegations

activities may stretch beyond the five traditional diplomatic functions, with the additional functions of development cooperation and coordination with member states.

It is true that functions of international relations are not the same as parliamentary functions. However, there are some interconnections that will be explored in this paper. For some, the performance of parliamentary functions can add to the legitimacy of transnational dialogue (Kraft-Kasack, 2008); whilst for others, ‘parliamentariness’ may stymie the success of parliaments’ involvement in diplomacy (Redei and Romanyshyn, 2019). The paper now outlines the case and the methods adopted.

3. Case Study: EU-UK Parliamentary diplomacy and methods

This paper explores constructions of parliamentary diplomacy that circulate around the EU-UK Parliamentary Partnership Assembly (PPA). The PPA was created in 2022 under provisions of Article 11 of the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA), pertaining to the governance framework, signed on 30 December 2020. The PPA has roots in a letter, sent from the EPP group to the Commission President that argued for the establishment of parliamentary structures post-Brexit (De Le Baume, 2020). The PPA coexists with other parliamentary mechanisms of maintaining EU-UK relationshipsⁱ, but is the principal inter-parliamentary body.

The PPA consists of a bicameral 35 member UK delegation and a 35-member unicameral delegation (D-UK) of MEPs. It has two (deliberative and scrutiny) roles outlined in the TCA: ‘A forum to exchange views of the [UK-EU] partnership and an interlocutor for, and scrutineer of, the UK-EU Partnership Council’ (the PPA’s executive organ). More specifically, in terms of decision-making powers, Article 11 of the TCA creates three formal powers for the PPA. The PPA: (a) may request relevant information regarding the implementation of [the TCA] and any supplementing agreement from the Partnership Council, which shall then supply that Assembly with the requested information; (b) shall be informed of the decisions and recommendations of the Partnership Council; and (c) may make recommendations to the Partnership Council. The third power (c) creates a degree of agenda-setting capacities, though within the confines of the TCA.

The data for this study includes: (1) verbal transcripts of four PPA sessions, a corpus totalling 23 hours of plenary sessions (2022-2023); (2) twelveⁱⁱ interviews with: 2 IPI staff, 4 PPA members, 3 EP staff (Group and APA), 1 UK Parliament Staff, 1 parliamentary diplomacy expert, 1 state diplomat. A semi-structured interview schedule was used, but interviews also veered into more conversational interviews to ‘soak and poke’ (Roederer-Rynning and Greenwood 2021) around the world of parliamentary diplomacy. In addition to the interviews, a field visit to the fourth session of the PPA was made in December 2023. The limitation of this study is that (1) the PPA is a body that oversees a trade agreement. The findings cannot be generalised to other contexts, for example highly militarised contexts; (2) the PPA is situated in Europe; and (3) the EU, including the EP is a fragmented diplomatic actor with many types of parliamentary delegations and international activities. Since this study resembles only a

corner of both parliaments' parliamentary diplomacy, the findings cannot be generalised to all contexts of parliamentary diplomacy.

4. Interpreting Parliamentary Diplomacy

This section maps parliamentary actors' constructions of parliamentary diplomacy. First, I start with first impressions of parliamentary diplomacy as a concept before analysing the relationship between traditional diplomatic and parliamentary functions in the constructions.

4a) 'Parliamentary diplomacy' as a concept

First, participants were asked to provide their general thoughts on parliamentary diplomacy as a term and whether parliamentarians could perform diplomatic work. The malleability of the term was noticeable, ranging from 'a buzzword...everyone understands it to be something different' (Interview) to an 'enigma' (Interview). One participant provided their interpretation of parliamentary diplomacy through an example, rather than a definition (Interview). Another used adjacent concepts, such as 'cultural diplomacy' (Interview) as an inroad to parliamentary diplomacy. An IPI staff member, albeit positioned in an international secretariat noted: 'I don't encounter the word very much in our work I encounter cooperation a lot more (Interview). Comparisons with 'parliamentary cooperation' were further explored:

it's very similar ...because of course it requires both parties to: one, be on the same page and have the same goal and action but it differs a bit because...the word cooperation for me implies that there is some form of a commitment that someone has to comply to something be it a standard or action whereas diplomacy it's kind of just exchanging views and standards and practices there's no formal commitment it's more voluntary than I guess cooperation (Interview)

An expert working with supporting parliamentary diplomacy noted: 'we really had to put this term first to parliamentarians for it to be understood better and then they said "oh yes that's what I'm doing":

it is easier for the researchers to look at it from a distance and see all those processes and dynamics taking place and call it "yes this is a parliamentary diplomacy" rather for a single person to say "my trip to Tbilisi, or my intervention in in Zambia, that was a part of parliamentary diplomacy" (Interview).

Some participants interpreted parliamentary diplomacy as a question of agency, noting that parliamentarians have an important role in 'soft power' – that is building relationships as well as (relative) 'hard power' – as part of Jean Monnet dialogue processes 'where parliamentarians

go to third countries to negotiate rules of procedure for their parliaments’ (Interview).

Parliamentary diplomacy can intermittently be brought into consciousness in international politics (Stavridis, 2021). Interpretations of parliamentary diplomacy are historically and geopolitically situated:

the war in Ukraine has again underpinned that whole area because we are fully fledged democracies that's not going to change so we resolve our problems by diplomacy and discussion (Sean Kelly, EPP Group, PPA Meeting, 13/05/22)

Parliamentary diplomacy has played a key concept in an EP Resolution (280224) on the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy. ‘Parliamentary diplomacy’ has been mentioned only twenty times in UK parliamentary debates (1964-2018) and mostly refers to delegations in multilateral bodies. However, the House of Lords European Union Committee (2016, p.27-28) proposed the UK parliament to have an ‘active diplomatic role’ in Brexit Scrutiny:

Parliament should play an active diplomatic role throughout the Brexit process, and beyond. Dialogue with the European Parliament, and with other national parliaments, will be important in maintaining cordial relations during what will be, at the intergovernmental level, difficult negotiations (2016, p.28).

In terms of situated definitions inside parliaments, not only do parliamentarians wear a ‘double hat’ (Delputte et al, 2016, p.163) from their service in both parliamentary committees and delegations to IPIs and bilateral delegations parliaments, but they have other relevant experience. In the Ordinary meeting of D-UK, Inma Rodriguez Pinero wearing her ‘third hat’ as then Chair of the Conference of Delegations noted:

it is important that we create a climate that is favorable for parliamentary diplomacy between both delegations in the interparliamentary assembly of the UK and the European Parliament... that is the path towards a better parliamentary diplomacy – constructive dialogue that can help us to overcome all of the challenges that we're facing and those that will come’ (Ordinary Meeting, Constitutive Meeting 091221)

A regular member of the PPA who had experience of being a delegation leader agreed: ‘Yes I think (parliamentarians) can (perform diplomatic work) and I think they should’. They further noted how members of their delegation had experience from former national mandates, where they had served as IPI chairs and brought ‘experience’ – ‘definitely another value to the work we're delivering’ (Interview). Heightened knowledge of those heavily involved in delegations, corresponds with Jancic et al’s (2021, p.130) survey of political and administrative members of EP delegations. 86% demonstrated a ‘very strong’ (53%) or ‘strong’ (33%) understanding of the concept of parliamentary diplomacyⁱⁱⁱ. Therefore, interpretations of parliamentary

diplomacy may be situated by how involved a parliamentarian has been in delegations.

Parliamentary diplomacy as a concept was not shared unequivocally. The question of whether parliamentarians can perform diplomacy was interpreted as ‘a tricky one’ and parliamentary diplomacy was contrasted inferiorly with state diplomacy as ‘hardcore diplomacy’ (Interview). Meanwhile, a UK PPA member was reluctant to use the term ‘parliamentary diplomacy’ due to a lack of pre-socialisation experience, specialisation and a reverence for diplomacy as a profession (see also Hart and Siniver 2021, p.177):

I don't buy into the philosophy of parliamentary diplomacy. We're not in parliament to be diplomats and we must respect the diplomats with their special training, special skills, and special purposes we are parliamentarians (Interview)

Finally, parliamentary diplomacy coincides with pervasive denunciations of ‘political tourism’ (Herranz, 2005, p.80; Delputte 2012, p.243) and this concern becomes during economic crises (Delputte, 2012, p.258, see also *Brisbane Times* 2024). PPA members have articulated the need to organise PPA business to its optimal effect. Arguably, this organisation could involve greater reflexivity towards the functions of (parliamentary) diplomacy that are represented below.

4b) Parliamentary diplomacy vis-a-vis diplomatic functions

The paper now moves more deeply into parliamentary diplomacy by mapping constructions vis-à-vis traditional diplomatic functions. The identification of core elements of parliamentary diplomacy with state diplomacy is not unproblematic. Parliamentary diplomacy is not a one-on-one reflection of state diplomacy. Parliamentary norms will have regulative, evaluative, constitutive and practical effects on how parliamentary diplomacy is interpreted and practiced. The purpose of exploring traditional diplomatic activities is to linger on the ‘means utilized’ that constitute the ‘diplomatic nature’ of parliamentary diplomacy (Stavridis, 2017 p.235). Therefore, the empirical presentation also highlights nuances by setting out what might distinguish parliamentary diplomacy from state diplomacy in these interpretations.

i) Representation

Representation, a core function of diplomacy refers to: ‘whose interests, values, and identities are being represented by whom, on account of what authorization, for what purpose, and to what effect?’ (Banai, 2016, 230). Representation can present a source of authority (Duquet, 2018, 27). As a parliamentary body, the PPA does not have clear instructive principals – the UK Government or the EU Commission. However, the TCA has bolstered an executive approach to EU-UK relations (Craig, 2021). In interviews, some felt that there was a ‘parliamentary deficit’ (Lipps, 2021, p.501) in this governance structure (see also Interview X)

and that the Partnership Council is ‘quite reluctant to acknowledge too much the parliamentary assembly and to kind of afford it too much power’ (Interview).

Publicly, within the PPA plenary, parliamentarism has been praised, such as discussions of the resilience of the Ukrainian Parliament, (Hayter 12/05/23). Both leadership figures in each parliament have addressed the PPA and have made memorial contributions (Stavridis 2021, 244) to former EP Presidents (Metsola, 12/05/22, McFall 07/11/22). These associations bring the PPA into line with the very senior levels of the parliaments. However, session five of the PPA was postponed with one week’s notice since the UK government required their parliamentarians to vote on controversial migration legislation. The PPA had been a ‘symbol’ (Peters, 2019) of the value of parliamentary diplomacy and of political will. The ability to set a date for the fifth session already in the fourth session before the UK and European Parliamentary elections, was heralded as exceptional in the context of EP rules. Therefore, the PPA’s postponement due to executive pressure became even more meaningful.

Assimilation to the diplomatic tradition is immediately visible in PPA proceedings. Whilst the TCA does not have a formalised ambassadorial committee around it, like Cotonou (Delputte 2012), EU Ambassadors to the UK have addressed the PPA. The visual imagery of two flags – the EU flag and the Union Jack in the PPA – easily recognisable for diplomatic partners, gives both parliaments a high diplomatic profile – one a state and one a Union. A gavel is used in the EP – symbolizing authority, prestige, power, control and order and a ceremonial ‘family photo’ is held at the end of each PPA session. Symbolic diplomatic dates and summits infuse PPA proceedings such as the 25th Anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement (Metsola 04/07/23); UK representatives being at COP (Lord Speaker McFall, 05/12/23) and the UK’s AI Summit (Cleverly 03/07/23).

The PPA is a statutory body – meaning that it is a body between the EP and the UK Parliament. Yet any breakage of the TCA or retaliatory measures between the UK government and European Commission, may impact on the constituent parts of the UK. Therefore, an EP Resolution: ‘calls for the devolved territories of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales to have greater involvement in the EU-UK PPA’ (2023 cf. Jacob Rees Mogg, HC Deb Vol 705 Col 154). The Committee of the Regions (2022) critiqued ‘the lack of territorial depth’ in the TCA. It was decided by the UK delegation to the PPA that the UK side would not send any UK local government representative to the PPA on a standing basis. The PPA can invite UK local government representatives to speak on a one-off basis on a topic where relevant. A participant attributed the lack of territorial depth partly to an EP co-chair noting they took a more institutional approach, a ‘top-down old school, state centric approach’ (Interview). Many participants criticised the weak speaking rights of observer members in the plenary (Interview X, see also Andrews 08/11/22)

Unlike permanent representatives, parliamentarians individually face re-election (Dibateza, 2023). A then member of the Partnership Council, James Cleverly noted how PPA members shared experiences of the campaign trail and needed to be accountable to constituents at the

ballot box (03/07/22). This observation is shared by Slaughter (2004, p.105) who notes:

in democratic political systems, the legislature's function is to represent as much as it is to regulate, meaning that legislators are most directly tied to territorially defined policies...remaining resolutely "national", or even parochial, is their job.

This differs slightly in the European Parliament and by electoral system:

EU parliamentarians have an easier job of it because their job is intrinsically international and they're engaged in an international institution and so by way of that there's always going to be a sort of element of diplomacy where we're gonna be engaging with foreign actors whereas in the UK it's sort of then much more down to the individual parliamentarians' interests and whether it's something they want to engage in (Interview)

However, in constituency representation, the agent may be a trustee, or a delegate. More heterogeneous, personal preferences have been articulated, for example for the UK to rejoin the EU (Vautmans 12/05/22, Ludford 12/05/22) or in a self-identification as a 'proud Brexiteer' (Leadsom 12/05/22). However, this doesn't mean that parliamentarians are entirely free to intervene. The norms of parliamentarism also constrain members (Redei and Romanyshyn 2019). Because MEPs must represent the views of the EP, they must make clear when something is their personal position or a position on behalf of their group (Conference of Presidents decision 2015, Article 14b).

In summation, parliamentary actors – interpret representation in varied ways, including parliamentary, territorial, constituency representation and how far they articulate personal judgements as a trustee. However, MEPs are not totally free to speak and still have to perform their external relations, in line with parliaments' institutional rules.

ii) Protecting interests

The Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations has traditionally been concerned with political or trade interests (Duquet, 2018). However, the EU is value laden. The first sentence of Article 3(5) TEU obliges the European Union to 'uphold and promote its values and interests and contribute to the protection of its citizens' in its relations with the wider world'. In contrast to stereotypical representations of state diplomacy as being based on clearly formulated and fixed goals, parliaments have been identified as arenas where national interests are debated and defined:

the definition of national interests is a matter of giving priority to and balancing different domestic interests, and thus lies at the heart of what parliaments are supposed to do in democratic societies (Langhelle and Rommetvedt 2004, p.192).

This interpretation was shared by a PPA member:

(Parliamentarians) they regularly debate international policies...their decisions and opinions play a part in defining the policies defended by each state (Interview)

Diplomacy may promote the interests of international society (Hart and Siniver 2021) – that can be larger than national governments’ foreign policy goals. For example, the UK’s membership of the European Convention of Human Rights is locked into TCA provisions. The UK’s position vis-a-vis ECHR has been raised in the PPA (Ludford 12/05/22; McManus; 03/07/23) – as have human rights concerns around legislation concerning the Northern Ireland legacy, Rwanda and labour strikes. The EP passed two resolutions, supporting this step. In a broader sense, PPA Member, Katarina Barley MEP, a rapporteur about fundamental rights in the EU noted:

(what) absolutely unites us...is the question of values...like democracy rule of law separation of powers human rights it's a long standing tradition in the UK...it's one of the motherlands of democracy...I think we have it a bit easier because we only have to stick to the treaties but you have the good chaps principle (08/11/22)

Protecting interests invokes underpinning assumptions about power – whether parties to IPIs have conflicting interests, or whether they are embedded in a ‘more holistic worldwide perspective and how people can cooperate together to meet challenges on an equal footing’ (Interview). Indeed, Eurocentrism has been criticised in the PPA for approaching global challenges – for example, failing to look at innovations and developments in the African Union around regulating AI (Scholz 05/12/23). In a study of how national interests play out on supranational delegations, Herranz (2005, 100) explored the distribution of national party delegations on EP inter-parliamentary delegations. She found that for some delegations, MEPs bring their expertise from national foreign policy priorities to *strengthen* the EP’s work and priorities, rather than responding to an ‘egoistic national rationale’. On the UK side, there have been some intra-delegation contestations, with one Conservative, government UK MP claiming:

delegates to the (PPA)...should be there to promote Britain’s interests overseas, and that those who do not want to do so and who simply want to be apologists for Brexit and to act against the UK’s interests should leave the PPA (Leadsom HC Deb Vol 737, 14/09/23)

To raise the profile and credibility of the PPA, preference was communicated for the PPA to concentrate on discreet, small wins on issues of importance to citizens (Teverson, 13/05/22; Ricketts 13/05/22). However, it is not yet clear how parliamentarians envisage the Civil Society Forum feeding into the deliberations of the PPA. Furthermore, although these preferences were communicated by some Lords, others felt that notion of representing citizens interests was described as ‘a House of Commons issue’, whereas the Lords were interested in ‘future work and development’

that's part of my frustration with the TCA and indeed with the PPA it's got horribly bogged down with a few current issues which is in the great scheme of things you know are not about our future relationship with the EU (Interview X; see also Interview Y)

Protecting interests, arguably aligns with substantive forms of representation and scrutiny. However, the nature, content and time horizons of this cooperation regarding interests is contested in the PPA.

iii) Negotiation

Negotiation means examining a problem of common interest to solve it. Literature shows how parliaments are spaces of parliamentary, party, bicameral, national and international negotiation (Elgström and Sundström 2024; Roederer-Rynning and Greenwood, 2021; Bressanelli et al 2019; Russell and Cowley 2016). Negotiation is conflated as a synonym, rather than as one function of diplomacy (Hart and Siniver, 2021, 166). A participant did distinguish negotiation as only one function of parliamentary diplomacy:

there's two bits to diplomatic work, one is...building the relationships the understanding the position of the other the smoothing the way for diplomatic activity and I think parliament has a big role to play in that...but the second aspect of diplomacy is about negotiating...hard negotiations... and that is eyeball to eyeball that is people who can deliver which is usually government to government (Interview).

However, some parliamentary actors agreed that international negotiation has been a function dominated by executives:

the negotiations are too dominated by the European Commission maybe some member States and the UK government then I think that maybe the parliament has a secondary role really (Interview).

A key power of the PPA is to make recommendations to the Partnership Council. However, recommendations do not commit the Partnership Council in a formal way and for one

participant are ‘just trying to get a piece of paper at the end that you've seen they're fairly nebulous’ (Interview). These recommendations can be forms of diplomatic signalling to other institutions, using parliamentary positions to impact policy, such as the Commission, UK Government and Council of the European Union. One member interpreted the role of the PPA as: ‘a workshop in which we can hammer out some of our problems and where we can see things coming towards us on the horizon’ (Goodwill, HC Deb 06/12/21). Meanwhile, another participant noted how conversations between parliamentarians could ‘unstuck sticking points and show that the UK prioritises an issue’ (Interview). Given that there are key future EU-UK EP rapporteurs on the PPA, then negotiations at the PPA could have a key impact on legislation.

Whilst the PPA has deliberated about non-TCA issues such as defence, youth mobility and touring artists, it will be constrained by the ambitions of the executives – who at the time of writing, seek a recalibration of the TCA, rather than a more ambitious realignment. Inferences of two-level games have been made – meaning, that those involved in parliamentary diplomacy must appeal to two audiences – those at the supranational level, but also domestic actors – including political parties and constituents. This has appeared in discussions about Brexit fatigue in UK society and divisions in the Conservative Party as creating a ‘double incentive’ for the UK government not to engage (Interview) and to take a hands-off approach:

(UK Government) isn't interested in further developments of the TCA the TCA was a holding agreement it was a way of getting us out by a set date and so most of the negotiations the government is doing is trying to get rid of the wrinkles (Interview, see also Interview X)

Despite executives’ direct involvement in setting the contours for, conducting and concluding negotiations, two parliamentarians noted how parliamentarians ratify international agreements:

as the result of anything that a government does in many countries it has to go back to parliament and therefore the higher the involvement in parliament during any discussions or build up the better it will be at the end of say negotiations to a treaty for parliament to understand it (Interview)

Members of parliament have direct diplomatic responsibilities: they ratify treaties and international trade agreements (Interview)

Whilst the EP has exercised influence as a ‘quasi-negotiator’ through its veto power (Bressanelli et al 2019), the UK House of Commons has also noted that it is not enough for Parliament to be involved only at the end of the process of international agreements and has proposed changes for parliament to be involved in the lifecycle of international agreements (House of Commons, 2024, 44.-45, p.65). Evidence has ranged from suggestions that the UK Parliament should be involved in negotiating treaty mandates; international treaty scrutiny should be incorporated into select committee tasks; parliament should have access to documents throughout the negotiating process and that the government should agree working

practices with the UK parliament on treaty negotiations. A PPA member (Interview) called for more analytical knowledge for parliament – that is, knowing ‘that wider framework’ surrounding government negotiations e.g. government’s objectives for foreign policy, rather than a negotiating role for the parliament.

There is a mixture of parliamentary and former diplomatic experience in the membership of the delegations (Appendix 1). A PPA member with diplomatic experience’s diplomatic skill sets were interpreted as knowing the art of subtle messaging:

understanding the undertones... the language if you like...“if we say that's a red line do we really mean it's a red line or do we mean it's an objective” you know he understands very much all those nuances and so I guess he brings to the discussions a real understanding of how government when it's negotiating the subtleties if you like (Interview).

A staff member concurred that diplomatic communication was needed parliamentarians who are often generalists and lack the ‘finesse and the exact understanding of all the implications of their words and their actions on the ground’ (Interview, see also Interview X). However, an MEP noted how parliamentarians understood flexibility:

there's need for flexibility on both sides we as parliamentarians know that and therefore, we can I think hopefully drive that message through and get solutions (Sean Kelly, EPP 13th May 2022)

A key discussion point in the interviews was also how the media was predisposed to report on executive negotiated breakthroughs, such as the Windsor Framework and the restoration of the Northern Ireland Assembly (Interview) as well as executive disagreements (Interview). Others noted that the Windsor Agreement was ‘of course, the result of negotiations at the highest level, but it was also facilitated by the findings at grassroots level’ (Interview). This shows how there is often not a clear beginning to negotiations and that parliamentarians might be involved in different stages.

In terms of the relationships between diplomatic and parliamentary functions, communication was a contested area of (in)compatibility: ‘(Diplomats) have a lot better understanding in terms of timing discretion and message (whereas)...politicians that go there have to be seen to be active...to be vocal and to communicate what they're doing’ (Interview). Moreover, in the EP context, parliamentarians were constructed as having ‘a bigger microphone’ than the other EU institutions (Interview) to draw attention to issues. However, having parliamentary support and publicly knowing a parliament’s red lines can strengthen an executive’s negotiating position (House of Commons, 2024, 44) and the parliament can communicate its wishes to other institutional actors. Therefore, the extent to which parliament has a role in negotiation and its relationship with communication is contested, but the appetite for parliaments’ further involvement in negotiating international agreements, along all stages, is growing.

iv) Information-seeking and reporting

The fourth function is ascertaining conditions and developments in states by legal means. Differently from state diplomacy, the PPA has a power to request information from the Partnership Council – a power – in respect to the Partnership Council as an interlocutor – that select committees and standing committees do not have. The types of information that the PPA would seek was outlined by the chairs in Session 1 (12/05/22). However, referring to the lack of responsiveness from the Partnership Council, a PPA member decried ‘it’s hopeless’ (Interview). Mentions of delays, ‘quite standard replies, and the UK government sending deputies’ was mentioned by others (Interview). Co-Chair Nathalie Loiseau noted her ‘slight regret’ at the absence of Liz Truss – then Foreign Secretary at the inaugural session (12/05/22, see also Kelly 12/05/22). Other members remarked that it ‘sends a powerful message’ when the appropriate members of the Partnership Council addressed the PPA (Ricketts, 03/07/23).

Getting information from the executive interlocutor and from partner delegations may be more prescient for Opposition MPs (Lipps 2021), which differs from state diplomacy. In a study of the Franco-German Assembly, Boronska-Hryniewiecka and Kinski (2022, 473) found that the French delegation would receive feedback and documentation to scrutinise their executive from their German counterparts. Therefore, information seeking can support the parliamentary function of scrutiny. However, some felt they got better information from the Partnership Council in less public fora than the PPA plenary:

With the PPA, we ask (the Partnership Council) to come and report about their work but there is a lot of other lets, say not so public fora where we get more information from them, because most of the stuff is also very sensitive on both sides and so you also have always to see how, what information you can provide at one point so that it’s not immediately exploited politically (Interview)

Inter-delegation information-seeking also supports the parliamentary function of deliberation – a core function of IPIs. A PPA member noted:

Establishing "parliamentary diplomacy" between parliamentarians from different countries can broaden the field of vision of each of them and promote knowledge and consideration of the other during debates and deliberations within their national bodies. This different kind of information instils a greater and more open diplomatic culture. (Interview)

Putting one’s name down to speak in the plenary in advance, was a parliamentary norm that governed rules of interparliamentary interaction. Some found this norm, attributed to the EP constraining (Interview 6). However, the PPA institutionalised break out groups to allow more detailed and discursive discussions. A formal slot was allocated from the third session onwards,

to political groups to meet on the first morning of each PPA session.

For parliamentarians, information-seeking has also coincided with the end of policy learning (Dibateza, 2023). Indeed, as well as cultivating epistemic communities (Stavridis, 2021, 241), peer to peer learning on cultural values rather than strictly scientific areas can be where the benefit of individual parliamentarians' interactions may lie (Interview). Learning comes with different levels of concertedness. Whereas some saw the PPA as a venue to 'pass some ideas about (Interview), policy learning moments were cited by members from both delegations bi-directionally – e.g. learning about EU's position on Ukraine (Interview) and 'touch(ing) base with the British way of seeing things...for example, international affairs' (Interview). However, constraints were noted by two staff members about accessing the full range of views on some topics (see also Interview X):

the MP's that choose to be to sit on the PPA from the UK side are often pro Europe or pro EU very often or quite interested and so I'm not sure is a representative sample of the members so that undermines the value of the PPA to be honest' (Interview)

the Conservative Party...just allowed... pro Europeans to sit there... to give them something to do...we are all... preaching to the converted (Interview).

Returning to Delputte et al (2017), many parliamentarians are double-hatted and bring policy expertise from sitting on standing committees. However, Usherwood (2022) finds that membership of the UK delegation has fewer members who sit on parliamentary committees. Notwithstanding this, a UK member noted the UK delegation's cumulative expertise:

the UK delegation is wide-ranging with lots of expertise...we are not at the European Parliament obviously we've moved on from there but there is a lot of expertise that will bring forward all the discussions and help us move forward (Vaz, 13/05/22)

In addition to peer-to-peer learning, parliamentarians value civil society as a source of information. Indeed, at a civil society event, an MEP told the audience: 'you are the ambassadors, you are the eyes and ears of what's happening on the ground' (Fieldnote 1). Delegations may observe conditions from the national media:

we need to have up to date to follow up of what is going on in the British media when it comes to things that fall under our competency and measures that will be passed in the British parliament that relate to our mandate' (Inma Pinero Rodriguez, constituent ordinary delegation meeting'

There are democratic questions: who works with what information and whose information is treated as better? A moot point in traditional diplomacy is whether to engage with/encourage struggles on the ground (Duquet 2018). The side programme of the PPA was seen as ‘institutional’ by one staff member who was – seeking mechanisms outside the PPA (Interview), for example to get the perspective of citizens in Northern Ireland. However, in terms of the gender of expert witnesses, men have so far been over-represented in non-discretionary witnesses. This reduces the PPA’s information seeking and convening power.

In summation, information seeking occurs between different actors in parliamentary diplomacy for multifarious reasons. Information-seeking from the Partnership Council supports the function of scrutiny. Inter-delegation exchange of information supports deliberation and scrutiny. Finally, policy-learning (Dibateza, 2023) may arguably lead to better legislation.

v) Friendly relations

Promoting friendly relations was a shared construct by all interviewees. First, parliamentarians shared commonalities due to parliaments as distinct workplaces (Interview). Second, individual parliamentarians were cited as offering ‘the individual perspective’:

they're more perhaps person to person they're more individual parliamentarians that engage one another they don't have necessarily an agenda of being a member of the government when meeting with one another and offer some more individual perspective (Interview)

This corroborates findings that interpersonal relations can generate exposure to different backgrounds and modify ‘parliamentarians’ role-conceptions, institutional identities, and sense of appropriateness’ (Crum and Fossum, 2009, p.263). At least eleven members from the UK delegation in the constituent session had experiences of working in the European Institutions (Appendix 2). The impact of service in the EP matters, not necessarily because it leads to pro-integrationist sentiments, but because it is ‘highly plausible’ (Scully, 2005, p.138) that MEPs adjusted aspects of their attitudes and behaviour during this time, such as learning how to interact with politicians from other countries and form compromises. The impact of service in the EP was also emphasised by members:

if the officials can't come up with agreed solutions, then we as a partnership assembly should be able to do so because we're like minded. Many of you from the United Kingdom have indeed been very valued members of the European Parliament in the past and for that reason we should be able to look at issues and come up with practical solutions and then move our relationship forward more into the future (Kelly, EPP Group, 13/05/22)

The inaugural State of Play PPA exchange with the Partnership Council was fraught with the backdrop of the UK government potentially reneging on an international agreement (the Northern Ireland protocol). In her first address to the PPA, EP President Roberta Metsola emphasised that she was a lawyer committed to the Rule of Law. Experts also noted the practice of ‘executive high-jacking’ (Fowler, 2022) – where executive representatives spoke to each other and parliamentarians were ‘intermediaries’ (Mundell, 13/05/22). The third session took place in ‘a positive context’ (Loiseau, 03/07/23) in which the Windsor Framework had been agreed and parliamentarians offered “congratulations...trust is absolutely fundamental” (Benn 03/07/23). President Metsola’s introductory remarks this time softened, informing the PPA how she was the granddaughter of a UK Royal Navy cook (04/07/23). The fourth (04/12/23) session opened with an announcement of the ratification of the UK’s re-entry into Horizon to banging on tables and clapping. This corresponds with Duquet (2018, p.35) who notes that the promotion of friendly relations is located in developing economic, cultural and scientific partnerships.

A PPA member noted in the context of diverging interests that ‘conviviality is a factor.... Each PPA meeting builds bridges and closes gaps’ (Interview); and that the PPA’s role was ‘building the relationships, understanding the position of the other, smoothing the way for diplomatic activity’ (Interview). However, this enthusiasm was tempered by another participant who noted that the PPA became ‘less useful’ as a ‘safety valve’ during improved executive relations:

the relationship with the UK from the perspective of the PPA has been very difficult in particular because of Boris Johnson and the Conservative government...with Sunak I think that people are a bit more reassured um so I think that the PPA has offered a space for collaboration for engagement at a bit less let's say senior level executive like the Prime Minister and which I think has been very helpful. There is less rhetoric of confrontation ...I'm not saying (the PPA is) not useful (now) but I'm saying is that I think well a bit less (useful) (Interview)

Parliamentary diplomacy, for some, could veer into overfriendliness, that is ‘not wanting to upset the UK government too much...or be a bit more provocative or challenging... it's like “let's not be revolutionary, let's be very classic’ (Interview). Meanwhile, after an ordinary D-UK delegation meeting, Gunnar Beck MEP (Alternative für Deutschland, Germany), submitted a written question to the Commission with the subject ‘derogatory remarks at the EU-UK Parliamentary Assembly’, noting the Commission’s ‘diplomatic shortcomings’, using a phrase that ‘may well put a diplomatic strain on relations with the United Kingdom’ (08/02/22). Vocally exposing executive diplomatic frailties speaks to broader debates about whether parliamentary diplomacy is complementary to, or alternative to executive diplomacy.

In terms of building friendly relations, the PPA is constrained by parliamentary norms. This includes holding sessions in parliamentary locations. Whilst parliamentary actors placed importance on the symbolic value of ‘parliamentarians are travelling towards each other,

making them be surrounded by the environment of the other of the other party’ as having an ‘immense effect indeed on the spirit of cooperation in parliamentary diplomacy’ (Interview, see also Interview), having meetings in the place of work can reduce attendance (Interview, Interview). Unlike diplomats, this is only one part of parliamentarians’ jobs.

The PPA’s temporal constraints include parliamentary calendars and electoral cycles. The EP has group week, whereas the UK parliament does not, and the timing has already been moved to Mondays and Tuesdays, rather than Thursdays and Fridays. Only meeting twice in a year was a constraint repeatedly mentioned (Interview; LLoyd 13/5/22; Whitford, HoC Deb Vol 705, 06/12/21). Meeting more in-person would incur costs that would have to be approved by the Conference of Delegation chairs, but it would mean that the PPA could respond at pace to issues.

We arrive at an interesting analytical space. Building friendly relations was a key diplomatic function shared by parliamentary actors as part of their role. However, it does not obviously correspond to parliamentary functions – or there has certainly been an under-theorisation so far of this activity in parliamentary studies literature. Although building friendly relations is not a ‘core’ function of parliaments, it is by no means marginal. Representation and communication parliamentary functions may inform building friendly relations, but these links need to be explored further.

5. Discussion and conclusion

Parliamentary diplomacy is an essentially contested concept – moreover, it is situated by geopolitical circumstance and institutional location in parliaments. The term is used more in the European Parliament than in the UK Parliament. For parliamentary actors, some functions of diplomacy, such as building friendly relations and information seeking are emphasised more. Parliaments are seen to have less direct involvement in international negotiation.

Diplomatic functions are both strengthened and undermined by parliamentary functions and norms. Regarding the PPA, on the one hand parliamentary norms give it some flexibility. Whilst constrained by the outcomes of executive negotiations, the PPA has worked on many non-TCA issues and has agenda setting power in its recommendations that fill policy vacuums. On the other hand, parliamentary norms constrain the PPA, such as around parliamentary calendars, and norms of requesting speaking time. With weak institutionalisation of the PPA and nascent understandings of parliamentary diplomacy emerging, arguably, there is still all to play for, regarding the PPA’s contribution to parliamentary diplomacy going forward.

The PPA will face further challenges after the UK General Election in 2024. The composition of the delegations will change, affecting issues of continuity. Future research could analyse party divisions affecting interpretations of parliamentary diplomacy. Green MPs for example may be critical of the travel elements involved in parliamentary diplomacy. Those on the far right may also interpret that diplomacy should be the preserve of states (Cooper 2019).

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Interviews

Interview 1: IPI Staff, 220124, Online

Interview 2: EP Staff, 260124, Online

Interview 3: IPI Staff, 010224, Online

Interview 4: PPA Member, 080224, Online

Interview 5: Subject Expert, 140224, Online

Interview 6: PPA Member 190224, Online

Interview 7: PPA Member 230224, Online

Interview 8: EP Staff, 060324, Online

Interview 9: EP Staff, 120324, Online

Interview 10: PPA Member, 190324, Written

Interview 11: UK Parliamentary Staff 170624, Written

Interview 12: Diplomat, EU Capital, 270624, In person

Fieldnote 1: Citizen's Gathering Event, London, 061223 In-person

Appendix 1: Executive and Diplomatic Experience of Delegation

<u>UK Delegation Diplomatic experience</u>	
Lord Peter Ricketts	British Ambassador to France, United Kingdom National Security Advisor, Permanent Secretary, Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Baroness Catherine Meyer	Former Trade Envoy to Ukraine
<u>EP Delegation Diplomatic Experience</u>	
Beatrix Corvassi MEP	Minister Counsellor at the EU Delegation to the UK Head of the European Commission Representation in Italy First Counsellor EU Delegation to the US
Nathalie Loiseau MEP	Joined French foreign service in 1986

Appendix 2: Members with former experience of European Institutions

<u>UK Delegation</u>	
Baroness Christine Crawley	MEP
Robert Goodwill	MEP
Lord Daniel Hannan	MEP
Baroness Diane Hayter	Chief Executive of the European Parliamentary Labour Party
Lord Timothy Kirkhope of Harrogate	MEP, former national party delegation leader
Lord Roger Liddle	Special Advisor on European matters to Tony Blair and President of the European Commission, Jose Manuel Barosso
Baroness Sarah Ludford	MEP
Baroness Nosheena Mobarik	MEP
Baroness Emma Nicholson	MEP
Neil Parish	MEP
Lord Robin Teverson	MEP
<u>European Delegation</u>	
Gunnar Beck	Worked in UK Parliament

ⁱ Other inter-parliamentary structures of EU-UK cooperation include missions from committees (for a discussion of the EP Committee's missions see Iannides 2023, p.56-57). The EU Parliament Liaison office in the UK hosts online topic-led #ParliamentsinDialogue sessions. The EPP group also proposed an envoy to Northern Ireland (EPP Group 2023). There have been formal exchanges of letters between Heads of Delegations, for example, between the Head of UK and EP NATO delegations. In the UK Parliament, select committee trips to European Institutions and Overseas Visits are detailed in the House of Commons Sessional Returns.

ⁱⁱ The numbers of the interviews have been removed in the dissemination of this draft for anonymity, but a list of interview respondents has been provided.

ⁱⁱⁱ In the US, ambassadorial appointments are confirmed by the US senate. The UK Parliament and European Parliament do not have such control powers.