JOURNAL OF EUROPEAN PUBLIC POLICY
2026, VOL. 33, NO. 11, 3031–3059
https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2025.2566343

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Check for updates

In the end, it could be a 'no'. Conditions of ratification challenges on international agreements by the European Parliament

Marine Bardou and Tom Delreux

Institut de Sciences Politiques Louvain-Europe (ISPOLE), University of Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium

ABSTRACT

Since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the consent of the European Parliament is required for the ratification of international agreements. Besides actually vetoing the ratification, the EP can also recommend a veto or delay its decision. We refer to such a contestation of the ratification of an international agreement as a 'ratification challenge'. Focusing on the dyadic EP-Commission relationship, this paper examines under which conditions EP ratification challenges occur. Based on a Qualitative Comparative Analysis of 34 agreements, we identify three explanations for EP ratification challenges: (1) major controversial agreements neutralising interinstitutional mechanisms; (2) agreements with shielded EP concerns about human rights, democracy and the rule of law; and (3) agreements with important economic impacts and specific sensitive issues. Overall, the results highlight the importance of EP-Commission interinstitutional mechanisms and show that parliamentary contestation can emerge even in the absence of politicisation.

ARTICLE HISTORY Received 10 April 2025; Accepted 21 September 2025

KEYWORDS European Parliament; international agreements; ratification; ratification challenge; consent procedure; Qualitative Comparative Analysis

Introduction

The Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA), the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) with China and the Understanding on the Conservation of Swordfish with Chile are three examples of international agreements that have been negotiated by the European Union (EU), but, at the time of writing, are not ratified because the European Parliament (EP) refused to give its consent. Since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty

CONTACT Marine Bardou marine.bardou@uclouvain.be Institut de Sciences Politiques Louvain-Europe (ISPOLE), University of Louvain, Montesquieu 1, SPLE bte L2.08.07, B-1348 Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium

Supplemental data for this article can be accessed online at https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2025.2566343.

© 2025 Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

in December 2009, the EP's consent is required for the ratification of most international agreements. The EP was therefore able to deny its consent to ACTA, and to postpone its decisions on the CAI and the Understanding on Swordfish with Chile – in practice preventing the ratification by the EU and the entry into force of the agreements. These three cases constitute examples of EP ratification challenges, i.e., the EP contesting the ratification of international agreements with an actual impact on the ratification process.

Admittedly, and despite the aforementioned examples, such ratification challenges are rather exceptional. Since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the EP has challenged the ratification of 17 international agreements, while it has not challenged the ratification of (i.e., given its consent to) approximately 350 international agreements. Most international agreements are rather smoothly ratified by the EP for two reasons. First, in the post-Lisbon era, the EP has developed mechanisms to get involved in all stages of negotiations and to interact with the Commission, which negotiates on behalf of the EU with third countries. Such mechanisms limit open and explicit contestation (Eckes, 2019; Meissner, 2016). Second, as a ratification challenge entails an open and explicit contestation of the ratification, it is likely to have important negative policy and diplomatic consequences for the EU. Consequently, it could be expected that the Commission seeks to avoid that the EP challenges the ratification, in particular by taking into account the EP's concerns (Ripoll Servent, 2014). As ratification challenges deviate from the general pattern of consensus and 'smooth' ratification, it is important to study under which conditions they occur. The occurrence of ratification challenges is additionally puzzling because, as illustrated by the cases of ACTA, the CAI and the Understanding on Swordfish with Chile, they occur for different types of international agreements and in different policy domains. Therefore, this paper asks: *under which conditions does the EP challenge the ratification of international agreements?*

Relying on a crisp-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (csQCA) of 34 international agreements, we find three explanations for the occurrence of ratification challenges. We label the first explanation 'major controversial agreements neutralising interinstitutional mechanisms': if there are interinstitutional mechanisms facilitating EP-Commission relations, the international agreement should be of major importance to neutralise the function of the interinstitutional mechanisms, and for ratification challenges to occur. The two other explanations are labelled 'agreements with shielded EP concerns about human rights, democracy and the rule of law' and 'agreements with important economic impacts and specific sensitive issues'. Together, they show that when interinstitutional mechanisms are absent, ratification challenges emerge more 'easily'.

Taken together, the paper contributes to the literature on the parliamentarization of EU foreign policy. In particular, it sheds light on the conditions

under which a specific form of EP contestation – namely ratification challenges – occur. We focus on structural factors, related to the nature of the agreements and the negotiation processes, which are complementary to the micro-level of partisan and national dynamics in the EP. Besides, while an important body of research is interested in the politicisation of (trade) agreements (inter alia Cabras, 2024; De Bièvre & Poletti, 2020; Meunier & Czesana, 2019), our results demonstrate that such politicisation is not a necessary condition for parliamentary contestation.

More generally the paper adds to the study of two broader aspects of EU (foreign) policymaking. First, it contributes to better understanding why the EU's interinstitutional machinery that is geared towards building consensus (which here corresponds to a smooth or unproblematic ratification) sometimes breaks down. Such mechanisms have been studied in the case of EU legislative policy-making, and the focus on international agreements brings additional insights (Novak et al., 2021). Second, ratification challenges affect the EU's cohesiveness and credibility in its relations with third countries. Identifying their drivers thus informs the study of the EU as an international actor.

The paper is structured as follows. The next section introduces the role of the EP in the negotiation of international agreements. Sections 3 and 4 present respectively the theoretical framework and the conditions. Section 5 outlines the methodological approach, which is further detailed in the methodological annex. Section 6 presents the results, i.e., the three explanations of ratification challenge. Section 7 discusses the results.

The European Parliament and the ratification of international agreements

In most democratic political systems, parliaments have a say in the ratification of international agreements, while executives dominate the preparation and the conduct of negotiations (Ostermann & Wagner, 2023; Thym, 2008; Vignoli & Corradi, 2023). This creates a dyadic relationship between the parliament and the executive: the latter negotiates with third countries, but the result of these negotiations has to be consented to by the former. In case the executive fails to secure parliamentary approval, or if such approval is uncertain, this comes with policy and diplomatic consequences. First, the absence of ratification of an agreement can affect the policy field in question as certain issues remain unaddressed. Second, there can be diplomatic consequences (Karlas, 2023). This second consequence is particularly relevant for the EU, which is traditionally committed to a rule-based international order in which international law – and thus international agreements – matter (Bargués et al., 2023; Bozzini & Sicurelli, 2024).

The EU's procedure for the making of international agreements is determined in Article 218 TFEU and can be divided in three stages.[1] First, during the *authorisation stage*, the Council decides on a negotiating mandate on the basis of a Commission recommendation. Second, during the *negotiation stage*, the Commission negotiates with the third country or countries. Third, during the *ratification stage*, the EP's consent is required before the Council can ratify international agreements.[2] This formal decision-making procedure implies that the Commission (as the negotiator) and the Council (as the mandate-giver and the final ratifier) dominate the making of international agreements, while the EP is formally involved only for ratification (together with the Council).

In practice, the EP very seldom vetoes international agreements.[3] Yet, it is regularly involved in their negotiation through other means (Bardou, 2024b). Case studies have extensively explored these strategies of EP involvement, for example through resolutions (e.g., Bardou & Delreux, 2025; Delreux & Burns, 2019; Meissner, 2016; Meissner & McKenzie, 2019; Ripoll Servent, 2014; Sicurelli, 2015). The EP has established a strong track record for such activities, leading to its 'deep' integration in the making of international agreements (Roederer-Rynning, 2017). Overall, the interactions between the EP and the Commission are mostly cooperative and constructive, based on frequent meetings and exchanges of information between the two institutions (Eckes, 2019; Márton, 2020). This is particularly the case in the policy field of trade (Coremans & Meissner, 2018; Kerremans et al., 2019; Meissner, 2016).

Conceptualising ratification challenges

We consider the dyadic relation between the Commission and the EP as a classic two-level game logic (Putnam, 1988), rooted in a rational choice approach: the Commission negotiates at the international level and needs the EP's consent at the EU level. Admittedly, the 'game' played by the Commission is more complicated than a simple dyadic relation, notably because the Council is a mandate-giver and an additional veto player at the EU level. Yet, we focus on the dyadic EP-Commission relation because we are interested in ratification challenges created by the EP. In such a two-level game perspective, the Commission has incentives to anticipate the EP's reaction and is therefore likely to engage with EP demands (Delreux & Burns, 2019; Ripoll Servent, 2014). If the Commission fails to anticipate by misunderstanding or ignoring the EP's signals, it faces the risk of a ratification challenge.

We define an EP ratification challenge as the contestation of the ratification of an international agreement, by the EP as an institution, with an actual impact on the ratification process. Hence, a ratification challenge refers to the *absence* of smooth, unproblematic consent by the EP. It covers a variety of empirical phenomena but always differs from other means of

EP contestation because of its two defining characteristics. First, a ratification challenge is created by the EP as an institution. It is the result of an internal EP procedure, during which a majority of MEPs was found. By contrast, a veto threat formulated by a small group of MEPs, for example in an open letter sent to the Commission, is not considered to be a ratification challenge.

Second, a ratification challenge has an actual impact on the ratification stage because the EP unilaterally stops or brings uncertainty on the ratification process. By contrast, the mere adoption of a critical resolution is not considered to be a ratification challenge, as it only has an impact if the Commission chooses to take it into account. Because of its actual impact on the ratification stage, a ratification challenge can occur from the moment onwards that the text of the international agreement is agreed upon between the Commission and the third country. At that point, the negotiation stage ends, and the Commission launches the procedure for signature and ratification. The latest point at which a ratification challenge can occur is the EP's formal decision on consent because afterwards, the EP can no longer unilaterally impact the ratification.

Building on our definition of a ratification challenge, we inductively distinguish three types of ratification challenges**,** which are not mutually exclusive, and which have in common that there is no smooth or unproblematic consent by the EP:

1) *Veto*: the EP denies consent to the ratification of the international agreement.
2) *Recommendation of veto*: the responsible EP committee or one of the committees for opinion recommends that the EP denies consent.
3) *Consent delay*: the responsible EP committee or the EP plenary decides to purposefully delay the ratification.

Just like an EP veto, the two other manifestations of a ratification challenge entail policy and diplomatic costs for the EU. The EP is expected to avoid these costs for two reasons. First, the EP is generally in favour of concluding international agreements, even when they are not completely aligned with its preferences, rather than having no agreement at all (Auersperger Matic, 2021; Jansen et al., 2024). Second, the EP has an interest in ensuring that it follows a 'responsible' course of action for reputational reasons (Van den Putte et al., 2015). However, the benefits of ratification challenges may sometimes outweigh their costs for the EP. On the one hand, a ratification challenge can allow the EP to strengthen its profile as an actor that wishes to be taken seriously in EU foreign policymaking. Especially in the early post-Lisbon period, EP involvement was strongly connected to such institutional self-assertion and to making its recently acquired veto power credible, as it was the case with ACTA (Meissner, 2016; Ripoll Servent, 2014). On the other

hand, ratification challenges can be driven by strong concerns about the adverse policy implications of international agreements.

Existing case studies show that the EP's involvement in the negotiation process of international agreements varies from one agreement to another, depending on the salience, the policy field and the issues at stake (Bardou & Delreux, 2025; Héritier et al., 2019; Van den Putte et al., 2015). Other studies have tackled the contestation of (trade) agreements in the EU public sphere (Cabras, 2024; De Bièvre & Poletti, 2020), but do not address variation of EP contestation, and a fortiori EP ratification challenges.

In the dyadic relation between the EP and the Commission, it is important to take the perspective of the Commission into account. Although the Commission's perspective has been little addressed in the literature, especially empirically, two analytical angles stand out. On the one hand, from a classic two-level-game perspective, in cases of 'involuntary defection', the executive fails to anticipate parliamentary preferences (e.g., Lantis, 2006) despite the mechanisms put into place for that purpose (Peffenköver & Adriaensen, 2021), or it does not manage to convince the parliamentary veto player. On the other hand, the requirement of the EP's consent can be exploited by the Commission to strengthen its position vis-à-vis third countries, through the so-called tied-hands strategy (Putnam, 1988).

Conditions of ratification challenges

Following our rational choice, two-level game perspective, and given the largely negative consequences of ratification challenges for the EP and the Commission, ratification challenges are likely to occur in three, non-mutually exclusive, scenarios:

1) when the EP considers the benefits of the ratification challenge higher than its costs;
2) when the Commission does not seek to avoid a ratification challenge, for instance to increase its bargaining power;
3) when the Commission fails to anticipate the EP's preferences correctly or does not manage to convince the EP about the agreement in its current form.

Overall, these three scenarios reveal that the occurrence of ratification challenges depends on the interinstitutional mechanisms that allow the Commission to anticipate the EP's demands, and on the EP's and Commission's preferences. In other words, ratification challenges are not exclusively induced by either the Commission or the EP side of the dyadic relation. Following that reasoning, and combined with our case-specific knowledge, we select five conditions about the institutional setting and about the content

of the agreement on which the preferences are formed. These conditions are situated at the structural level, and thus relate to the nature of the agreements and the negotiation processes.

First, we consider the *interinstitutional mechanisms* in place between the EP and the Commission. Such mechanisms are, for example, regular meetings between the responsible EP committee and the Commission before and/or after negotiation rounds, via which the EP is informed about the negotiations, and the Commission about the EP's preferences. They are therefore an important tool for the Commission to anticipate and prevent a ratification challenge (Hurrelmann & Wendler, 2024; Lantis, 2006; Peffenköver & Adriaensen, 2021). Yet, such interinstitutional mechanisms are not the same in all policy fields. They are particularly developed in the field of trade (Bardou, 2024a). In policy fields in which interinstitutional mechanisms are less developed, ratification challenges are more likely to occur.

Second, the EP traditionally presents itself as a normative voice in EU foreign policy, paying particular attention to the *provisions on human rights, democracy and the rule of law* (Fahey & Wieczorek, 2022; Servent & MacKenzie, 2012; Sicurelli, 2015; Yan, 2019). The literature has shown that it is not sufficient that such norms are 'objectively' at stake, for example because of the third country's political regime, for triggering EP activities (Bardou & Delreux, 2025). Instead, it is necessary that these norms are *framed* to be at stake (Fenner, 2024; Meissner, 2021). Therefore, when the EP is concerned that human rights, democracy or the rule of law are negatively affected by the international agreement, it is more difficult for the Commission to anticipate the EP's demands. Therefore, under these circumstances, we expect ratification challenges to occur.

Third, international agreements with an *impact on the agriculture (including fisheries) sector* entail a strong potential for contestation in the EP. Agricultural interest groups are particularly vocal in the EU and often oppose trade liberalisation through international agreements (Bednaríková & Jílková, 2012). Moreover, the EP is in general cautious about trade liberalisation in the agricultural sector (Gravey & Buzogány, 2021; Pasquariello Mariano & Luciano, 2019). Taken together, international agreements with an impact on agriculture are likely to generate contestation in the EU in general and the EP in particular. Like for human rights, democracy and the rule of law, we consider framing as a key point. Therefore, when an international agreement is *framed* as having an important impact on the agricultural sector, we expect ratification challenges to occur.

Fourth, the economic size of the third country and the expected *economic impact* is an important factor affecting the (parliamentary) contestation of international (trade) agreements (Cabras, 2024; Norrevik, 2021). Therefore, when international agreements have an important economic impact, there is more potential for EP contestation, and we expect ratification challenges to occur.

Fifth, we consider the *politicisation* of international agreements, which we define as comprising the three classic dimensions: mediatisation, actor expansion and polarisation (De Wilde et al., 2016). We add a fourth dimension that is specific to the politicisation of the EP consent procedure to ratification: the institutional self-assertion of the EP (Meissner, 2016; Van den Putte et al., 2015). The four dimensions are brought together as follows: international agreements are politicised if they are mediatised *and* if there is actor expansion and polarisation, or institutional self-assertion. When there is mediatisation, EP actors have more incentives to get involved because their activities are more visible (Meissner & McKenzie, 2019; Vliegenthart et al., 2016). Actor expansion and polarisation further trigger EP involvement, albeit not systematically (Crespy & Parks, 2017; Crespy & Rone, 2022; Fenner, 2024; Mancini, 2022). Institutional self-assertion is incentivized by maximising the credibility of the recently acquired veto power, which was particularly at stake in the early post-Lisbon years. Taken together, when an international agreement is politicised, we presume that the EP is less likely to ratify smoothly because there is increased public scrutiny and potential for contestation. Additionally, the anticipation mechanisms are likely to function less effectively in a context that is more uncertain as a result of the politicisation (Peffenköver & Adriaensen, 2021). Therefore, we expect ratification challenges to occur when an agreement is politicised.

Methods

We conduct a Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) to explain the occurrence of ratification challenges. QCA is particularly useful to investigate how complex patterns of conditions lead to specific outcomes (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012). In QCA, the analysis is conducted on the presence of an outcome (here, the occurrence of ratification challenges) and several conditions. We apply the crisp-set variation of QCA, where the outcome and conditions are dichotomised (i.e., either present or absent; or in set-theoretic QCA terminology either in or outside the set). QCA relies on a minimisation algorithm to identify which (combinations of) condition(s) are necessary and/or sufficient for the outcome to occur.

The QCA is conducted with 34 cases of international agreement negotiations to which Lisbon Treaty rules were applicable at some point, and therefore for which EP consent was needed. Cases were selected in two steps. In a first step, we identified the positive cases, i.e., the cases in which at least one type of ratification challenges (veto, recommendation of veto, consent delay) occurred. To identify the cases of veto and recommendation of veto, we retrieved the EP committee recommendations and the decisions on consent for all ratification procedures. To identify cases of consent delay, we relied on the existing literature, on a press review and on interviews with

EP and Commission actors. In total, we found 17 cases of ratification challenges, presented in Table 1 (see also the annex at the end of the paper).

In a second step, following a strategy of purposeful selection of the negative cases (Mello, 2021, pp. 11–12), we matched each case of ratification challenge with a similar international agreement without a ratification challenge. The similarity of the agreement was assessed on the basis of the policy field; the comprehensiveness of the agreement (i.e., the number of sectors covered); the type of cooperation, policies or economic opportunities contained in the agreement; and the third country. This second step resulted in the selection of 17 negative cases among the more than 350 agreements concluded since 2010 without a ratification challenge.

The 34 agreements resulting from this case selection cover trade agreements, fisheries agreements, agreements on justice and home affairs, agreements on science and technology, and association agreements (which include a major trade component). They are presented in the annex.

To code the five conditions, we collected specialised press articles via the database Factiva and official EU documents via the EP Legislative Observatory. This resulted in the compilation of a corpus of over 500 documents. The five conditions were operationalised as follows (see Table 2).[4]

Inter-institutional mechanisms (INST) are considered to be present for agreements dealt with by the International Trade (INTA) Committee *and* signed after 2014. Trade policy indeed stands out as a policy field by its unique and far-reaching interinstitutional mechanisms for EP involvement in the negotiation process of international agreements (Bardou, 2024a). However, these mechanisms developed progressively after the entry into

Table 1. Types of ratification challenges and corresponding cases.

Case	Veto	Recommendation of veto	Consent delay
ACTA	yes	yes	no
SWIFT	yes	yes	yes
FisheriesMorocco	yes	yes	no
EPASouthernAfricaStates	no	yes	no
TradeMorocco	no	yes	no
FisheriesKiribati	no	yes	no
FisheriesMadagascar	no	yes	no
FisheriesMauritania	no	yes	no
CETA	no	yes	no
TextileUzbekistan	no	no	yes
FisheriesChile	no	yes[a]	no
PNRsAustraliaUSA	no	no	yes
EUprogrammesNewZealandFaroe	no	no	yes
PostBrexitTCAUK	no	no	yes
FTASouthKorea	no	no	yes
CAIChina	no	no	yes[b]
AssociationMercosur	no	no	yes[b]

[a]recommendation outside of the formal consent procedure
[b]the EP as a whole signalled in a resolution that would not ratify

Table 2. Operationalisation of conditions.

Condition	Abbreviation	Criterion for presence (condition = 1)
Interinstitutional mechanisms	INST	INTA is the responsible committee and agreement is signed after 2014
Human rights, democracy and the rule of law	HR_DEMO_LAW	EP concerns about human rights, democracy and/or the rule of law (EP documents and specialised press)
Impact on agriculture and/or fisheries	AGRI	Sectoral agreement on agriculture or encompassing agreement framed as affecting the sector (EP documents and specialised press)
Economic impact	ECO_IMP	Agreements with an economic dimension, either important in their sector or encompassing and with a third country with a significant relative GDP
Politicisation	POL	Agreement is mediatised (at least two articles about the agreement in Euractiv) and (a) characterised by actor expansion and polarisation (existing literature) or (b) signed during the first post-Lisbon EP term (2009-2014)

force of the Lisbon Treaty and fulfilled a full anticipation potential from the second post-Lisbon EP term onwards (i.e., from 2014).

EP concerns about human rights, democracy and the rule of law (HR_DEMO_-LAW) are considered to be present when such concerns are expressed in EP documents or in the specialised press. This condition differs from politicisation, inasmuch such concerns are not necessarily expressed in media outlets, by an extended set of actors, or in a polarised way. Moreover, international agreements can be politicised because of other issues than concerns about human rights, democracy and/or the rule of law.

The *impact on the agriculture and/or fisheries sector (AGRI)* is coded depending on the type of agreement: (1) agreements which do not cover agriculture and/or fisheries are coded outside the set; (2) sectoral agreements dedicated to agriculture and/or fisheries are coded inside the set; (3) encompassing trade and/or investment agreements are coded depending on whether their impact on fisheries and/or agriculture is framed as an issue by the EP. To code this condition, we rely on EP documents, the specialised press and the existing literature.

The *economic impact (ECO_IMP)* of agreements is also coded depending on the type of agreement: (1) agreements which do not cover economic issues are coded outside the set; (2) sectoral agreements are coded on the basis of the impact of other agreements in the sector, based on their provisions and Commission and EP documents; (3) encompassing trade and/or investment agreements are coded on the basis of the GDP of the third country relative to that of the EU (see Cabras, 2024).

Politicisation (POL) is considered to be present when an agreement is mediatised *and* either characterised by actor expansion and polarisation,

or signed before 2014 (i.e., in the period when there were intense dynamics of EP institutional self-assertion). Mediatisation is operationalised on the basis of articles published in Euractiv, which is one of the main EU-specialised media outlets.[5] We used a threshold of two articles to capture variation in relatively low levels of politicisation, which are characteristic of international agreements (Zimmermann, 2019). We evaluated the presence of actor expansion and polarisation on the basis of evidence of involvement of a relatively high variety of actors and of polarised debates in existing case studies. To evaluate EP institutional self-assertion, we considered whether the agreement was at least partly negotiated or in the consent procedure during the first post-Lisbon EP term (2009-2014).

Results: three explanations of ratification challenges

Table 3 presents the truth table with the logically possible combinations of the conditions and the outcome, and the corresponding cases.

Table 4 presents the results of the minimisation of this truth table, which are the paths (i.e., combinations of conditions) that lead to an EP ratification challenge. We present the so-called 'conservative solution', which is the most detailed result of a QCA procedure (Glaesser, 2023).[6] The conservative solution reveals most clearly the effect of interinstitutional mechanisms (INST) on ratification challenges. We also conducted a QCA procedure for the absence of ratification challenges. The results are coherent with those obtained for the presence of ratification challenges.[7]

As Table 4 shows, there are six combinations of conditions associated with the occurrence of a ratification challenge:

1) cases with interinstitutional mechanisms, on agreements with economic impact, politicised and about which the EP has concerns about human rights, democracy and the rule of law (INST*ECO_IMP*POL*HR_DEMO_LAW);
2) cases with interinstitutional mechanisms, on agreements with economic impact, politicised and with impact on agriculture (INST*ECO_IMP*POL*AGRI)
3) cases without interinstitutional mechanisms, on agreements on which the EP has concerns about human rights, democracy and the rule of law, without economic impact and without an impact on agriculture (∼INST*HR_DEMO_LAW*∼ECO_IMP*∼AGRI);
4) cases without interinstitutional mechanisms, on agreements on which the EP has concerns about human rights, democracy and the rule of law, without economic impact and without politicisation (∼INST*HR_DEMO_LAW*∼ECO_IMP*∼POL);

Table 3. Truth table.[14]

INST	HR_DEMO_LAW	AGRI	ECO_IMP	POL	CHL	n	PRI*	Cases
0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	FTASouthKorea
0	0	1	1	0	1	4	1	FisheriesMorocco,TradeMorocco, FisheriesMauritania,FisheriesChile
0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	TextileUzbekistan
0	1	0	0	1	1	3	1	ACTA,SWIFT,PNRsAustraliaUSA
0	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	FisheriesMadagascar
1	0	1	1	1	1	2	1	PostBrexitTCAUK,AssociationMercosur
1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	CAIChina
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	CETA
0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0.2	EPASouthernAfricaStates,WHOTobacco,PersonalDataUSA,AirTransportMorocco,EuropolNewZealand
1	0	0	0	0	0	5	0.2	EUprogrammesNewZealandFaroe,EPASADC,EUProgrammesFaroe,InvestmentSingapore,AssociationChile
0	0	1	0	0	0	6	0.17	FisheriesKiribati,TradePalestine,FisheriesSeychelles,FisheriesSenegal,FisheriesIvoryCoast, FisheriesMozambique
0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	AssociationUkraine
1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	FTAJapan
1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	TradeOrganicChile
1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	FTAVietnam

*Proportional Reduction in Inconsistency. Indicates the proportion of cases in the row for which there was a ratification challenge

Table 4. Results of the minimisation (conservative solution) and explanations of ratification challenges.

	Causal path[15]	inclS[16]	covS[17]	covU[18]	Cases	Explanation of ratification challenge	Presence of inter-institutional mechanisms
1	INST*ECO_IMP*POL*HR_DEMO_LAW -> CHL	1	0.12	0.06	CAIChina, CETA	Major controversial agreements neutralising inter-institutional mechanisms	Yes
2	INST*ECO_IMP*POL*AGRI -> CHL	1	0.18	0.12	PostBrexitTCAUK, AssociationMercosur, CETA		
3	~INST*HR_DEMO_LAW*~ECO_IMP*~AGRI -> CHL	1	0.24	0.18	TextileUzbekistan, ACTA, SWIFT, PNRsAustraliaUSA	Agreements with shielded EP concerns about human rights, democracy and the rule of law	No
4	~INST*HR_DEMO_LAW*~ECO_IMP*~POL -> CHL	1	0.12	0.06	TextileUzbekistan, FisheriesMadagascar		
5	~INST*ECO_IMP*~HR_DEMO_LAW*~AGRI*POL -> CHL	1	0.06	0.06	FTASouthKorea	Agreements with important economic impacts and specific sensitive issues	No
6	~INST*ECO_IMP*~HR_DEMO_LAW*AGRI*~POL -> CHL	1	0.24	0.24	FisheriesMorocco, TradeMorocco, FisheriesMauritania, FisheriesChile		
	Solution	1	0.82				

5) cases without interinstitutional mechanisms, on agreements with economic impact, on which the EP has no concerns about human rights, democracy and the rule of law, without an impact on agriculture but politicised (~INST*ECO_IMP*~HR_DEMO_LAW*~AGRI*POL);
6) cases without interinstitutional mechanisms, on agreements with economic impact, on which the EP has no concerns about human rights, democracy and the rule of law, with an impact on agriculture and without politicisation (~INST*ECO_IMP*~HR_DEMO_LAW*AGRI*~POL).

These six paths cover 14 of the 17 cases of ratification challenges (coverage score of 0.82). Importantly, no negative case is covered by these paths. In technical QCA terms, our results are very consistent and display a high coverage. In the remainder of this section, we group the six paths leading to ratification challenges into three categories of explanation.[8] The first explanation (path 1 and 2) covers agreements for which interinstitutional mechanisms are well developed, the second and third (respectively paths 3 and 4, and 5 and 6) cover agreements without such interinstitutional mechanisms.

*Explanation 1: major controversial agreements neutralising interinstitutional mechanisms [INST*ECO_IMP*POL*(HR_DEMO_LAW + AGRI)]*

The first explanation covers cases with EP-Commission interinstitutional mechanisms designed to ensure ratification, but for which the anticipatory function of these mechanisms is neutralised by the controversial nature of the agreements. When there are such interinstitutional mechanisms, three additional conditions should be present simultaneously for ratification challenges to occur: an important economic impact, politicisation and at least one sensitive issue for the EP, i.e., either human rights, democracy and the rule of law, or agriculture. This explanation is coherent with our expectations: interinstitutional mechanisms reduce the risks of ratification challenges, but they are not sufficient in the case of agreements which are controversial for several reasons at the same time.

This first explanation covers four agreements with a ratification challenge. They all have an important trade component. CAIChina is an investment agreement with a major economic impact. It became controversial when the EU imposed sanctions on China because of the human rights situation in that country, in retaliation of which some MEPs were sanctioned by China. As a result, the EP decided to delay its consent until the sanctions are lifted (Kuang et al., 2024). For CETA, there were concerns both related to human rights, democracy and the rule of law, as well as agriculture. Regarding the former, the EP strongly engaged to obtain the insertion of a human rights clause (Meissner & McKenzie, 2019). Regarding agriculture,

the agreement was criticised in the EP for leading to a lowering of agricultural standards (De Bièvre, 2018). The ratification of CETA was challenged by the EP's opinion committee on employment, which recommended to deny consent. PostBrexitTCAUK was associated with strong concerns about fisheries (Appleby, 2020). The EP delayed its decision on consent to this agreement in the context of tensions with the United Kingdom on several other topics, including the implementation of customs arrangements in Northern Ireland. AssociationMercosur was debated for its impact on European agriculture in terms of standards and competitiveness (Theodoro Luciano & Junqueira, 2023). After a first version of the agreement was politically agreed (i.e., initialled) between the Commission and the negotiators from Mercosur in 2019, the EP adopted a resolution stating that it would not give its consent to the agreement in its initialled form.

*Explanation 2: agreements with shielded EP concerns about human rights, democracy and the rule of law [~INST*HR_DEMO_LAW*~ECO_IMP*(~AGRI+~POL)]*

The second explanation covers cases without interinstitutional mechanisms. In line with our expectations, if there are no interinstitutional mechanisms to facilitate the avoidance of a ratification challenge, the latter emerges more 'easily'. In this second explanation, the absence of interinstitutional mechanisms is combined with EP concerns about human rights, democracy and the rule of law, but the economic impact is limited, and there is either no impact on agriculture or no politicisation. This explanation displays a surprising combination of conditions: human rights, democracy and rule of law concerns are associated with ratification challenges as expected, but *without* economic impact, impact on agriculture or politicisation. As such, these concerns are 'shielded' from other sensitive issues. In such cases, the EP can challenge the ratification based on concerns on human rights, democracy and the rule of law risking fewer negative consequences.

The second explanation covers five agreements with an EP ratification challenge. ACTA, SWIFT and PNRsAustraliaUSA were criticised in the EP for not providing sufficient guarantees on the protection of personal data in the context of intellectual property protection (ACTA), the transfer of banking data (SWIFT) or passenger data (PNRsAustraliaUSA) (Eckes, 2014; Meissner, 2016). As a result, the EP vetoed the ratification of ACTA and SWIFT, and it delayed its consent for PNRsAustraliaUSA. In TextileUzbekistan and FisheriesMadagascar, the EP's concerns on human rights, democracy and the rule of law were about the third country. The main concern on TextileUzbekistan was about child labour[9] and the EP postponed its consent until improvements were made. In the case of FisheriesMadagascar, the EP

voiced concerns about the democratic character of elections in Madagascar and the committee recommended to deny consent.[10]

*Explanation 3: agreements with major economic impact and specific sensitive issues [~INST*ECO_IMP*~HR_DEMO_LAW*(~AGRI*POL + AGRI*~POL)]*

Like the second explanation, the third explanation covers cases without inter-institutional mechanisms. Yet for these agreements the ratification challenge is not caused by concerns about human rights, democracy and the rule of law, but by the combination of their important economic impact and one other issue heightening EP contestation of ratification. This issue is either the politicisation of the agreement, or its impact on the agricultural sector. This explanation is line with our expectations: when the agreement is politicised or touches upon the sensitive sector of agriculture, then the EP has less incentives to prefer ratification over the absence of agreement.

This path covers five cases with a ratification challenge: three fisheries agreements and two trade agreements signed before 2014, when the inter-institutional mechanisms were less developed. The EP challenged ratification of these five agreements because of the (allegedly negative) impact on sensitive economic sectors, despite the fact that the agreements were, with the exception of FTASouthKorea, not politicised. FisheriesMauritania is an agreement giving EU vessels access to one of the richest fishing grounds. The provisions of this agreement had important economic implications for EU fleets operating in these waters, especially in terms of (absence of) rights to fish the valuable cephalopods species. The EP committee report that recommended to deny consent includes arguments on how the agreement would be economically detrimental to the EU fleet. Likewise, FisheriesMorocco includes sizeable fishing opportunities for the EU fleet.[11] But in this case, the major element that created contestation in the EP was the application of the agreement to the Western Sahara. FisheriesChile was designed to settle a long-standing dispute between the EU and Chile on the landing of swordfish catches, a very valuable species. Arguing that such an agreement would be detrimental to EU fisheries activities, the EP fisheries committee voted against the agreement, even before the formal consent request of the Council. TradeMorocco is an agreement liberalising trade of agricultural goods with Morocco. Morocco is a major supplier of fruits and vegetables of the EU, which led to intense debates in the EP on the competitiveness impact of the agreement on the agricultural sector.[12] The opinion committee on agriculture recommended to deny consent. Finally, FTASouthKorea is an encompassing trade agreement with important economic impact, but not on the agricultural sector. However, it was politicised since it was mediatised and was one of the first major agreements needing EP consent after the entry

into force of the Lisbon Treaty. Hence there were strong incentives for EP institutional self-assertion. The EP delayed its decision on the ratification of this agreement to obtain a safeguard clause relative to the automotive industry.[13]

Cases of ratification challenges not covered by the explanations

Three cases of ratification challenges are not covered by any of the three explanations. EUprogrammesNewZealandFaroe is composed of two similar agreements on the association of third countries to the EU's research programme Horizon Europe. The responsible committee delayed its decision on the ratification of these agreements because it had concerns about the EP's powers on similar agreements in the future. The concern is thus not related to the substance of the agreement, but rather to the institutional status of the EP. The other two cases not covered are FisheriesKiribati and EPASouthernAfricaStates. For both agreements, EP concerns related to the potential adverse effects of the agreements on regional integration.

Discussion

We found three explanations of EP ratification challenges. While the first explanation corresponds to major, well-known agreements which have been extensively studied (CAIChina, CETA, PostBrexitTCAUK and AssociationMercosur), the two other explanations show that ratification challenges can emerge for less salient agreements, such as sectoral agreements with limited impact. This complements existing knowledge on the drivers of parliamentary contestation and of EP-Commission relations in the context of the negotiation process of international agreements, but also in other (legislative) procedures. Five findings stand out regarding the structural factors explaining ratification challenges.

First, by comparing trade agreements with agreements in other policy fields, we find a confirmation of the importance of the interinstitutional mechanisms that are particularly developed in the trade policy field. When such mechanisms are not present, ratification challenges emerge more 'easily': all conditions do not need to co-occur. Taking a step back, this finding points at the importance of inter-institutional dynamics that are endogenous to certain policy fields.

Second, the Commission continues to face structural anticipation issues in its attempts to avoid ratification challenges – and ultimately involuntary defections. As Peffenköver and Adriaensen (2021) argue about the negotiation of trade agreements, there is 'white noise', i.e., a residual inability for the Commission to anticipate parliamentary contestation. Our contribution confirms this argument and extends it beyond the trade policy field.

It sheds light on the origins of the 'white noise'. EP concerns about human rights, democracy and the rule of law, the impact of the agreement on agriculture, and politicisation cause ratification challenges because they are subject to framing dynamics. Hence, these conditions are not 'objectively' observable ex ante but emerge because of discursive enterprises. This makes Commission anticipation harder. These conclusions about the residual inability of the Commission to anticipate EP contestation might be applicable beyond the context of international agreements and could also shed light on the relationship between the Commission in the EP in other procedures, such as the Ordinary Legislative Procedure.

Third, perhaps counterintuitively, ratification challenges can occur in the absence of politicisation. This finding qualifies existing studies, which show that the level of EP involvement in the making of international agreements is associated with the politicisation of the agreement (Héritier et al., 2019). Our results show that the relation between such politicisation and EP-Commission relations is less straightforward, confirming that contestation can emerge within the EP on files which are very little politicised outside of specialised arenas, such as fisheries agreements (Zimmermann, 2019). While the phenomenon of politicisation of (trade) agreements has attracted much attention (e.g., Gheyle, 2019; Hamilton, 2024), it should not lead to overlook (parliamentary) contestation in less politicised contexts. Furthermore, it should be analysed in connection with the politicisation of the EP's institutional self-assertion, in casu in the consent procedure post-Lisbon.

Fourth, we find a surprising pattern regarding the link between EP involvement and human rights, democracy and the rule of law. On the one hand, concerns about human rights, democracy and the rule of law are associated with ratification challenges, in line with the literature presenting the EP as a 'human rights advocate'. On the other hand, cases covered by our second explanation 'agreements with shielded EP concerns about human rights, democracy and the rule of law' contrast with previous findings that the EP advocates for human rights, democracy and the rule of law only when international agreements are politicised (Meissner & McKenzie, 2019). We find that such politicisation is not necessary.

Fifth, the economic impact of an agreement matters in explaining ratification challenges, but it needs to co-occur with at least one other factor. We interpret this finding in two, non-mutually exclusive ways. On the one hand, as the EP is overall supportive of the trade liberalisation agenda (e.g., Auersperger Matic, 2021), it does not challenge the ratification of an economically important agreement if at least one other sensitive issue is not at stake. On the other hand, the Commission could be investing more resources in avoiding ratification challenges of agreements with a considerable economic impact.

A final reflection is about future ratification challenges, which may display different patterns than the ones we found for the 2009-2023 period. We do not focus on partisan politics in this article, but the increasing fragmentation of the EP after the 2024 elections may bring less consensus within the EP around issues such as human rights, democracy and the rule of law. This could make ratification challenges less likely. The increased fragmentation in the EP could also negatively affect the cooperative nature of the EP-Commission relations through interinstitutional mechanisms. Besides, as the international order shifts, the EU may be less able to conclude formal international agreements (Wessels, 2021). These changes may tilt the preferences of the EP and the Commission even more in favour of concluding an international agreement over no agreement at all, thus making ratification challenges less likely. Beyond affecting the likelihood of ratification challenges, these changes may make the specific types of ratification challenges evolve towards types that do not entail the direct involvement of the plenary, or that are less publicly visible.

Conclusion

This article analysed the conditions under which the EP challenges the ratification of international agreements relying on a Qualitative Comparative Analysis of 34 cases across policy fields. We found three explanations for ratification challenges: 'major controversial agreements neutralising interinstitutional mechanisms', 'agreements with shielded EP concerns about human rights, democracy and the rule of law' and 'agreements with major economic impact and specific sensitive issues'. These explanations are highly consistent and can be cautiously generalised to similar parliaments and agreements. However, recent changes at the EU level (e.g., the growth of the far-right in the EP) and at the international level (e.g., the weakening of the rule-based international order) could affect these explanations for future ratification challenges.

Taken together, our analysis contributes to the study of interinstitutional relations and parliamentary contestation in three ways. First, it demonstrates the importance of interinstitutional mechanisms specific to certain policy fields. Second, the role of EP concerns about human rights, democracy and the rule of law, and the perception of impact on the agricultural sector show the centrality of framing dynamics and hence explains the residual inability of the Commission to anticipate EP preferences. Finally, politicisation has an important impact as suggested in the literature, but in a more complex way than expected, as its absence can also be associated with ratification challenges, and thus parliamentary contestation.

These findings open at least three avenues for future research. First, as this article only focused on the structural conditions associated with the

occurrence of ratification challenges, it does not address the politics underpinning ratification challenges. Future research should explore how, for instance, the partisan and national affiliation of MEPs create dynamics linking these structural conditions to ratification challenges. Second, the concept of ratification challenges captures different empirical phenomena that diverge from the smooth, unproblematic ratification which is the norm. Explaining the drivers of different types of ratification challenges would therefore be an important step in future research. Third, the consequences of ratification challenges have not been explored so far. Even when ratification challenges occur, it is rare that agreements are not ratified at all. Indeed, while we identified 17 cases of ratifications challenges since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, only three agreements were ultimately vetoed by the EP. For example, instead of running into the EP's veto, agreements for which the ratification is challenged can be renegotiated or the EP plenary does not follow the recommendation of the committee. In other words, most ratification challenges are overcome in the end, which leads to question the consequences of ratification challenges for the substance and democratic legitimacy of the EU's foreign policy. Given the diversity of configurations in which ratification challenges can emerge, their consequences could be as diverse and remain to be explored in future research.

Notes

1. Furthermore, additional provisions exist for some policy areas, like article 207 TFEU for trade agreements.
2. Over 80% of agreements negotiated by the EU since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty required the EP's consent to be ratified. The Council decides alone on the ratification of the remainder of agreements, which are mainly devoted to the Common and Foreign Security Policy (CFSP).
3. Since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the EP has vetoed the ratification of the SWIFT Agreement on the transfer of banking data (2010), a Fisheries Agreement with Morocco (2011) and the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) (2012).
4. See methodological annex for details on the operationalization.
5. Searches conducted in other media outlets such as Politico led to similar results, confirming the validity of our measurement.
6. Other solutions have the same coverage and lead to very similar conclusions.
7. See methodological annex for details.
8. For each explanation, we indicate the factorization of the two paths to which they correspond.
9. For example: EP resolution of 14 December 2016 on EC-Uzbekistan Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and bilateral trade in textiles (P8_TA(2016)0490).
10. For example: EP committee recommendation of 19 March 2014 (A7-0178/2014).
11. See comparison of economic impacts of sectoral agreements in the methodological annex.

12. For example: EP committee recommendation of 01/02/2012 (A7-0023/2012).
13. 'EU-South Korea trade deal under attack', 08/09/2010, Euractiv.
14. Truth table without logical remainders (a conservative solution is used). See methodological annex.
15. Usual Boolean operators: * means 'and', ~ means 'not', and -> means 'sufficient for'.
16. inclS : consistency score. The closer to 1, the more the solution is consistent, i.e. the less it covers cases without the outcome.
17. covS : raw coverage. Proportion of cases with the outcome covered by the path.
18. covU: unique coverage. Proportion of cases with the outcome uniquely covered by the path (i.e. cases which are not covered by another path).

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the participants to the panels in which previous versions of this paper were presented, at the 2024 conference of the ECPR Standing Group on the European Union and at the 2024 UACES conference, as well as the editor and the three anonymous referees for their helpful comments.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

Marine Bardou is an Aspirante of the Fonds De La Recherche Scientifique - FNRS.

Notes on contributors

Marine Bardou is a researcher at the Institut de Sciences Politiques Louvain-Europe (ISPOLE) of the University of Louvain (Louvain-la-Neuve), Belgium.

Tom Delreux is a professor of political science at the Institut de Sciences Politiques Louvain-Europe (ISPOLE) of the University of Louvain (Louvain-la-Neuve), Belgium.

ORCID

Marine Bardou http://orcid.org/0009-0004-4062-910X
Tom Delreux https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2162-9273

References

Appleby, T. (2020). From membership to partnership the EU and its relations with the UK after Brexit: The fisheries dimension. European Foreign Affairs Review, 25(4), 551–572. https://doi.org/10.54648/eerr2020038

Auersperger Matic, A. (2021). The role of the European Parliament in the shaping of the common commercial policy. In M. Hahn, & G. Van der Loo (Eds.), *Law and*

practice of the common commercial policy. The first 10 years after the treaty of Lisbon (pp. 567–585). Brill and Nijhof.

Bardou, M. (2024a). European Parliament-Commission relations and international agreements. European Foreign Affairs Review, 29(4), 405–426. https://doi.org/10.54648/eerr2024029

Bardou, M. (2024b). Quiet early bird or loud late riser? Parliamentary activities and types of European Parliament involvement during the negotiation of international agreements. *Journal of European Integration*, 47(1), 43–61. https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2024.2360165

Bardou, M., & Delreux, T. (2025). How the European Parliament chooses its battles: Parliamentary resolutions on the negotiation of international agreements. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13720

Bargués, P., Joseph, J., & Juncos, A. E. (2023). Rescuing the liberal international order: Crisis, resilience and EU security policy. *International Affairs*, *99*(6), 2281–2299. https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiad222

Bednaríková, Z., & Jílková, J. (2012). Why is the agricultural lobby in the European Union member states so effective? *Ekonomie a management*, *15*(2), 26–37.

Bozzini, E., & Sicurelli, D. (2024). Oops! … EU did it again! The EU's preference for global treaties Vis-a-Vis the reality of WHO politics. *The International Spectator*, *59*(2), 112–126. https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2023.2263350

Cabras, L. (2024). Explaining the politicization of EU trade agreement negotiations over the past 30 years. *Italian Political Science Review/Rivista Italiana Di Scienza Politica*, *54*(2), 138–153. https://doi.org/10.1017/ipo.2023.30

Coremans, E., & Meissner, K. L. (2018). Putting power into practice: Administrative and political capacity building in the European parliament's committee for international trade. *Public Administration*, *96*(3), 561–577. https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12400

Crespy, A., & Parks, L. (2017). The connection between parliamentary and extra-parliamentary opposition in the EU. From ACTA to the financial crisis. *Journal of European Integration*, *39*(4), 453–467. https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2017.1309038

Crespy, A., & Rone, J. (2022). Conflicts of sovereignty over EU trade policy: A new constitutional settlement? *Comparative European Politics*, *20*(3), 314–335. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41295-022-00272-x

De Bièvre, D. (2018). The paradox of weakness in European trade policy: Contestation and resilience in CETA and TTIP negotiations. *The International Spectator*, *53*(3), 70–85. https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2018.1499849

De Bièvre, D., & Poletti, A. (2020). Towards explaining varying degrees of politicization of EU trade agreement negotiations. *Politics and Governance*, *8*(1), 243–253. https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v8i1.2686

Delreux, T., & Burns, C. (2019). Parliamentarizing a politicized policy: Understanding the involvement of the European Parliament in UN climate negotiations. *Politics and Governance*, *7*(3), 339–349. https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v7i3.2093

De Wilde, P., Leupold, A., & Schmidtke, H. (2016). Introduction: The differentiated politicisation of European governance. *West European Politics*, *39*(1), 3–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2015.1081505

Eckes, C. (2014). How the European Parliament's participation in international relations affects the deep tissue of the EU's power structures. *International Journal of Constitutional Law*, *12*(4), 904–929. https://doi.org/10.1093/icon/mou067

Eckes, C. (2019). *EU powers under external pressure: How the EU's external actions alter its internal structures* (pp. 149–184). Oxford University Press.

Fahey, E., & Wieczorek, I. (2022). The European Parliament as a defender of EU values in EU-Japan agreements: What role for soft law and hard law powers? *European Law Review*, *47*(3), 331–352.

Fenner, L. S. (2025). From streets to parliament: Understanding the mechanisms of protest impact on the policy-making process in the European Parliament's TTIP debate. *Journal of European Integration*, *47*(3), 445–467. https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2024.2380511

Gheyle, N. (2019). *Trade policy with the lights on. The origins, dynamics, and consequences of the politicization of TTIP*. Ghent University.

Glaesser, J. (2023). Limited diversity and QCA solution types: Assumptions and their consequences. *Quality & Quantity*, *57*(4), 3485–3497. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-022-01483-w

Gravey, V., & Buzogány, A. (2021). For farmers or the environment? The European Parliament in the 2013 CAP reform. *Politics and Governance*, *9*(3), 16–28. https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v9i3.4033

Hamilton, S. M. (2024). *The politicization of EU trade agreement negotiations*. University of Antwerp.

Héritier, A., Meissner, K. L., Moury, C., & Schoeller, M. G. (2019). The European Parliament in external agreements. In *European Parliament ascendant. Parliamentary strategies of self-empowerment in the EU* (pp. 149–176). European Administrative Governance. Palgrave McMillan.

Hurrelmann, A., & Wendler, F. (2024). How does politicisation affect the ratification of mixed EU trade agreements? The case of CETA. *Journal of European Public Policy*, *31*(1), 157–181. https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2023.2202196

Jansen, L., Paulissen, T., & Van Hecke, S. (2024). Power beyond borders? Analysing formal and informal tools of the European Parliament in EU enlargement policy. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 33(3), 859–872. https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2024.2448257

Karlas, J. (2023). State commitments and inhumane conventional weapons: An explanatory analysis of treaty ratification. *Cooperation and Conflict*, *58*(3), 335–355. https://doi.org/10.1177/00108367221113459

Kerremans, B., Adriaensen, J., Colli, F., & Coremans, E. (2019). Parliamentary scrutiny of trade policies across the Western world. Study PE 603.477. Brussels: European Parliament, Directorate General for External Policies of the Union.

Kuang, S., Orbie, J., & Blancquaert, S. (2024). The rise and fall of the EU-China comprehensive agreement on investment: "Open strategic autonomy" in action. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, *32*(3), 772–786. https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2023.2293779

Lantis, J. S. (2006). The life and death of international treaties: Double-edged diplomacy and the politics of ratification in comparative perspective. *International Politics*, *43*(1), 24–52. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.ip.8800130

Mancini, I. (2022). The European parliament and civil society in EU trade negotiations: The untold story of an erratic engagement. *European Foreign Affairs Review*, *27*(Issue 2), 241–262. https://doi.org/10.54648/EERR2022021

Márton, P. (2020). How the debates on trade policy helped rebalance the executive–legislative relationship in favour of the European Parliament. In D. Fromage, & A. Herranz-Surrales (Eds.), *Executive–Legislative (Im)Balance in the European Union* (pp. 161–178). Parliamentary Democracy in Europe. Hart Publishing.

Meissner, K. L. (2016). Democratizing EU external relations: The European Parliament's informal role in SWIFT, ACTA, and TTIP. *European Foreign Affairs Review*, *21*(2), 269–288. https://doi.org/10.54648/EERR2016017

Meissner, K. L. (2021). Requesting trade sanctions? The European Parliament and the generalized scheme of preferences. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, *59*(1), 91–107. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13142

Meissner, K. L., & McKenzie, L. (2019). The paradox of human rights conditionality in EU trade policy: When strategic interests drive policy outcomes. *Journal of European Public Policy*, *26*(9), 1273–1291. https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2018.1526203

Mello, P. (2021). *Qualitative comparative analysis: An introduction to research design and application*. Georgetown University Press.

Meunier, S., & Czesana, R. (2019). From back rooms to the street? A research agenda for explaining variation in the public salience of trade policy-making in Europe. *Journal of European Public Policy*, *26*(12), 1847–1865. https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2019.1678058

Norrevik, S. (2021). Foreign economic policy in the European Parliament and economic interdependence with foreign powers. *European Union Politics*, *22*(4), 700–720. https://doi.org/10.1177/14651165211035060

Novak, S., Rozenberg, O., & Bendjaballah, S. (2021). Enduring consensus: Why the EU legislative process stays the same. *Journal of European Integration*, *43*(4), 475–493. https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2020.1800679

Ostermann, F., & Wagner, W. (2023). Introducing the international treaty ratification votes database. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, *19*(4). https://doi.org/10.1093/fpa/orad023

Pasquariello Mariano, K. L., & Luciano, B. T. (2019). The parliamentarization of EU trade policy: Unveiling the European Parliament's involvement in EU MERCOSUR trade negotiations. *European Politics and Society*, *20*(5), 591–608. https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2018.1559792

Peffenköver, M., & Adriaensen, J. (2021). Detecting looming vetoes: Getting the European parliament's consent in trade agreements. *Politics and Governance*, *9*(3), 74–84. https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v9i3.4014

Putnam, R. (1988). Diplomacy and domestic policies: The logic of two-level games. *International Organization*, *42*(3), 427–460. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818300027697

Ripoll Servent, A. (2014). The role of the European parliament in international negotiations after Lisbon. *Journal of European Public Policy*, *21*(4), 568–586. https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2014.886614

Roederer-Rynning, C. (2017). Parliamentary assertion and deep integration: The European Parliament in the CETA and TTIP negotiations. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, *30*(5-6), 507–526. https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2018.1461808

Schneider, C., & Wagemann, C. (2012). *Set-theoretic methods for the social sciences. A guide to qualitative comparative analysis*. Cambridge University Press.

Servent, A. R., & MacKenzie, A. (2012). The European Parliament as a 'Norm taker'? EU-US relations after the SWIFT agreement. *European Foreign Affairs Review*, *17* (Special issue), 71–86.

Sicurelli, D. (2015). The EU as a promoter of human rights in bilateral trade agreements: The case of the negotiations with Vietnam. *Journal of Contemporary European Research*, *11*(2), 230–245. https://doi.org/10.30950/jcer.v11i2.655

Theodoro Luciano, B., & Junqueira, C. G. B. (2023). Beyond parliamentary ratification: The role of national and subnational parliaments in EU-Mercosur trade

negotiations. *Journal of European Integration*, *45*(4), 665–682. https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2022.2129630

Thym, D. (2008). Parliamentary involvement in European international relations. In M. Cremona, & B. D. Witte (Eds.), *EU foreign relations law: Constitutional fundamentals* (pp. 201–232). Hart.

Van den Putte, L., De Ville, F., & Orbie, J. (2015). The European Parliament as an international actor in trade. From power to impact. In S. Stavridis, & D. Irrera (Eds.), *The European Parliament and its international relations* (pp. 52–69). Routledge.

Vignoli, V., & Corradi, E. (2023). Trick or treaty? An empirical analysis of the treaty ratification process in Italy. Comparative European Politics, 22, 512–537. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41295-023-00370-4

Vliegenthart, R., Walgrave, S., Baumgartner, F. R., Bevan, S., Breunig, C., Brouard, S., Bonafont, L. C., Grossman, E., Jennings, W., Mortensen, P.B., & Palau, A.M. (2016). Do the media set the parliamentary agenda? A comparative study in seven countries. *European Journal of Political Research*, *55*(2), 283–301. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12134

Wessels, R. (2021). Normative transformations in EU external relations: The phenomenon of "Soft" international agreements. *West European Politics*, *44*(1), 72–92. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2020.1738094

Yan, S. (2019). The European Parliament in EU trade relations with China: A norm and policy advocate? In K. Raube, M. Müftüler-Baç, & J. Wouters (Eds.), *Parliamentary cooperation and diplomacy in EU external relations. An essential companion* (pp. 432–448). Edward Elgar.

Zimmermann, H. (2019). The European Parliament and the layered politicization of the external dimension of the common fisheries policy. *Politics and Governance*, *7*(3), 237–247. https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v7i3.2178

Annex: selected cases

Case code	Name of the agreement	Type of agreement	Third country	Ratification challenge?
ACTA	Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement	Trade, intellectual property	Multilateral	Yes
SWIFT	Agreement on processing and transfer of Financial Messaging Data for purposes of the Terrorist Finance Tracking Program with the United States	Justice and home affairs, data transfer	United States	Yes
FisheriesMorocco	Protocol setting out the fishing opportunities and financial compensation (2011-2012)	Fisheries	Morocco	Yes
EPASouthernAfricaStates	Interim agreement for Economic Partnership Agreement with the Eastern and Southern Africa States	Trade, economic partnership	Multilateral, regional group including Mauritius, Seychelles, Zimbabwe, Madagascar	Yes
TradeMorocco	Agreement on the reciprocal liberalisation measures on agricultural products, processed agricultural products, fish and fishery products with Morocco	Trade, liberalisation	Morocco	Yes
FisheriesKiribati	Protocol setting out the fishing opportunities and financial contribution with Kiribati (2012-2015)	Fisheries	Kiribati	Yes
FisheriesMadagascar	Protocol setting out fishing opportunities and the financial contribution with Madagascar (2012-2014)	Fisheries	Madagascar	Yes
FisheriesMauritania	Protocol setting out the fishing opportunities and financial contribution with Mauritania (2012-2014)	Fisheries	Mauritania	Yes

(*Continued*)

Continued.

Case code	Name of the agreement	Type of agreement	Third country	Ratification challenge?
CETA	Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement with Canada	Trade, encompassing agreement	Canada	Yes
TextileUzbekistan	Protocol on textile trade with Uzbekistan	Trade, sectoral agreement	Uzbekistan	Yes
FisheriesChile	Understanding concerning the conservation of swordfish stocks in the South Eastern Pacific Ocean with Chile	Fisheries, specie-specific	Chile	Yes
PNRsAustraliaUSA	Agreements on the on the processing and transfer of Passenger Name Record (PNR)	Justice and home affairs, data transfer	Australia and United States	Yes
EUprogrammesNewZealandFaroe	Agreements on the participation to Union's programme	Industry and research	New Zealand and Faroe Islands	Yes
PostBrexitTCAUK	Trade and Cooperation Agreement with the United Kingdom	Association Agreement	United Kingdom	Yes
FTASouthKorea	Free Trade Agreement with South Korea	Trade, encompassing	South Korea	Yes
CAIChina	Comprehensive Agreement on Investment with China	Trade, investment	China	Yes
AssociationMercosur	Partnership agreement with Mercosur	Association Agreement	Mercosur countries: Argentina, Bolivia (since 2024), Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay	Yes
WHOTobacco	Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products to the World Health Organisation's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control	Trade	Multilateral	No

(*Continued*)

Continued.

Case code	Name of the agreement	Type of agreement	Third country	Ratification challenge?
PersonalDataUSA	Agreement on the protection of personal information relating to the prevention, investigation, detection, and prosecution of criminal offences	Justice and home affairs, data transfers	United States	No
AirTransportMorocco	Aviation agreement with Morocco	Transport	Morocco	No
EPASADC	Economic Partnership Agreement with SADC states	Trade	Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Eswatini	No
TradePalestine	Agreement on the liberalisation of agricultural products, processed agricultural products and fish and fishery products with the Palestinian Authority	Trade	Palestinian Authority of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip	No
FisheriesSeychelles	Protocol setting out the fishing opportunities and the financial contribution with the Seychelles (2014-2019)	Fisheries	Seychelles	No
FisheriesSenegal	Protocol on the implementation of the Agreement on a Sustainable Fisheries Partnership (2019-2024)	Fisheries	Senegal	No
FisheriesIvoryCoast	Protocol setting out the fishing opportunities and financial contribution with the Ivory Coast (2013-2018)	Fisheries	Ivory Coast	No
FTAJapan	Economic Partnership Agreement with Japan	Trade	Japan	No
TradeOrganicChile	Agreement on trade in organic products with Chile	Trade, sectoral agreement	Chile	No
FisheriesMozambique	Protocol setting out the fishing opportunities and the financial contribution with Mozambique (2012-2014)	Fisheries	Mozambique	No

(*Continued*)

Continued.

Case code	Name of the agreement	Type of agreement	Third country	Ratification challenge?
EuropolNewZealand	Agreement on the exchange of personal data between the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) and the authorities of New Zealand	Justice and home affairs	New Zealand	No
AssociationUkraine	Association Agreement with Ukraine	Association Agreement	Ukraine	No
FTAVietnam	Free Trade Agreement with Vietnam	Trade	Vietnam	No
InvestmentSingapore	Investment Protection Agreement with Singapore	Trade	Singapore	No
EUProgrammesFaroe	Agreement associating the Faroe Islands to Horizon 2020 the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2014-2020)	Industry and research	Faroe Islands	No
AssociationChile	Advanced Framework Agreement and interim agreement on trade with Chile	Association Agreement	Chile	No