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Understanding the European Parliament role in the EU
response to the Hong Kong protests of 2019

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Introduction

The European Parliament (EP) is considered as the voice of the citizens of the European Union (EU). It is an interesting institution that fought its way throughout history to gain more powers and went from being a merely consultative body, to one of the leading bodies of the EU. To obtain such outcomes, the EP developed an array of techniques to exert its influence on other European institutions and created informal practices which supported its climb within the EU. In other words, the story of the institutional changes of the EP is made up by the effective employment of informal instruments and techniques which would later be officialised in formal treaties. In particular, with regard to the Lisbon Treaty, the EP is considered one of the biggest winners as it gained more competences in prominent fields such as the EU budget and the legislative process. Nonetheless, the EP still possess little formal power concerning EU foreign policy. The latter constitutes the second pillar of the EU and, unlike the first and third pillar, retains a strong intergovernmental nature as member states do not wish to yield sovereignty of such field to the EU.

As the voice of EU citizens, though, the EP established itself as the watchdog of European core values, such as democracy, human rights, rule of law and fundamental freedoms. In its role of guardian, the EP frequently expresses its point of view on international matters, issuing resolutions with a strong normative nature. Because of their highly moral content as well as their widespread diffusion at the institutional level and media coverage, resolutions are hardly ignored by other EU institutions and all the concerned parties. This gives the EP a moderate amount of power in international affairs that is quite unique if compared to other national parliaments.

This thesis discusses the role and the impact of EP resolutions on EU actions about the protests that occurred in Hong Kong between 2019-2020. It firstly explains the background of the research by briefly reporting some relevant facts about the Special Administrative Region (SAR) organization and its history, to better understand the significance of the protests. The latter started as an outcry for the abolition of the proposed “Fugitive Offenders and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Legislation Bill”, which risked giving the People’s Republic of

China (PRC) the opportunity to extradite political opponents and process them in China. Hong Kong people, afraid for their basic rights granted to them by the SAR law, poured into the streets, giving life to the biggest protests that the region ever witnessed in its history.

Secondly, it examines the EP configuration as well as its development and role in the EU. As mentioned, the Parliament started as a consultative body only and increasingly obtain more competences and powers. Furthermore, the thesis applies a constructivist perspective to analyse the role of the EP in EU foreign policy and its formal and informal mechanisms to influence the decision-making process of other EU or external actors.

Thirdly, by examining the debates, draft documents and resolutions passed by the EP, the research seeks to reflect upon the variations –if any – between the discourses used in the EP final stand and the ones employed in the debates as well as the draft proposals. Through the analysis it can be observed the role the EP wants to occupy in the EU-China strained relationship concerning Hong Kong and whether, by presenting a united front on the issue, the EP is able to strengthen its influence in external relation matters.

Moreover, this thesis tries to address the role of parliaments as international actors, who can influence and define the external relations of a country or, in this case, a community.

Chapter 1

○ General context of the research

Colonial Hong Kong and post-handover

Analysing the history of Hong Kong, it is possible to identify two phases through which Hong Kong was separated from the rest of China. The first stage consisted of the Treaty of Nanking signing, through which China surrendered Hong Kong to the United Kingdom in 1842, after having lost the Opium War. Such treaty became later included in what the Chinese call the “unequal treaties”. (Britannica, 2018) Great Britain turned Hong Kong into a strategic port to invest and trade in China, however during this stage, Hong Kong identity was still very much linked to China, as many of its inhabitants were migrants who came to Hong Kong enticed by its trade and employment opportunities. Most of them, though, would go back to China once they could retire or had amassed enough funds to invest in a business there. Consequently, the migrants felt and identified themselves as Chinese temporarily living in Hong Kong. (So, 2011: p. 101)

During the second stage, however, this dynamic changed. After the Chinese Communist Revolution in 1949, many refugees started pouring into Hong Kong seeking asylum. This wave of permanent migrants, since the majority of them could not go back to China, caused the harsh reaction of the colonial government that built fences along the borders of the city and put in place documents control blocks. From the Chinese perspective as well, the government implemented a control policy to avoid any infiltration of the “imperialistic and bourgeois evil”. (Ibid) Moreover, the colonial government started a process of “de-nationalisation” that would widen even more the rift between Hong Kong and China. Such policy included: the devaluation of the Chinese language, elevating English as the educated language; a change in trade, changing from Chinese-oriented to global market-oriented; as well as repressing any communist propaganda in Hong Kong. Thus, Hong Kong slowly alienated itself from Chinese economy, society and culture, with a new generation of Hong Kongers who grew up in the Cold War environment and viewed the communist regime of China in a very critical and negative perspective. (So, 2006: p. 213)

Following the handover in 1997, Hong Kongers would not identify as British citizens, but neither as Chinese, this opened up an identity dilemma. If on one hand, a process of “re-nationalization” had started to reconnect Hong Kong to China, the SAR state did not wish for the city to lose its global status and so such efforts were quite moderated. On the other hand, a “localization” policy was out of question, as insisting too much on the creation of a city identity could be misinterpreted as a desire for separatism from mainland China. So, to avoid both scenarios, Hong Kong created an “enterprising citizenship”, in which the SAR would become a high-tech, informational global city. (Ibid: p. 214)

One of the pillars of Hong Kong society is the rule of law, thanks to which the city preserves its status of modern and liberal society with all the rights and freedoms that come with it. The preservation of the rule of law is also crucial to maintain a steady reputation as an international financial hub, which attracts the investments of many foreign businesses and generates wealth to the city. (Ming, 2018: p. 02) Consequently, any challenges to such order would not sit well by Hong Kong community, as they would threaten their very identity.

One country, two systems

Since the 1st of July 1997, the control over Hong Kong was transferred from the United Kingdom to China by the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration and the Basic Law of the special administrative region came officially in effect as well. One of the main policies enlisted in the Law is the “one country, two system” principle, which states that there is only one China, but it allows the special administrative regions (SAR) of Hong Kong to independently retain its own governmental systems as well as its own legal, economic and financial affairs - including trade relations with foreign countries-. (Maguire, 2021: p. 03)

Throughout the years, the relationship between China and Hong Kong shifted from amicable to wary. This trend has intensified during the leadership of President Xi Jinping since 2012. His approach to China-Hong Kong relations is much more assertive than previous governments. Indeed, if in 2007, President Hu-Wen had assured direct elections in the SAR by the year 2017; Xi will not allow any discordant view to question the CPC political line. His leadership considers Hong

Kong as prominent actor for state sovereignty, national interests and security. For these reasons, in his approach to the “one country, two systems” framework, the “one country” concept assumes the primary focus, side-lining the “two systems”. The more systematic form of domination is fully revealed in the 2014 constitutional reform that caused the start of the so-called “Umbrella Movement”. The latter consisted of protests against the new electoral system, which would grant illusory universal suffrage to Hong Kong. Indeed, the candidates to the SAR government would be pre-selected by an election committee formed by pro-Beijing officials, and only then Hong Kong people could vote their candidate. (Ming, 2018: p. 04) Such reform has not been the only sign of “Mainlandization”, observing the behaviours of the National People’s Congress Standing Committee for the interpretation of Hong Kong’s Basic Law, it becomes clear that over the years, central representatives have gained more confidence to interfere in SAR internal affairs. To offer an interpretation, normally the committee should receive a petition from the Hong Kong judiciary or executive branch; however, there have been instances in which an interpretation was offered without any request being issued. In an Anglo-Saxon legal system, this is highly irregular and undermines dangerously the authority of the local judiciary. (Ibid: p. 06) These intrusions of the central government in Hong Kong matters, slowly built up a sense of helplessness in its people as well as a resentment for broken promises.

The 2019-2020 protests

In 2019 the already existing tensions between Hong Kong and the mainland escalated after the introduction of the “Fugitive Offenders and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Legislation Bill” to tackle the issue of extradition. The latter was formally introduced after a Hong Kong citizen was murdered by her partner in Taiwan. According to Hong Kong law, a suspect of a murder that has occurred outside the perimeters of Hong Kong, can only face trial in the place where the crime unfolded. At the same time, though, the extradition of criminal suspects by Hong Kong law is only allowed when an extradition agreement has been previously established with the specific jurisdiction. Since Taiwan didn’t comply with this criterion, the murder case became stuck. The injustice of the murder served as the perfect pretext for Carrie Lam, Chief Executive of Hong Kong, to propose an

amendment to the Hong Kong's Fugitive Offenders Ordinance as to remove the geographic restrictions. The reform would imply that criminal suspects could face trial anywhere, including mainland China. (Dapiran et al., 2020: pp. 05-06) This new development raised the concerns of the Democratic Party as well as of many Hong Kongers that viewed the bill as a tool in the hands of China to arrest voices of political dissent in Hong Kong and subject them to unfair trials in the mainland. Members of the law sector produced analysis to show the many unanswered legal questions featured in the bill. Even pro-establishment personalities and business figures voiced their concerns in that the proposed amendment included white-collar crimes as offenses for which a person could be extradited. (Purbrick, 2019: p. 467)

Despite the worries shown by various sections of society, the government pressed ahead with the bill, scheduling a second reading for the 12th of June. Consequently, many protests started to stir up in the city with the slogan "Faan Sung Zung!" that summarized the main fears of the people. Its direct translation would be "Oppose sending to China", however through a deeper analysis, it is possible to discover another interpretation. "Sung Zung" in Chinese characters is the homophone of the expression "see off a dying relative", so the protesters, by using such slogan, were hinting to a darker meaning: if the bill were to pass, it would send people to their death. (Dapiran et al., 2020: pp. 20-21) From the beginning of March 2019, a long period of protests began. These demonstrations would reach colossal numbers in the history of Hong Kong, with the march of the 9th of June counting one million participants and the one of the 16th going as far as two million participants. On the 12th of June - the day when the second reading of the bill had been scheduled – protests started early on with the intent of preventing the Legislative Council from discussing the proposal. By 8.00 am, all the government and legislative buildings were inaccessible due to the crowd, and it was announced that the reading would be postponed to a later date. (Ibid)

Although most of the protest was conducted in a peaceful manner, a few of the participants attempted to violently breach the buildings. The response of the police was immediately harsh, resorting to tear gas and rubber bullets to control the crowd. The police chief Stephen Lo defined the protest on the 12th of June as a riot rather than a peaceful event; (Lee et al., 2019: p. 10) this statement was confirmed by the

Chief Executive Carrie Lam who described the demonstration as “a blatantly organised instigation of a riot” (Lam C., 2019). These allegations were not well received by the protesters because, on one hand, they claimed that the police had been the one to recur to violence rather than the protesters; and on the other hand, by labelling the protest as a riot, the participants would risk a jail time up to ten years in accordance with the Public Order Ordinance, a law traceable back to the colonial time. (Dapiran et al. 2020: p. 50) To support the protesters point of view was Amnesty International, that in its report exposed the excessive use of force exhibited by the police and denounced it as a violation of human rights law and standards. Among the incriminating evidence were the unlawful employment of batons and rubber bullets, as well as the misuse of pepper spray and tear gas, the impossibility to identify members of the police force, the attempts to isolate journalists and to prevent access to medical personnel. These actions were taken against all protesters, no matter that most of them were peacefully demonstrating, provoking a wave of local and international indignation. (Purbrick, 2019: p. 470) What is worth noticing, though, is that the overall local outrage for the incident, could not compare to the reactions shown some previous years during the use of eighty-seven rounds of tear gas against the Umbrella Movement of 2014. While at the time the public response had been one of shock and profound outrage; in 2019 the use of tear gas by the police seemed to be an expected tactic, it had become normalized. (Dapiran et. al, 2020: p. 51)

When the 16th of June protesters took the streets, Carrie Lam had just announced the suspension of the bill to deflate public dissent, however the move did not work as two million people demonstrated to obtain the official withdrawal of the bill. On the 1st of July, the date in which Hong Kong was handed over to China, wide-spread protests sparked once more in the city. (Purbrick, 2019: pp. 471-472) The protesters stormed the Legislative Council building and, in this occasion, five main demands emerged: namely, to fully withdraw the bill, to retract the classification of protesters as “rioters”, to launch an independent inquiry into police brutality, to release the protesters who had been arrested and grant them amnesty as well as guaranteeing greater democratic freedoms, namely dual universal suffrage for the elections of both the Legislative Council and the Chief Executive. (Lee et al., 2019: p. 10)

As the protests continued, the police reactions escalated in greater use of violence, while protesters, as well, equipped with hard hats and gas masks began to increasingly engage in violent confrontation. On the 9th of July, Carrie Lam asserted in the media that “the Bill is dead” (Lam C., 2019), meaning that the amendment would decay once the current legislation would end. However, by only suspending the bill in lieu of withdrawing it, the government could still in fact resume the reading of the latter. The reluctance of the government to officially withdraw the proposal sharpened the discontent of Hong Kongers even more, while more protests unfolded. (Purbrick, 2020: p. 472) On the 21st of July a new critical point was reached when, a group of thugs wearing white shirts launched an attack on protesters and ordinary civilians alike at Yuen Long station. The protesters had just vandalized the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government and were assailed as they were returning home. The controversy lies on the fact that many calls to the police were made during the attacks, but the latter arrived only forty minutes after. Furthermore, some policemen were present on the scene and did not act in any way to stop the violence. This behaviour, added to the fact that none of the thugs were arrested, raised the suspicion that the police had been in collusion with the attackers. As a result, many citizens who had maintained up to this point a passive position, joined the protests pushed by a newfound dislike toward the police force. A march was organised in Yuen Long to denounce the event, which escalated in violent clashes between protesters and police. (Ibid: p. 473; Dapiran et. al., 2020: p. 110)

The rest of the summer saw the succession of many other protests which eventually led to the announcement of a “four actions” plan on the 4th of September by the Chief Executive. The latter included the formal withdrawal of the Extradition Bill, the support to the work of the Independent Police Complaints Council which would formulate recommendations to the government, the opening of a direct dialogue with society to look for sustainable solutions to the widespread discontent and lastly the independent examination of society’s grievances by community leaders, professionals and academics who would afterwards advise the government’s next steps. This plan was the government's answer to the five demands previously presented by the protesters, and although it mainly addressed the first request,

namely to withdraw the bill, it marked the start of a political response on behalf of the government. (Purbrick, 2020: pp. 483-484)

Nonetheless, many critiques noted that the response arrived a little too late and it did not appease the protesters since it only tackled one demand out of five. Consequently, while a dialogue with some members of Hong Kong's society started, protests continued as well. On the weekend preceding the 1st of October, China's National Day, Hong Kong's protesters managed to coordinate a global anti-totalitarianism march that involved various cities around the world. People from different walks of life took the streets in a not-too-subtle show of solidarity toward Hong Kong and an anti-Communist party of China spirit. During the celebrations of the National Day in the mainland, Hong Kong's streets were the stage to anti-China protests and police repression. Even though the march had been banned by police, tens of thousands joined; giving to international spectators two very different pictures of what China represented. (Dapiran et al., 2020: pp. 218-219)

The high tension and protests continued long after the announcement of Hong Kong Secretary of Security, John Lee on the 23rd of October that the extradition bill had been formally withdrawn. On the 30th of June 2020, the Chinese government bypassed the Legislative Council of Hong Kong, imposing the National Security Law in the SAR. Said law is dangerously broad, it criminalizes any action perceived as the fruit of secession, subversion, terrorism and collusion with foreign forces which became offences punishable by life imprisonment. With the implementation of this law, the repression of the pro-democratic protests adopted a new face. Indeed, for the first time since the beginning of the unrests, the central government took actions, making it crystal clear that the SAR government is nothing more than a pawn in the hands of Beijing. (Amnesty International, 2020)

Police use of violence

Police violence played a prominent role in the unfolding of the protests, it gave protesters a stronger sense of identity as a group. As pointed out by Edward E. Maguire and other researchers, police leadership made an error in judgement when adopting a harsher response to the protests, because they only intensified protesters' resolution. (2021: p. 10) It has been examined that when the nature of the protests

is deeply seeded in society discontent, violent reactions do not sedate protesters, but rather help in escalating the tensions. Hong Kong protests started off as an outcry against the proposed extradition bill, however resulted in demonstrations against police violence and the deterioration of democracy. Indeed, the harsh response of the police showed the limits of democratic freedoms in Hong Kong shrinking and caused great indignation among local and international society. (Maguire, 2021)

The events of the 12th of June transformed the protesters' conception of the police. From a neutral guardian of the law, it became a political actor that used force to impose an unwanted legislation. The use of force during a peaceful and legal protests, left people dumbfounded as apparently there was no reason to employ tear gas. To anger the people even more, was the total absence of a fair and credible system of accountability, the police simply denied any wrongdoings and the Legislative Council supported their position. (Stott et al., 2020: pp. 11-12)

The improper use of tear gas and other crowd control weapons was strongly criticized and denounced by various human rights organizations, who joined the protesters in the request for an independent and impartial investigation. The issue brought into the debate by various reports, is that the trade of the so-called "less lethal weapons" is poorly regulated and very little countries communicate the quantities of their exports. Due to the misuses and casualties resulted by these mechanisms, in 2020 the United Nations as well as the EU have recognised the necessity to better regulated such trade. (Kobayashi et al., 2021: p. 06)

EU-China Relations

When considering EU-China relations, the international political economy perspective is the most wide-spread. Its scholars base their studies on the assumption that European countries compromise their normative values in favour of economic benefits. (Jørgensen & Wong, 2016: p. 03) However this theoretical framework does not successfully explain the changes occurred in the relationship throughout the years as well as some "irrational" actions taken by Chinese leaders. Instead, by analysing and trying to understand the roots behind the actors' identity, it is easier to explain their relations. (Ibid: pp. 20-21) When considering both the EU and China, it is necessary to remember their ancient cultural background; in

both cases they represent old civilizations with strong ideological ties entangled in them; and in both cases the premises for their identity differ greatly. Furthermore, over the years, both identities have shifted because of internal and external factors. While the EU underwent a process of enlargement, China rapidly became one of the most influential economic actors. These changes influenced the self-perception and the global role of such actors, modifying their interests as well. (Ibid: p. 04)

Therefore, the drastically different approach to foreign affairs of EU and China, and their consequent tensions, can be explained by the issue of identity, which cannot be considered as static, but as a changeable, subjective and relational entity. Looking at the EU, for instance, it is hard to define a coherent policy toward China. Indeed, each member state as well as European institution adopt diversifying strategies in respect to the PRC. On the one hand, relevant countries such as France and Germany, alongside the European Commission strive for a strategic partnership and techno-political alliance; while on the other hand, other actors such as the UK -when still part of the EU- and the EP, cautioned against close ties with an illiberal regime. (Wong, 2013: pp. 112-113)

At the same time, the USA have always been on the background of the relationship development between EU and PRC. The strong nature of the transatlantic relations impacted European positions toward China. This influence becomes clear regarding the arms embargo imposed by the EU to China, after the violent repression of the protests in Tiananmen Square in 1989. Indeed, both in 2003 and 2010, when the issue of lifting the ban was brought forward by China, the persistent opposition of the USA, discouraged European countries from allowing it. Threatened by the alienation and weakening of transatlantic ties, EU members decided to maintain the embargo and deepen intelligence sharing on China with Washington, rather than following previous statements made by various European leaders in favour on the lifting. (Wong, 2013a: pp. 167-168)

On top of that, with the advent to power of Angela Merkel in Germany and Nicholas Sarkozy in France, the so-called “honeymoon” face ended. Human rights issue became central in the German agenda concerning China, and the two leaders angered Chinese leadership by meeting with the Dalai Lama. While Chancellor

Merkel met him in 2007, President Sarkozy did so in 2008. Following such meeting, the EU-China summit to be held in Lyons was cancelled by the PRC, proving China’s aggravation on the matter. (Wai, 2011: p. 208)

Table 1: the issue of identity in the EU-China relationship (Wong, 2013: p. 175)

	Foci of EU policy	Motivations	Highlights
1989-1997 Tiananmen sanctions & Human Rights	EU normative values Expanding commercial ties EU sanctions	European interest groups European commercial and industrial interests; “Third link” in IPE	1989 EU sanctions after Tiananmen events 1993 Christian Democratic Union paper (DE) 1994 Commission’s “Asia Strategy’
1995-2005 “Honeymoon”	Commercial ties Strategic partnership	Balance US unilateralism EU as distinct and principled power	1995 First “China strategy paper” 1997 UK returns HK 1998 1st EU-China summit 1999 PT returns Macau 2001 Council paper downplaying Human Rights (EU-China) 2003 1st Chinese MFA paper on EU (Oct.) 2004 EU backs down from lifting arms embargo 2005 EU-China “bra wars’
2006- “Normal Relationship”	Commercial ties HR & Democracy	Maturing relationship with both cooperation and conflict	2008 Beijing postpones EU-China summit over Sarkozy/Tibet 2009-2013 Eurozone crisis, European Financial Stability Facility and search for Chinese support

The table clearly identifies different stages of EU-China relations, their cooperation has never been completely conflict free, because of many discrepancies in their identities. However, the EU orientated its policy toward China as a “strategic

partnership” to ensure European commercial interests and, at the same time, stimulate China to respect international norms and become a more responsible actor. (Wai, 2011: p. 210) A clear example of such strategy is the “change through trade” policy promoted by the EP to place human rights at the centre of trade agreements. From its side, China has taken advantage of its economic leverage, by adopting a human rights diplomacy that benefits from the internal lobbying of Chinese enterprises and officials who entered the EU market. (Wong, 2017: p. 53)

Over the years, the two actors have developed a productive relationship that benefits both. Although their cooperation can be seen as the sum of many bilateral relations, the continuously increasing common European position in external affairs will benefit its relations, offering more clarity to China, and any external actor, about the priorities and dealbreakers of the EU.

- **Research question**

As shown above the situation in the region of Hong Kong was critical and continues to be so as tensions are not defusing. The “one country, two systems” principle is being continuously threatened by the actions implemented by the central government of China. Just in 2021, the National’s People Congress adopted the decision to enhance the concentration of power and influence of the Hong Kong Election Committee, namely a non-democratically elected body. Through this act, the amount of directly elected representatives within the Honk Kong Legislative Council will be greatly reduced, giving more power and support to the mainland. (Li, 2021) In short, it seems that Xi Jinping is slowly reducing the amount of freedoms guaranteed by the Basic Law of Hong Kong and is no longer bothering to cover such attempts. Within these dynamics, the European Union has emphasised how the actions taken by China are not in conformity with its international commitments. Indeed, the Sino-British Joint Declaration on the question of Hong Kong of 1984 clearly states that the city will enjoy a high degree of autonomy from mainland China for 50 years after the handover of 1997. Pursuant to such international treaty, Hong Kong should have retained its own government and independent legal system, whereas the authority wielded by the central government should have affected only the defence and foreign affairs. The behaviour adopted

by the Chinese government, then, breaches a legally binding international obligation, as the agreement was registered by both parties at the United Nations in 1985.

Following the introduction of the highly vague national security law in 2020, various EU member states have suspended their extradition agreements with Hong Kong, as well as enhanced the communication and coordination by member states diplomatic representatives in the SAR to observe court hearings of pro-democracy activists. At the same time, the EU-China Human Right Dialogue has slowly deteriorated since Xi Jinping leadership began, as it is possible to observe by the very disappointing results so far achieved as well as the poor collaboration shown by Chinese diplomats.

Since the end of the Cold War, various parliaments demanded a closer supervision of governmental actions in foreign affairs, in order to create a system that could be safer for democracies. At the same time, the European Union was created to make sure that the bloodbaths that had characterized the XX century would not repeat and peace could be maintained through close cooperation. Nowadays, the role of parliaments in foreign policy and diplomacy is undeniable and what has been observed, is that the overall impact of parliaments usually improves the democratic scrutiny over public policy areas. The same can be said for foreign policy, no matter if parliamentary involvement is a direct or indirect one. The main ways in which parliamentary institutions can give their contribution to foreign policy are first of all through the classical function of national parliaments that overview the decisions of the executive; second of all, by establishing the so-called parliamentary diplomacy, namely parallel diplomatic relations among parliaments; lastly through the establishment or empowerment of international or mostly regional parliaments which leads to supranational institution-building. (Malamud & Stavridis, 2011: p. 100) This parliamentarization of international relations is also encouraged by globalization. Indeed, the constraints of what is domestic and what is international are increasingly blending, making democratic accountability in foreign policy a fundamental step. (Ibid: p. 101)

The aim of this research is to analyse the arguments put forward in the discussions and draft resolutions proposed by the EP on the events happened in Hong Kong and compare them to the final resolution put forward by the EP, to reflect upon the final stance taken by the Parliament as well as on the discrepancies that can be found between the final motion and the debates as well as the drafts. Indeed, although the impact of the EP in the foreign policy of the EU is quite still limited, its ability to exert some influence is strengthened when it presents a united front in its positioning. Through this analysis, the thesis will assess the role that the EP plays in the EU-China external relations in regard to the Hong Kong protests of 2019 and estimate its impact.

Finally, in a broader sense, this thesis stimulates questions about the nature of parliaments as actors in international relations since their definition of domestic actors is not sufficient to explain the foreign policy activities that parliaments engage in. Parliaments such as the EP are becoming international actors with a particular parliamentary quality; they are not an ordinary transnational or nongovernmental actor, but particular actors with a political nature.

- **Methodology**

The Lisbon Treaty has resulted in a revolutionary change to the powers of the European Parliament as an actor in the European Union. This thesis applies a constructivist perspective to analyse the EP as a foreign policy actor whose role needs to be understood in the context of the EU's unique foreign policy structure. Constructivism provides a meaningful analytical tool through which capture the logic behind the behaviours of international actors and analyse the way they perceive others and themselves. Indeed, constructivists view international politics as social construct that has the potential to change, because social practices have been constructed by norms and ideals, in other words, there is nothing natural nor given about them. (Fearon and Wendt, 2002: p. 75) Within the EU system, the EP is regarded, and regards itself, as keeper and watchdog of democratic legitimacy as well as accountability over EU policies. At the same time, it considers itself as a norm entrepreneur that needs to defend the democratic and liberal ideals of the EU and, to achieve such goal, the EP relies on a plethora of strategies among which

persuasion, coercion, shaming, discourse shaping as well as communicative actions. (Payne, 2001; Manners 2002; Manners 2009)

Thus, the second chapter will analyse the functioning and role of the EP within the EU foreign policy. It will firstly explain how the EP is formed and how it works, in order to show the reasons why it is considered “the voice of EU citizens” and why it gives democratic legitimacy and accountability to the Community. Similarly, it will help understanding the relevance of coalitions and compromises in EP proceedings. Indeed, presenting a united stance gives the EP greater leverage with other EU institutions. Secondly, the chapter will concentrate on the changes that the EP underwent throughout its history in regard to its role in foreign policy. As various previous research has shown, the EP has gained powers both formally and informally. Although its part in the foreign policy of the Union is quite limited, thanks to informal practises and bodies, the EP is carving a role for itself. Understanding the role in which the EP is placing itself, is crucial to fully appreciate the meaning behind its actions. Thirdly, the second chapter will dwell on the significance and impact of EP resolutions. The latter may seem ineffective at first, however their heavy normative value does influence not only other EU bodies, but also third parties.

The third chapter will, instead, focus on the qualitative discourse analysis of the texts and debates of the EP. Discourse is a crucial part of political communication, the way in which events are presented and described influences public opinion. In this sense, political discourse is often full of rhetoric, which persuades citizens’ beliefs and their values in the direction wished for. Political rhetoric appeals not only to people’s “reason”, by framing a political situation under certain lenses and creating political knowledge; but also to people’s “emotions”, by eliciting a sense of solidarity, anger or even hatred to affect their response. (Feldman & Zmerli, 2018: pp. 1-2)

In the analysis of the texts concerning the protests of Hong Kong, I concentrated in looking for the “storyline” created by the EP to address the situation. When conducting discourse analysis, one must remember the cultural context in which discourses take place, since the latter greatly influences what is considered

appropriate to say and what is not. Thus, it is pivotal to fully understand the role of the EP before the analysis of its texts. Moreover, discourse analysis examines the choice of words and communication tactics employed by the communicators. The members of the EP (MEPs) must possess sufficient rhetorical skills to communicate effectively to the public and other EU institutions. The ability to choose the right words for the right public represents a key factor in politics. (Ibid: p. 03) The way in which the EP presented the protests of Hong Kong clearly emphasised the normative value they wanted to imprint on the situation. On the 18th of July 2019, the EP held the first official session to tackle the topic of Hong Kong's protests against the infamous extradition bill. Previously to this plenary sitting, six of the seven political groups of the Parliament, had presented six motions for a resolution, explaining their positions and enlisting their priorities. Of these six, five had then been able to reach a common ground to write a shared draft, which was proposed to the EP and later adopted. On the 16th of September 2019, another debate was held in the EP plenary to discuss the developments of the protests and the EU response. By examining these transcripts and texts it is possible to identify the communication strategies used by the MEPs to frame the events in a manners that would emphasise certain values over others. At the same time, the analysis of these scripts clearly illustrates the differences between the various drafts presented, what each of them proposed and which elements made it to the final resolution. It is also interesting to notice the differences between the five drafts that managed to find a compromise, and the one which preferred maintaining its own status. Through such examination, it is possible to define the most agreed upon arguments, as well as identify some elements that apparently could not fit in any way in the final resolution. Finally, the analysis of these documents fully shows the normative power of the EP and its commitment to the control and respect of basic rights. By analysing the speeches in the debates, specifically, it becomes obvious that the EP considers the respect and protection of human rights around the globe an integral part of the EU and its international role. The strong position taken by the EP differs from the stance of the Vice President/High Representative (VP/HR), in that the latter is more moderate in its wording. Through the analysis of the declaration of the 17th of August and speeches made by the representatives of the VP/HR during parliament plenaries,

one can compare the two approaches and identify differences in the framing of the issue. While the VP/HR does address the need of restraint, it mainly concentrates on the economic level, avoiding statements on more sensitive matters. On the other hand, the EP concentrates its arguments on human rights issues, depicting China as a “strategic partner and a systemic rival”, in that it still does not conform to many international norms, despite having signed into them. This vision of the country is evident in the arguments brought forward by the MEPs in their interventions. Through the study of the debates as well as the final resolution, the EP’s vision of China regarding the Hong Kong protests becomes clear, as it presents the PRC like a modern authoritarian regime. The identity of international players is quite relevant, as it determines and shapes their social practices. The way a state conceives what are its interests and its ideational structures affects their actions and the international order. Indeed, it is the identities that establish the interests, and thereafter the interests define how a state behaves or reacts. Through discourse analysis, it is possible to fully understand the outspoken approach that the EP adopted in the matter.

○ **Academic contribution and research limitations**

This study contributes to the literature regarding the European Parliament and its role in the EU. Specifically, it delves upon its actorness in foreign policy, investigating its behaviour and nature in this particular field. The understanding of the dynamics between EU bodies is significant because it clarifies its policies and the perception of its outcomes. Moreover, the EP stance on Hong Kong protests brings further evidence of the logics and mechanisms at work in the Parliament, adding to the existing literature cause of reflection about the normative and ideational nature of EP’s actions. Similarly, it shows that the EP is not only a “talk shop”, rather it can influence other parties in subtle manners, or cause reactions by the party called upon, or even incentive them to rehabilitate their reputation by providing proofs that exonerate them. Furthermore, the thesis contributes to the research about EU-China relations, by showing what is a strenuous relationship between the two actors. Indeed, the EU considers China a strategic partner in economic circumstances, however ongoing underlining tensions are created from the Chinese disregard of international human rights frameworks as well as the

interference of EU in matters that pertains to national sovereignty in the eyes of the PRC.

On the other hand, the research has its limits. Firstly, any sociological and political research suffers from a small amount of subjectivity; discursive analysis is a very useful qualitative tool to examine texts and speeches, however it can also lead to subjective interpretations. In the thesis, I tried to maintain a firm and constant method of investigation; nonetheless, I cannot completely rule out such possibility. Secondly, because the research has been geared specifically to the debates and resolutions regarding the Hong Kong protests of 2019-2020, the results of this thesis may not be generalisable to all other cases. Indeed, the general context of the relations between EU and China is in itself specific, therefore the role of the EP within this framework may not perfectly fit other situations.

Chapter 2

○ The inner workings of the European Parliament

The European Parliament is the body of the EU that provides most democratic legitimacy to the community. Its members are directly elected by EU citizens; therefore, it is considered the voice of the people. The EP counterbalances the interests of governments and member states, ensuring that the will of the citizens is heard. Initially, it was created merely as a consulting body, which produced non-binding guidance; however, it slowly gained more influence in the processes of the EU. Its first elections were held in 1979 and nowadays it is still the only body elected through transnational elections. (Maciejewski, 2022) The key seat is located in Strasbourg where there are monthly plenary sessions, while the committees' sessions take place in Brussels every month. The general outline for the composition of the European Parliament is regulated in Article 14 of the Maastricht Treaty, also known as the Treaty of the European Union (TEU). Accordingly, the Parliament cannot exceed the number of 751 representatives -prior Brexit-, in which it is included the President. Furthermore, each member state in the Parliament must respect a minimum threshold of six members as well as a limit of no more than 96 seats. After the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, within the EP, a principle of "degressively proportional" was applied. The latter implies that, although the number of seats is allocated based on the population size of the member state, the countries with larger populations agree to be underrepresented to support the decision powers of less populous nations. (Pavy, 2022) Following the United Kingdom withdrawal from the EU, the total number of seats was reduced to 705; at the same time, some countries saw their share of places increased. The D'Hondt Method governs the allocation of seats in the EP. This method gives an advantage and favours bigger parties, as a result it is more convenient for politicians to be part of a huge coalition to increase their chances to enter in the Parliament. A consequence of this method is that the coalitions are artificially constructed, the internal dynamic of the parliament is disturbed because not all visions are accurately represented. (Ibid)

As in national parliaments, the members sit in line with their political affinities. Since its first meeting in 1952, MEPs decided to sit in transnational political groups rather than by nationality. Pursuant to the Rules of Procedure, the members of a political group must come from at least a quarter of the Member States as well as exceed the threshold of 23 members to enter the EP. While the configuration of the political groups changed over the years, the division into “party families” maintained its stability. (Hix & Hoyland, 2013: p. 8)

Table 2: European Parliament Browse table | Search | MEPs | European Parliament (europa.eu)

MEPs by Member State and political group

Country	EPP	S&D	Renew	Greens/EFA	ID	ECR	The Left	NI	Total
Belgium	4	3	4	3	3	3	1		21
Bulgaria	7	5	3			2			17
Czechia	5	1	5	3	2	4	1		21
Denmark	1	3	6	2	1		1		14
Germany	30	16	7	25	9	1	5	3	96
Estonia	1	2	3		1				7
Ireland	5		2	2			4		13
Greece	7	2	1			1	6	4	21
Spain	13	21	9	3		4	6	3	59
France	8	6	24	12	19		6	4	79
Croatia	4	4	1			1		2	12
Italy	11	17	3	4	24	8		9	76
Cyprus	2	2					2		6
Latvia	2	2	1			2		1	8
Lithuania	4	2	1	2		1		1	11
Luxembourg	2	1	2	1					6
Hungary	1	5	2					13	21
Malta	2	4							6
Netherlands	6	6	7	3	1	5	1		29
Austria	7	5	1	3	3				19
Poland	16	7	1	1		27			52
Portugal	7	9		1			4		21
Romania	14	10	8			1			33
Slovenia	4	2	2						8
Slovakia	4	3	4			1		2	14
Finland	3	2	3	3	2		1		14
Sweden	6	5	3	3		3	1		21
EU	176	145	103	71	65	64	39	42	705

Currently, there are seven political groups participating in the EP. The two main groups are the European People’s Party, where the Christian democrats and liberal conservative parties sit, and the group of Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament which reunites the social democratic or labour parties of each member state. The other five groups elected with the 2019

elections are: Renew Europe group, the group of the Greens/ European Free Alliance, Identity and Democracy group (ID), European Conservatives and Reformists group and the Left group in the European Parliament - GUE/NGL. At the same time, some of the parliamentarians do not belong to any political group forming part of the so-called non-attached members.

What is interesting to point out is that contrary to the classical government-parliament dynamic, the EP political groups have more independence from the “EU government”, namely the Commission. Usually, within a parliament, most of its members are affiliated with the ruling government; consequently, parliamentary majority tends to follow the lines of the government, especially in a field such as international relations. (Bajtaj, 2015: p. 8) Instead, the institutional structure of the EU does not create such a relationship, leaving the EP free to make quite autonomous decisions concerning foreign policy. MEPs do not feel compelled to support the position of the Commission or the other EU executive figures in foreign policy such as the High Representative or the Council. This indicates that the EP has the potential to enjoy an extensive political autonomy which can translate into a specific policy identity with its own legitimacy as well as independent actions. (Ibid)

This absence of “governmental loyalty” in the EP, affects coalition formation as well. Instead of having fixed coalitions based on majority and opposition, EP coalitions change depending on the policy area as well as ideology. What has been noted is the change in the process of forming coalitions since the EP obtained competences in the co-legislative procedure. Before the legislative changes in the EU were introduced, the two largest groups of the EP, namely the EPP and S&D, would look for allies in the smaller groups placed in the outer sits of the Parliament. This tendency resulted in strong ideological divides and more extremist resolutions. However, once the EP got a voice in the legislative procedure, the trend shifted. Coalitions are a crucial game in the EP since the more homogeneous is the stance of the Parliament, the bigger will be its impact against other EU institutions. Consequently, the two groups started to consider one another as potential allies, creating a new bipartisanship, in which ideology still retained a prominent role, but parties opened themselves to compromise. (Kreppel, 2002: pp. 151-152)

This evolution is also to attribute to the institutional structure of the EU, which forces MEPs to cooperate more closely with one another. Taking into consideration legislative proposals, if the EP wishes to have an impact on EU policies, party groups need to reach common understandings moderate enough to be agreed to by the Commission and Council as well. This entails that ideological divides must be overcome in order for the Parliament to have a voice. (Ibid: pp. 216-217)

- **The development of powers of the EP in foreign policy affairs**

Throughout the decades, parliamentary involvement in international relations has increased globally. This phenomenon took various shapes and models since in each national system, political traditions vary leading to differences in the best solutions for parliaments' participation. When considering a community such as the EU, it's necessary to observe the role that the EP plays in foreign relations hand-in-hand with the structure the latter is embedded in. It is not possible to conceive the EU as an international actor with fixed preferences in its external policy. Consequently, to understand how the EP is involved in European external relations, it is required to firstly analyse the nature of EU foreign policy.

The EU is in itself a puzzle for many scholars. It is the only international organization that entails as many members cooperating on as many different levels of governance, leading to a complex decision-making process. (Welle, 2013: 07) The latter features a "tripartite" system in its external relations with a mixture of intergovernmental and supranational bodies as well as through its member states' actions. (Abdelal & Krotz 2014: pp. 2-5) Moreover, its sui generis nature makes it complicated to place such organization within the limits of existing categorization. Indeed, it cannot be considered a state nor a simple international organization as it holds sovereign powers over various policies of its member states, and it is a member of few international organizations.

Concerning its foreign policy, although many critics argue against the impact, and the overall existence, of a common policy; the EU has overtime developed a set of institutions to discuss such issues and, by creating the European External Action Service, it has, for all intents and purposes, established a set of European diplomatic missions around the world. Moreover, it engages in dialogues with many strategic

partners to discuss not only economic issues, but also political and social matters. Additionally, thanks to its enlargement policy it successfully integrated the former soviet countries from Central and Eastern Europe and it is committed to various international agreements regarding climate change, humanitarian aid, technological development and so on. The way in which the EU approaches its foreign policy is by no means comparable to the tactics employed by nation-states. Its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) constitutes the second pillar of the Union, and despite its inter-governmental nature, it has contributed to the socialization process of foreign policy that brought a change in the social practices of its members. Throughout the years, a set of rules governing EU work and coordination emerged, representatives of the member states started to meet regularly and exchange points of view, they began to consider themselves as colleagues, as participants of a same club. (Smith, 2004: p. 106) This new dynamic encouraged them to be more open about new ideas, EU member states adopted a general rule, referred to as coordination reflex, to consult with each other before reaching final positions on their own so that policies of their partners would not catch them by surprise. Similarly, it was agreed that CFSP discussions would be highly confidential to prevent members from reproaching each other about the positions adopted in the debates. Moreover, since the beginning of foreign cooperation in the EU, participants benefited from the notion of *domaines reserves*, namely some subjects considered off-limits due to the objections of one or more EU states. Nonetheless, as CFSP developed and its ambitions grew, this rule became increasingly irrelevant, as now topics such as terrorism are in no way considered taboo for EU debates. (Ibid: p. 108) This codification of conducting foreign policy led to closer interaction and understanding among actors with different identities, and therefore interests, which eventually translated into converging standpoints as well as an internationalization of norms.

- **Formal and informal powers of the EP**

When observing the EP, it is important to realise that the latter is not only a co-legislator and consultant, but it represents an autonomous foreign policy actor which is able to obtain tools to conduct foreign policy beyond the treaties provisions. In other words, the EP characteristics go beyond the ones of a parliament considered

in its classical sense. In addition, the EP has found ways to influence foreign policy other than democratic legitimacy and accountability, consequently when reflecting on parliamentary diplomacy it is necessary to highlight the particular nature of the EP. This body, while maintaining a normative approach to EU foreign policy, is also able to adopt a pragmatic rationale in its international relations, giving not only a symbolic but also substantial support to EU external relation. For example, in its inter-parliamentary dialogues with the Chinese counterparts, the EP operates as autonomous international actor beyond the Brussels institutional landscape.

In its external actions the EP operates respecting its EU watchdog nature, offering help in protecting democratic values around the world, this conception of guardian of normative power and democratic legitimacy, provides both meaning to EP's actions and it also legitimizes them. In this sense, it strongly advocates for the inclusion of human rights clauses in all EU external agreements. (Rüland & Carrapatoso, 2015: p. 200) Initiatives undertaken in its inter-parliamentary relations with China -such as the "change through trade" policy in trade, and the implementation of a rigorous approach in human rights and the promotion of European values- are all empowered by the identity of the EP.

The role of the EP in the European Union has evolved during the decades, from a merely consultative body it gradually gained more influence and power. As pointed out by Hix as well as Kreppel, the formal growth of powers, usually officialised informal practises already well established in the management of EU affairs. (Hix, 2002; Kreppel, 2003) In short, the evolution of the EP has frequently reflected a story of its effective use of informal instruments and technics to reach a tangible political influence. (Kreppel & Webb, 2019: p. 386) In particular, the Lisbon treaty saw the Parliament as one of the biggest winners, with the enhancement of its competences. It is true that formally the EP is still quite at the margins of the CFSP, however by acquiring powers over other policies, it also got leverage through which sway foreign policy discussions. Article 36 of the Maastricht Treaty (TEU) already stated that the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy should consult the EP and take into consideration its recommendations about the main developments and aspects of both the CFSP and the CSDP (Art. 36 TEU, 2010). With the Lisbon Treaty, the figure of the High Representative merged with

that of the Commissioner for External Relations. In this new dynamic, the High Representative acts under two different decision-making regimes, namely its activities in the CFSP/CSDP it answers to the Council, while for its mandate in the External Action Service it must respect the principle of collegiality regarding the Commission. As a result of its role in the Commission -to which it is the vice-president- the High Representative needs to be approved by the EP after a hearing and it must report to the EP about the developments of its job. (Crum, 2012, pp. 369-370)

Anyway, the progress made in foreign policy by the Lisbon Treaty was marginal, leaving the formal powers of the EP largely of consultation. Nonetheless, the EP achieved greater competences in the legislative process as well as in the budgetary procedure. Pertaining to the former, with the adoption of the ordinary legislative procedure, the EP was placed on the same level as the Council as co-legislators. At the same time, on issues voted through the special legislative procedure, the EP could use the consent procedure to reject various legislative proposals. The Lisbon Treaty gave the EP veto power over international trade treaties. This was a breakthrough for the Parliament that does not give its consent freely, but uses the advantage to shape policies. Furthermore, since 1987, the EP has the power to approve or reject the accession of new members, making it a powerful player in the enlargement process, which is considered one of the biggest successes of EU foreign policy. (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2014: p. 56)

As regards the budget, the EP co-decides together with the Council how to allocate the EU budget. The EP has often used its budgetary power to influence the shape of policies, to ensure more democratic legitimacy to the decisions taken by the EU and to gain more leverage in foreign affairs policies. Its efforts, though, have been resisted by the Council which does not wish for any interference on the matter. In addition, the involvement of the EP on the budget intended for the CFSP and CSDP is limited, since these policies are financed through specific mechanisms that safeguard the inter-governmental nature of the field. In spite of that, the EP has been able to slowly increase the budget on human rights instruments to make sure that such matters are seriously addressed. (Ibid: p. 88)

Throughout its history, the EP used various informal tools in order to slowly enhance its influence in EU policies. Indeed, the EP, unlike national parliaments that operate under constitutional constraints, has been able to develop a set of tactics to increase its competences and ensure that its views do not go unheard. This is the case for a plethora of norm diffusion mechanisms applied by the EP to reach certain policy goals. To make their normative views appealing, the EP often resorts to persuasion, which according to constructivism is a “centrally important mechanism for constructing and reconstructing social facts” (Payne, 2001: p. 38). It is one of the tools most used to shape international settings as the attention shifts from a logic of consequence to a logic of appropriateness. Indeed, while the former determines its course of actions based on the most efficient means to reach its aims; the latter makes its decisions taking into account questions such as “how am I supposed to act to preserve my role and identity?” or “what is considered appropriate in such circumstances?”. (Fearon & Wendt, 2002: p. 79) To promote a new normative idea, usually the latter is connected to well-established values that resonate with public opinion, as this technic has proved to increase the persuasive nature of new norms. This capacity of successfully “framing” norms is a key element of persuasion. (Payne, 2001: pp. 38-39)

Invoking norms is yet another approach adopted by the EP to stir the decision-making process of the EU. By both reminding and activating commitments the Parliament exercises normative power, indeed, if the parties are not respecting the standards agreed upon, the EP can deny its consent to further cooperation. This mechanism can also be defined as procedural diffusion, this involves the institutionalization of a relationship between the EU and a third party, such as an accession agreement or the membership of an international organization. (Manners, 2002)

Moreover, the EP asserts its influence thanks to discourse shaping, the latter is a more indirect form to impact the discussions and results held by the EU. The image of EP as a talking shop helps in making it an prominent reference point to understand what is considered appropriate and “normal” by the EU and the global north in general. A clear example of this tactic can be found in the resolutions, debates and annual reports produced by the EP which evidently attempt to shape

the discourses on a plethora of topics. The way in which discourses are shaped is tightly intertwined with culture, indeed the construction of knowledge is crucial for the creation of a social and political identity which in turn shapes the norms ruling a society. (Ibid, p. 245) Lastly, shaming is a different mechanism used to disseminate norms. It is based on the re-affirmation of identities by locating a “us” versus “them” as well as the categorization of certain behaviours as appropriate or inappropriate. It consists of public condemnation or symbolic sanctioning with the aim of pressuring the states subjected to such treatment to amend their actions, in order to be included in what is considered the “civilized community” of nation states. (Manners, 2009, p. 13)

Besides the technics employed in their verbal interactions, the EP developed other abilities to enhance their participation and influence in EU processes. As it has been pointed out, the EP has shown a great ability in spotting loopholes within formal treaties and exploit them for its pursuits. Furthermore, scholars have noted how the many changes in the EU structure do not occur during “history-making” treaty revision moments, but instead they develop in the day-to-day interactions of European actors. (Crum, 2006, pp. 384-385) Its informal strategies stretch from persuading power backed up by appeals to public legitimacy to informal institutions.

The latter represent an important tactic in the hands of the EP that exploits the incomplete character of treaties’ provisions and pressures the other EU institutions into adopting its own interpretations by bargaining in areas where it enjoys blocking powers to obtain informal benefits in other policy areas. Indeed, the Parliament, unlike other EU bodies, is prepared to lose some concessions in the short term, in return for rewards in the long term. (Crum, 2012, pp. 355-356) This distinct approach comes from its formal institutional framework, its specific time horizons, the different levels of resources at its disposal and its “lower sensitivity to failure”. (Crum, 2006, p. 385; Farrell and Héritier, 2003, pp. 582-583) Informal institutions are often accepted by the other EU bodies because they usually improve the efficiency and transparency of the procedure, namely the sole setting up of a common process means that future similar situations will not need renegotiation since they will already have a formula to follow. Furthermore, the involvement of the EP implies a greater level of democratic legitimacy. (Crum, 2006, pp. 386-387)

One of the main reasons why informal institutions constitute a strategic tool for the EP is that once they have been set up, their dismantlement would require the approval of all member states, who would need to ratify a formal Treaty amendment. Since this process is quite complicated, what usually happens is that the institution switches from being informal to formally be incorporated in the Treaties. It is an ongoing process, since by including a new provision in the Treaties, the EP can look for new loopholes that will open new possibilities. (Crum, 2012, p. 360)

Inter-institutional agreements constitute another meaningful tool for the EP to gain powers. Through this mechanism, the EP reached a framework agreement to govern its relations with the Commission since 1990. Under such agreement, the Commission has guaranteed that the EP and the Council will both benefit from a principle of equal treatment, especially regarding the accessibility to meetings and the provision of contributions as well as other information, in particular on legislative and budgetary matters (EP, 2010, p. 49). At the same time, the EP obtained the right to access sensitive information of the Council in field of security and defence in 2002. (EP; CEU, 2002) Thanks to such agreements, the Parliament is able to play a more significant role in EU affairs than the Treaties intended.

Similarly, the EP conceived several autonomous practices which enhance its impact on foreign policy. For example, according to the internal Rules of Procedure, the EP can organise public debates and hearings to understand and address the citizens' perspectives. In addition, it can issue recommendations as well as raise questions to the Commission, the Council and the High Representative. These autonomous tools give the EP much flexibility to set its own agenda and voice its position on foreign policy issues. Post-Lisbon Treaty, the EP has also gained more leverage to offer strategic ultimatums in relevant policy areas, such as trade negotiations, which now request the final approval of the EP to be valid. This is an asset in the hands of the EP since it can express early in the process its political preferences and set preconditions for its final blessing. (Kleimann, 2011: p. 7)

The EP communicates and interacts with third parties, countries as well as international organizations, it's nature as a public forum directly elected by EU

citizens makes it the perfect place to discuss foreign affairs issues, since its legitimacy is evident. As shown by Albertini:

In the sixth parliamentary term, the Committee on Foreign Affairs was addressed close to 400 times by visiting speakers from both outside and within the EU, including prime ministers, leading government officials, as well as prominent representatives of international organisations and non-governmental bodies. The large number of visiting speakers from third countries attests to the high level of interest for exchanges with the Committee on Foreign Affairs; this of course is a reflection of the fact that over the years the European Parliament has become a respected and influential partner for debating geographical and thematic issues of common concern.

(2010: p. 2)

These contacts together with the inter-parliamentary dialogues are pivotal tools for parliamentary diplomacy. Equally paramount to EP's external action is the democratic support and the election observation to ensure that one of EU cornerstones, namely democracy, is thriving around the world. Responsible for the control over such activity is the Democratic Support and Election Coordination Group, co-chaired by the chairs of both the Committee for Foreign Affairs and the Committee on Development to guarantee the stability parliaments and institutions of new and emerging democracies. This group draws up an annual work programme and decides the regions where to conduct its activities. (Lerch, 2021)

- **Significance and impact of EP resolutions**

As it has been previously mentioned, over the years the involvement of the European Parliament in foreign affairs has intensified. On the one hand, legislators increasingly consult the EP through hearings, reports, committees of inquiry and participation to parliamentary debates. On the other hand, EP resolutions have far-reaching impacts on foreign policy. Indeed, if at first glance they might seem vague and bland, in truth they hold a strong normative power that forces other actors to take them into account when reaching a decision. Usually, the content of parliamentary resolutions recalls international norms, urging the interested parties to comply with them. Such tactic is especially effective when it comes to other EU

institutions, since the enlisted norms -such as democracy, rule of law and human rights- represent the cornerstone of the values on which the EU is formed, thus they are hard to ignore. (Rüland & Carrapatoso, 2015: pp. 200-201)

Even as non-binding documents, resolutions can influence EU decisions in foreign policy, firstly because of their widespread dissemination among actors. Resolutions are typically sent to European Commission, the Council, the VP/HR, the governments and parliaments of the EU member states as well as the government of the concerned country. Moreover, depending on the regional affiliations of the country, the resolution could be sent to even more actors. This mechanism supports the creation of certain normative parameters that enhance the accountability of all parties involved. The process is helped by the media as well, with many journalists reporting contents of EP documents and consequently stimulating public opinion. The latter is shaped through reports of civil society and international organizations as well, who via websites and social networks share the contents. At the same time, the Foreign Affairs Committee as well as the Subcommittee on Human Rights, hold hearings that are open to the public, in which various stakeholders participate, given to the final resolution adopted by the EP great credibility. (Ibid: p. 204)

Secondly, by involving non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and opposition figures in the hearings before the drafting of a resolution, the EP elevates the stature of such personalities, making them relevant in international settings and, therefore, strengthening their positions in the confrontations with their local government. As it is, normally in Asia voices of dissent and condemnation suffer from the harassment of their government, who seeks to discredit them. The Parliament, by asking their opinion, is instead presenting them as a reliable and credible source of information. (Ibid)

Thirdly, the impact of EP resolutions reaches external governments as well. It is not only the European society, EU institutions and NGOs to bear in mind the recommendations offered by the EP. The concerned governments typically acknowledge the act, either negatively or positively, but still comments on it. Asian governments, on their part, tend to deny or downplay the accusation, as well as criticise the EP for intervening in the internal affairs of a sovereign country.

Alternatively, they try to rehabilitate their reputation by providing explanations and evidence of their good faith and innocence in regard to the issue. (Ibid, p. 205)

Chapter 3

As it has been shown, the EP own perspective of its role in foreign policy is of guardian of European values, consequently its actions are charged with normative power. Before analysing the selected scripts, it is necessary to briefly frame some significant issues that characterize EU-China relations.

The EU has built its identity as a force for good based on European history and civilization. For a long period of time, the values professed by European powers - and the United States of America- were, at to some extents still are, considered universal. This vision clashes with the point of view of rapidly modernizing countries such as China, where the process to modernity assumed a different path. The mentality of European centralism is slowly giving way to a more regional vision of such concepts; however, the European attitude perceived by China is still one of superiority and imposition of foreign values. Indeed, what is observed by the PRC, is that Europe promotes diversity within its borders, but argues for homogeneity for the rest of the world. This teacher-pupil approach, fully visible in venues such as the EU-China Human Rights Dialogue, is counterproductive for the development of a beneficial relationship between these two actors. (Wang, 2009)

○ **Parliamentary debate on the 18th of July**

The debate held the 18th of July 2019 to discuss the situation in Hong Kong, saw various interventions by different representants of EP groups. The shared line of thought among the groups is that the proposed extradition bill violates human rights and should therefore be formally withdrawn. Although most political groups have come together to approve a common motion for a resolution, two EP groups did not participate, namely GUE/NGL and Identity and Democracy (ID). While the former proposed its own draft, the latter did not work on a motion because of the nature of the topic. Indeed, ID parliamentarians claim that intervening in any way in the Hong Kong issue would mean undermine the sovereignty of the region and they deplore the propensity of the European Parliament to consider itself as the United Nation, trying to impose its views on the whole world.

The two main discourses risen through the debates are firstly the depiction of China as an opponent of the international order and human rights, and secondly, understanding the Hong Kong situation as a decisive battle between two systemic visions of society, the outcome of which will dictate the fate of the region as well as its rights.

The first discourse has as starting point the clear belief that Hong Kong government is nothing more than a Chinese proxy, that follows the instructions of the central government. Indeed, as Antony Hook of Renew Europe points out, the standing government has not been elected by the citizens, and similarly, the election system still does not respect the parameters of the Basic Law, where it is stated that Hong Kong should benefit of a democratic, open and fair election system. Instead, the system in place witnesses the strong intervention of the Chinese authorities that must approve of the figures proposed to lead the SAR. Due to this mechanisms, Hong Kong governments are strongly pro-China, only giving the mirage of autonomy to the city. The latest development, though, is the exclusion of pro-democracy politicians who have been excluded in the run to the Legislative Council because of their political view. This worrying turn comes with a Chinese policy ever strict on Hong Kong and the much-disputed statement about the Sino-British Joint Declaration being no longer valid because an historic document. Said claim has been denounced by the EP, who once again urges China to comply with its international obligations and respect ratified Treaties, reconfirming the role of the PRC as a breaker of international norms. Reiterating this point, is Jiří Pospíšil (EPP) in his speech, when he recalls the case of the kidnapped booksellers, who were secretly brought to China and were subjected to a legal process that was contrary to the basic principles of a fair trial. With this reminder, he explains how dangerous the extradition bill is for Hong Kong, because there is a real fear that China could abuse said law; that in this way, people suspected of political offences could be extradited to China and there be punished in violation of the principles of criminal law.

This vision is even more acute when considering human rights. The latter are considered as inalienable in international law and generally quite defined. However, what has risen through various confrontations between the EU -or the

western portion of the world- and China, is that the definition of what constitutes a human right and what does not, differs on many levels. To observe such distance of thought, one can examine the EU-China Human Rights Dialogue. In this sense, human rights are a clear result of discourse shaping, in which cultures play a big role. (Taylor, 2020)

As for Hong Kong situation, the EP reprimands China for the infringement of basic and human rights that are granted to Hong Kong citizens -and, in general, are deemed guaranteed to all humanity by the EU point of view- such as freedom of expression, of information, of press, of demonstration and so on. Likewise, the brutal response put in place by the police to face the protests, triggered the criticism of the European community, to which the detention of peaceful protesters exercising their rights is inconceivable. In various speeches made by the EP is possible to find the request of an independent investigation on the police use of violence, as well as the remainder that Hong Kong legislation must observe its international human rights commitments.

The second discourse, about the clash of two systemic visions of Hong Kong society, is closely connected to the first one. If on one side, there are China and Hong Kong governments; on the other there can be found the protesters and the EU. The latter has stated its support to their cause in many instances. By examining the speeches of the MEPs, one realises that the protests about the extradition bill are depicted in such way that makes them assume a symbolic role, between democracy and autocracy, rule of law and socialist legal system etc. In this framework the outcome of the confrontation is seen as decisive for the future of Hong Kong people. The harsh response to the protests is seen as an omen of what the city would become were the bill to pass. No voice of dissent would be safe and the “one country, two system” principle would prematurely come to its end. In other words, Hong Kong would become as China. In her speech, Neena Gill of S&D fully shows this point of view when she states:

“If the protesters prevail, this will be a big win for freedom in Hong Kong. However, if Beijing wins, this will be a premature end to ‘one country, two systems’. You can rest assured that we will then see very many people being

brought to trial under less than ideal conditions. So, the European Union must take a clear stance and support the freedoms in Hong Kong.”

(Gill, 2019)

In this discourse, the EU presents itself as a champion of democracy and human rights, as the watchdog to monitor their development in Hong Kong and around the world. It is pretty clear by the speeches made by the MEPs, that the Parliament feels an obligation toward promoting such values and freedoms, and this commitment is not perceived as optional, but mandatory. The appeal for the EU to take a clear stance in favour of the protesters is supported in various interventions and the use of the verb “must” can be found assiduously, as to indicate the prime importance of taking actions.

Although, this represents the main vision shared by most MEPs, there are some exceptions in which parliamentarians denounce the hypocrisy of the EU. It is the case of Jordan Bardella who, speaking on behalf of ID group, points out how the EU should worry more about what China is doing in Europe, rather than what is happening in Hong Kong. The group does express their solidarity toward the protests, but at the same time deplores the Union, and specifically the European Parliament, for trying to impose their ideals on the world and intervening in situations of no import for them, instead of focusing on defending the common interests of its member states. Views on the hypocrisy of the EU do not only come from the right wing of the Parliament; Miguel Urbán Crespo, a parliamentarian belonging to the GUE/NGL group, also voiced his criticism to the EU, arguing that the latter only sees human rights violations when they happen outside of its borders, while it turns a blind eye when they occur within its territories.

- **The draft resolutions of the 16th of July**

Six of the seven groups of the European Parliament proposed their own motions for a resolution the 16th of July 2019. In these drafts, it is possible to identify once again the two discourses used later on in the parliamentary debate. To better understand the similarities and differences among them, their content will be resumed hereinafter and then compared.

Greens/EFA group

The motion for a resolution presented by this group is the most detailed one on the matter. The Greens show great solidarity toward the Hong Kong cause and indignation toward authorities' actions and the central government interference in the internal SAR's affairs. In the draft, Hong Kong chief executive Carrie Lam is appealed to formally withdraw the amendment bill both directly by writing such request, and indirectly by pointing out the various violations that such bill would entail. The first argument used to this purpose is that the amendments to the Fugitive Offenders Ordinance would challenge the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary in Hong Kong, which are rights granted to its citizens by the Basic Law. The second point raises concerns on the death of four protesters who committed suicide, specifying the worries "about these cases where people lost faith in the preservation of a democratic future and positive change", clearly connecting the cause of these tragedies to the political situation and in doing so, appealing to international indignation. Thirdly, the bill would legalise actions such as the abduction of the five booksellers in Hong Kong in 2015, which were afterwards discovered to be held prisoners in mainland China for selling politically sensitive books. Fourthly, the relevance of the "one country, two systems" principle is emphasized by comparing it, together with the EU's "one China" policy, to the cornerstone of EU-China relations as well as defining it as pivotal for its deepening and strengthening. Fifthly, as China has entered many international agreements such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), no articles introduced to rule over Hong Kong can interfere with the basic freedoms enshrined in those accords as well as the Basic Law.

Moreover, another prominent issue brought forward in the text is the undemocratic and illiberal turn of Hong Kong's government as well as the exaggerated violent reaction to the protests by the police force. Once again, the topics and reasons enlisted by the Greens are numerous and diverse; on the one hand, the draft clearly conveys the idea that the majority of the protests were conducted peacefully and with the intent of exercising freedom of expression and asks for the immediate release of all those unfairly detained as they were only

exercising their rights. On the other hand, it calls for an independent and impartial investigation not only to delve into the police actions and its excessive use of force during the recent protests, but also to examine all preceding cases. Similarly, the definition of the events of the 12th of June as “riots” is deemed unfit, especially since many reports indicate police violence as the cause of the protests’ escalation. A key issue with such definition is the sentence that follows it, which in Hong Kong would be of ten years imprisonment. However, the attitude toward the protests is not the only symptom of the democratic regression happening in the SAR; cases of threats to opposition politicians have been reported as well as an increasing pressure on journalists, with the deterioration of freedom of information, press freedom and self-censorship as a result. The overall breach of fundamental freedoms goes against the Basic Law in which they are guaranteed; consequently, it is the right of the people of Hong Kong to expect their way of living, their autonomy and their rights to be upheld by their local government as well as by the central one. In this regard, the institution of a National People’s Congress Standing Committee whose role is to issue interpretations of the Basic Law beforehand court rulings, raises the concerns of external observers as it undermines the trust in elected legislators and therefore it obstructs the independence of the judiciary. The growing interference by the People’s Republic of China in Hong Kong internal affairs is a trend that can be observed through out the years, especially after Xi Jinping election. The draft strongly condemns the statement made by Chinese officials, declaring the Sino-British Joint Declaration as void and invalid since it is a historic document. Indeed, in the text it is emphasised that the Declaration is in fact valid, and China is bound by it to respect Hong Kong SAR law.

Lastly, the draft addresses the role that the EU needs to play in this scenario. The latter is pictured as a watchdog committed to strengthening democracy, the rule of law, fundamental freedoms and all those values hold dear by the Union. In order to do so, Member states and EU institutions should monitor the developments of the region aiming at an agreement on an electoral system that should be democratic, transparent and fair, allowing Hong Kong citizens to elect and be elected without interferences. Moreover, both the Commission and the EEAS

should implement appropriate export control measures to deny China access to any technology employed to violate basic rights, such as crowd control equipment and “non-lethal” weaponry. Similarly, as mentioned above, the draft hints to the imperative nature of the “one country, two system” policy for the further development of a bilateral relationship, which conveys a strong commitment from the Greens to ensure the respect of human and basic rights in Hong Kong.

ECR group

The draft proposed by the ECR shares the worries expressed by all EP groups the civil unrests within Hong Kong. They call on the government to withdraw the bill as it is clearly the will of many peaceful protesters and it challenges the principles of the Basic Law. In the text it is clarified that the compliance of such law order is a prerequisite for the strengthening and expanding of EU-China relations, and therefore Chinese central authorities should refrain from challenging it. At the same time, the document specifies that Hong Kong’s legislation must remain observant of the international obligation it ratified, such as the ICCPR and the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

In regard of the numerous protests that inflame the city, the main focus is on the escalation of violence. Both the disproportionate reaction of the police on the 12th of June protests and the violent attack on the Legislative Council buildings by some protesters are condemned in the text. The latter identifies two different groups of protesters, which should be treated as two different units: the vast majority, who is peacefully exercising their rights, and a small percentage of groups with a violent nature. Considering the tightening of the confrontations, the draft appeals to both sides to show restraint. Similarly, it recognizes the right of the people of Hong Kong to expect their rights and fundamental freedoms to be respected, understanding as well the reasons behind the mass protests started with the proposal of the amendment bill and asking for the immediate release of all those arrested during or in the lead to peaceful protests, where people were simply exercising their given rights.

As for the role played by the EU, the latter it is fully committed to values such as democracy, the independence of the judiciary, transparency, fundamental freedoms and rights and it should engage in the monitoring as well as the strengthening of them in Hong Kong. Proving its dedication to the cause the draft invokes various accords, reminding its interlocutor that the observance of them is fundamental to its engagement with the Union.

GUE/NGL group

The draft resolution presented by the Left group tackles the issue of the extradition bill, giving great consideration to the overall infringements of human rights in Hong Kong. Indeed, it itemizes the numerous issues that the SAR faces, starting with the proposal of the amending bill. The document states its aversion to the bill, asking for its full withdrawal, since on the one hand, the “one country, two systems” framework would be challenged; and on the other hand, Hong Kong legislation must remain compliant with its international human rights obligations, which include the ICCPR and the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Hence, were the bill to pass, Hong Kong would renege its engagements, since the new legal framework would allow the extradition of anyone to face trials in a country with a dubious legal system and many human rights breaches, namely China.

The repressive response that the government has undertaken, threatens the stability of human rights in Hong Kong and concerns deeply the GUE/NGL group. The use of violence by part of the police has caused many injuries among the protesters and has prompted many activists to ask for an independent investigation to assess police’s actions, especially during the peaceful protests of the 12th of June. Such requests have been repeatedly rejected by Hong Kong authorities, who claim that the existing police complaint mechanisms are effective and adequate. The draft also expresses its disapproval of the events of the 1st of July, when a group of violent protesters stormed the Legislative Council buildings; however, asks for the immediate release of all the peaceful protesters arrested while exercising their rights of freedom of assembly, expression and demonstration. At the same time, it

urges the authorities to ensure fair treatments and impartial trials to all detainees, as it is their right.

Similarly, the strategy used by the police to track the movements of protesters through messaging apps to then arrest them, is considered highly inappropriate as it violates various basic rights. This response to the protests is embedded in a legal framework that does not seem to care for human and basic rights nor to respect their international obligations. This attitude can be observed in the continued violations of labour rights and the consequent shortcomings to fulfil its commitments in improving labour and workers' rights as established by the International Labour Organization (ILO) as well as by the International Trade Union Confederation.

As far as the international community goes, the draft clarifies that the very logic behind the liberalization of international trade and trade agreements should change, placing human rights and transparency at the heart of any such accords. They should also develop new kinds of cooperation agreements that would enhance, rather than endanger, labour and social rights as well as protect the interests and sovereignty of the countries involved. Indeed, human rights are universal and should not, in any way, be instrumentalised for geopolitical or economic reasons; in this regard, the Left group does not share the statements released by the USA and UK, as they show an interventionist nature that will not help the protesters and the respect of human rights in the region. At the same time, the document calls for the setting up of a dialogue between the EU and China, to not only safeguard democratic, cultural and linguistic rights of Hong Kong citizens; but also, to achieve a clear European position toward China that will permit the development of advantageous trade relations, which will include rights such as the environmental and labour. As it is, the situation in Hong Kong allows European companies to exploit the fiscal laws and labour market; therefore, the Commission and member states should adopt measures to circumscribe and eventually eliminate such practices.

S&D group

The draft resolution calls for the official withdrawal of the extradition bill explaining how its proposal led to the “most massive protests in Hong Kong’s history”, clearly wanting to emphasise the impressiveness and idiosyncrasy of the events. Another issue tackled to back up the request concerned Hong Kong legislation, which must observe the international treaties and human rights accords signed by the SAR representatives, hinting that the approval of the proposed bill would, instead, guarantee the opposite outcome.

In the text is also underlined the necessity to conduct an independent investigation on the exaggerated use of force by the police; and to that end, it proposes the establishment of an Independent Commission of Inquiry to ensure impartiality. Furthermore, it ponders the poor results obtained during the 37th round of EU-China Human Rights Dialogue, which saw the absence of the Chinese delegation during the consultation and exchange of opinions with civil society organization.

In this predicament, the EU must endeavour to discuss human rights violation with Chinese authorities at any political dialogue reminding them of their international commitments. The document specifies the importance of a European united front in this project, which leads to consider a more transnational approach to EU foreign affairs. Additionally, it reiterates the need to impose export controls mechanisms to deny China access to tools and technologies that could be employed to violate human rights in Hong Kong.

EPP group

The text proposed by the EPP brings forward the consequences that the approval of the amendment bill would cause, such as legal insecurity not only for Hong Kong citizens but for EU and foreign people as well, and a decrease of the business confidence in the SAR. Indeed, the protests flared by the bill have caused great losses in the economy of the region; at the same time, the risk of facing trials in China do not stimulate businessmen to invest in Hong Kong.

The document addresses the protests unfolding in the city by expressing the need from both sides to exercise restraint and avoid violent escalations; furthermore, it urges the release of all the peaceful protesters unjustly imprisoned. Additionally,

it advocates for an independent investigation on the violent response of the police against the protesters. Indeed, under the Basic Law, freedom of assembly, demonstration, procession as well as of speech and press, are guaranteed rights and must be respected in order for Hong Kong legislation to remain compliant of its human rights commitments and obligations under international treaties such as the ICCPR.

Moreover, the text stresses the commitment that the EU feels toward democracy, transparency, fundamental freedoms and rights; assuring that the Union will support the people of Hong Kong in upholding such values.

Renew Europe group

In their motion for a resolution, Renew Europe establishes its support for the “one country, two systems” principle and asks for the formal withdrawal of the amending bill. It does so by enumerating the amount of people that had taken the streets against such bill, namely one million on the 9th of June and two million on the 16th of the same month. These figures show the great discontent of society and should urge the local government to act accordingly.

However, the overall picture of the SAR was worrying. Indeed, the bill was only part of the deteriorating situation in Hong Kong, as civil and political rights continued to be challenged. The document contains the request to both the authorities in Hong Kong and mainland China, on the one hand, to show restraint in their actions; on the other hand, to guarantee the safety of human rights and all the rights enshrined in the Basic Law. For this reason, a democratic, fair and transparent electoral system should be put in place, as declared in the Basic Law. In fact, the rights that were supposed to be granted to Hong Kong citizens, were being slowly challenged and buried. A clear example of the trend, pointed out in the draft, is the exclusion from the elections to the Legislative Council of opposition candidates, such as Anges Chow and Lau Siu-Lai, banned because of their political ideals.

As Hong Kong legislature must remain in line with the international treaties signed, basic and human rights must be granted in all situations. To ensure that

those rights have been respected, Renew Europe, likewise other EP groups, proposes to launch an independent investigation to assess the excessive use of force by the police. Similarly, it highlights how, in 2018, the Spokesperson of the VP/HR had to reiterate in various statements the essentiality and unavoidability of fundamental freedoms and rights as well as ask Hong Kong and central authorities for a democratic, open and transparent electoral system. This clearly indicates the slow disintegration of basic rights in Hong Kong. As for the rule of law, although the Commission and VP/HR evaluation of the year 2018 about the region was quite positive, the protests changed the direction toward which Hong Kong is heading, endangering the way of living of its people.

EU institutions as well as its member states should ensure for such issues to be discussed and initiate a dialogue with both Hong Kong government and the central authorities, so to give their contribution in the resolution of the situation. At the same time, the Chinese government should release the Swedish national book publisher Gui Minhai, still held prisoner for selling books considered of sensitive content.

- **Comparison of the draft resolutions**

In the draft resolutions presented on the situation of Hong Kong, it is easy to see that all parties share the same negative view of the extradition bill. They offer various reasons why such piece of legislation is unacceptable and should be officially withdrawn by the government, as requested by the many protesters. As previously mentioned, the EP has a greater chance to influence EU foreign policy when the views presented to the other European institutions are quite concordant. Thus, this makes for a fitting example of such scenario.

Analysing them, it is possible to identify some main aspects that resonate throughout all the different drafts. First of all, the human rights and fundamental freedoms issue represents a key argument not only to advocate the withdrawal of the bill, but more in general, to notify the People's Republic of China that any infringements in this context will not be overlooked. Indeed, all the drafts presented, with the exception of the Greens/EFA, reprimand Hong Kong and China on the SAR's legislation, which must remain in line with the international

treaties to which the region signed in. This is an example of the invoking norms technic, employed to advocate on a course of action rather than another by clarifying that the breach of the standards agreed upon will have consequences. In this sense, the EP exercises normative power. What can be also noticed is the didactic tone in which the drafts discuss human rights, placing the EU as an entity able to define and teach how a society must be structured. This tendency has been already pointed out by Max Roger Taylor, who argues that one of the reasons why the EU-China Human Right Dialogue is producing scarce results is precisely the pedagogical attitude of European diplomats. The latter assert their interpretations on discussed topics, dismissing the alternative perspectives brought forward by their Chinese counterparts. (2020, p. 9)

Similarly, the drafts convey the commitment of the EU in promoting human rights and democracy; to this end they appeal to EU institutions to monitor the developments of the situation in Hong Kong. Some of the drafts, however, are less vocal about such involvement by part of the EU. The GUE/NGL group for instance, asks for a clear European stance with China, taking in consideration the geopolitical challenges of the 21st century, however it does not call for the monitoring of the Hong Kong situation as much as for the creation of advantageous trade agreements at the centre of which human, labour and environmental rights can be found. In this sense, the role that the EU should play, shifts from a systematic protector of rights to a guardian of those rights in connection to specific trade cooperations.

Furthermore, the drafts resort to discourse shaping as it can be observed in the request for an independent investigation on the exaggerated use of force against protesters by the police. The drafts presented by the Greens/EFA, S&D and Renew Europe address the issue by condemning the use of force by part of the police only; moreover, the Greens/EFA's text expresses its objection to the definition of the 12th of June protests as "riots", explaining that it was the police actions that incited protesters to resort to harsher responses. In this sense, protesters are depicted as merely victims of injustice. On the other hand, the document of the EPP calls on both side to exercise restraint and avoid violent reactions, therefore including the protesters in its plea. Lastly, the draft proposed

by ECR differs from the others as it does not include the request of an independent investigation on police violence; however, it urges both sides to refrain from using force and goes on to identify only a portion of the protesters as violent, specifying that it is necessary for the police to divide protesters in two different groups that must be handled separately.

A major challenge concerning the SAR is the continuous meddling of the central government in internal issues. This has always been the dilemma of the “one country, two systems” framework, which has been amplified after the rise to power of President Xi Jinping in 2012 as leader of the PRC. Indeed, the efforts of Beijing to privilege the “one country” element over the redeemed secondary “two systems”, have increased over the years and the disequilibrium has predominantly favoured Mainland China’s position. (Ming, 2018: p. 2) This difference in the conception of what the “one country, two systems” principle entails has been the caused of various tensions among the years; while Beijing deems the local matters of Hong Kong as issues of “national interest”, Hong Kongers value their high degree of autonomy enshrined in the Basic Law, that should allow them to tackle their local matters without fearing the invisible hand of Beijing. (Yuen, 2015: p. 52) Instead, the persistent interest that Beijing shows in Hong Kong, has brought many of its citizens to denounce a “mainlandization” of the region, with intrusive trends in all spheres of life, including local elections, public policymaking as well as regime prosecutorial decisions. (Ming, 2018: p. 3) Said trend can be clearly observed when reading the White Paper published on June 2014 by the Chinese State Council, in which the high degree of autonomy given to the SAR was referred to as the authority to manage local matters as authorized by the central officials. The continuous actions put in place by Beijing to foster the inclusion and integration of Hong Kong to the rest of China also prevent the region to obtain a genuine universal suffrage as promised in the Basic Law. The fear is that, as a fully democratic region, China would lose any hold on Hong Kong and the latter would turn into a possible strategic base used to threaten mainland’s socialist system as well as a place through which foreign forces could intrude into Chinese internal affairs. (Yuen, 2015: p. 52) So, as it is revealed, under Xi Jinping policy, Hong Kong is considered as a fundamental part of Chinese national security.

The actions undertaken by the PRC government, though, caused the negative reaction of the EU, who blames China for the breach of international laws and accords. While the Greens/EFA group explicitly expressed its discontent on the constant interferences of the central government in Hong Kong affairs as well as its disagreement on the statement released by Chinese officials regarding the invalidity of the Sino-British Joint Declaration; other groups denounced those actions in more indirect forms. For instance, they reiterated their support for the “one country, two systems” principle and the respect of the Basic Law; the ECR group even claimed that the compliance with the latter is of “key importance” to the expanding of EU-China relations, clarifying that any intervention in SAR matters will not be tolerated.

- **The final resolution of the 18th of July 2019**

The final resolution approved by the EP can somehow be seen as the synthesis of an already quite homogeneous view spread throughout the political groups. What can be understood in the analysis of these documents, is that to fully comprehend the reaction to the amending bill, it is necessary to shed light on the general context in which it is inserted. Indeed, the situation in Hong Kong presented delicate balances even before the extradition bill crossed the last line.

The resolution gives four main arguments why the bill should not only be declared “dead”, but formally withdrawn by the Chief Executive. Firstly, the amendments as they are would have far reaching consequences not only for Hong Kong citizens, but also for EU and foreign people, not to mention for the business confidence in Hong Kong. Secondly, it would make Hong Kong legislation non-compliant with its international agreements and human rights obligations, as laid out in the provisions of the ICCPR and of the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Thirdly, the social unrests and the great number of participants to the peaceful protests -in some cases reaching historical numbers such as two million protesters- prove how loathed the proposed bill is, as well as the great concerns that it raises. Fourthly, it would breach the rights and fundamental freedoms enshrined in the Basic Law of Hong Kong, which ensures a high level of autonomy for the region as well as the

freedom of speech, of the press and publication, of association and assembly, and demonstration. These rights are granted to Hong Kong citizens and should be protected by its government and the central authorities.

One of the main issues that have been troubling Hong Kong is precisely the adherence to basic rights. In this sense, the resolution points out the necessity of an agreement for an electoral system which is democratic, open, fair and transparent; which allows the people of Hong Kong the right to elect their candidates as well as the possibility to stand for election in the process of selection of all leadership positions. At the same time, the document states how concerned the EP is about the exclusion of candidates of the opposition from the Legislative Council election. Indeed, the Basic Law should provide a democratic and autonomous system in the political administration of the SAR, instead this predicament proves that those who differ in views from the Communist Party of China (CPC) will be cast aside at best and persecuted at worst. As a matter of fact, the PRC has been gradually starting to interfere in Hong Kong autonomy, so far as to declare the Sino-British Joint Declaration as non-valid because the accord is “historic”. Such statement is not true; therefore China has to wholeheartedly fulfil its obligations and abide by the provisions laid down in the Joint Declaration. Basic and human rights as well as fundamental freedoms must be observed by both the local and central government; the pressure exercised on journalists, and the consequent self-censure, must stop since the right of information and press are guaranteed by Hong Kong law. Similarly, the Swedish national book publisher Gui Minhai must be immediately released by the authorities.

The deterioration of civil and political rights represents a setback that is worrying many international observers, as many of the demonstrators who were peacefully protesting against the extradition bill, were arrested for simply exercising their rights. In the resolution, the EP asks for the immediate release of all those unfairly detained. Moreover, it calls for an independent investigation on the use of violence by part of the police, to ascertain whether the responses put in place against peaceful protesters were justified or too violent.

In this scenario, the EU shares the concerns of the protesters and reiterates its commitment to democracy, rule of law and fundamental freedoms in Hong Kong. To ensure that such rights are not violated, the EP urges the EU, its member states and the international community overall to establish an appropriate export control mechanisms over the technologies employed to infringe basic rights, so to deny China, and specifically Hong Kong, access to them. Moreover, it calls on the EU to raise the topic of human rights violations at every political dialogue and in the EU-China Human Rights Dialogue, presenting a united and clear voice to discuss with the country. Similarly, the VP/HR, the EEAS and member states should try to encourage a dialogue over any concern that may rise. It is true that China, during its reform process and increase in global engagement has entered in various international human rights accords, consequently the EU should maintain contacts with the country to ensure that all its obligations are complied with.

○ **Comparison of the draft resolutions and the final resolution**

Analysing the drafts presented by the different political groups of the EP the 16th of July 2019, the debates held in the plenary and the final resolution of the 18th of July 2019, elucidates on how the logic of consequence and appropriateness interact within European politics. Although, most parliamentary groups adopted a logic of appropriateness, expressing their concern and support to Hong Kong, ID group used the opportunity to reprimand the EU for its inaction to defend member states interests against China. The speech invited the EU to worry about what China was doing in Europe, before concerning itself with what was happening in Hong Kong. Considering ID ideology, the intervention was in line with the group's view and their identity as a right-wing and nationalist party, however it clashed with the usual role of the EP within the EU. Sure enough, it showed an opposite approach in comparison to the other EP groups. The latter followed a logic of appropriateness respecting the behavioural norms of the EP and its identity as a normative anchor.

The final resolution sponsored by the Greens/EFA group, the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group, the Socialists & Democrats (S&D) group, the European People's Party (EPP) group and Renew Europe group, clearly clarifies a European common position on the events unfolded in Hong Kong. It is a

strongly value-based resolution in which the protests are framed through a human rights discourse as well as the disapproval of the international treaties' violations by part of the PRC. The EP condemns any breach of international agreements and basic rights; nonetheless, the final text, as opposed to previously proposed drafts, eliminated any wording that would indicate widespread negative consequences on the bilateral relations of the two international actors, were the predicament to continue. If on the one hand, the final resolution specifies that the EU, its member states and the overall international community should work to impose export control mechanisms to avoid access to China, and specifically Hong Kong, to technologies that might be used to breach basic rights. On the other hand, it does not include statements where it specifies how the compliance with the "one country, two system" principle is a pivotal cornerstone of EU-China relationship, without which the future strengthening and expanding of the relations would not be possible. This commitment, contained in the motion for a resolution proposed by the Greens/EFA group, indicated the willingness of the political group to establish the adherence to such principle as a *conditio sine qua non* the further development of bilateral ties would cease. At the same time, the ECR group in its resolution, had stressed the importance of the Basic Law, and all that it entails, in the enhancement of the bilateral relations of the EU and China. However, the terminology used, with the use of the conditional "should" and the structure of the sentence convey a more lenient stance in the matter, if compared to the Green's, stating that "intervening in Hong Kong's internal affairs has the potential to undermine that principle [Basic Law] and should therefore be avoided".

The discourse on the universality of human rights encompasses various types of freedoms intertwined with one another. The EP firmly advocates for the rights of unfairly imprisoned protesters, requesting their immediate release as it had been prompted by five previous drafts, with the exception of the one proposed by Renew Europe. As for the police excessive use of force, the resolution calls for an independent, impartial and effective investigation. It can be noted that the general tone of the resolution is very reproving towards the Chinese and Hong Kong governments and it eliminated traces of reproach on the protesters side. Indeed, while in the drafts of Renew Europe, EPP and ECR, they call for restraint from both

sides, in the final resolution, the focus shifts solely to the police actions. What is interesting to note, is that although the EP is clearly siding with the protesters, in the final draft the more pungent provisions have not been included, as it is the case for the request issued by the Greens to revisit the definition of the 12th of June protests as riots. The EP expresses its deep concerns for freedom of expression as well, after all most of the protesters were peacefully exercising their granted right. In the same way the deterioration of civil and political rights alarms the international community.

The one group which had presented an initial draft but did not sponsor the final resolution is the Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL). As it can be observed during the debate as well as in their draft, the group is quite critical not only of the PCR and Hong Kong officials, but also of the EU, UK and USA. Their resolution differs from the rest in the sense that there is a strong pull to change the status quo of the international community and labour market. Although the human rights discourse still has a very strong impact in the document, the latter is also characterized by a insistent need to reform the general layout of international affairs that is absent in the adopted resolution. The group is very critical of the EU institutional composition, claiming it is a project of elites rather than people, and it actively seeks to introduce a variety of new perspectives -namely feminism, environmental etc.- into the discussions. In its resolution the group openly criticizes the statements made by both British and American officials, since it believes that their interventionist approach is instrumentalizing the issue for geopolitical and economic interests rather than helping the protesters. Moreover, the resolution brings into play different international frameworks to urge the SAR government and EU companies to respect workers, labour and human rights. It proposes as well to change the logic of international trade, putting at its centre human rights and transparency.

Although the final resolution can appear quite vague in its provisions, its real power is in the reminding of international norms and commitments, not only to China and Hong Kong government, but also to the other EU institutions. By issuing a formal resolution on the protests, the EP attracted the attention of media on the issue as well. Through these techniques, EU institutions are then persuaded to take into

consideration the values they stand for in their actions. Having shaped the discourse regarding the protests as a human rights matter as well, helps to EP to ensure a strong normative response by the rest of Europe.

- **Parliamentary debate on the 16th of September**

This debate held some months after the first official discussion on Hong Kong in the EP, is characterized by an outspoken critique by MEPs about the ongoing struggles in the SAR. The intervention by Michaela Šojdová in the name of the EPP is particularly harsh, as she compares the fight for freedoms of Hong Kongers to the history of Central and Eastern European countries fighting against dictatorship. However, if in that case dictatorship was overthrown; China is instead trying to introduce elements of it in Hong Kong. She goes on to mention the Christian values showed by the peaceful protesters while they sang “Hallelujah” and she further recalls the kidnapping of the five booksellers in 2015 to highlight the real threat that China represents to the SAR. In the final sentence she fully states that human rights are an inalienable condition for any cooperation with the EU, including the economic field. It is a speech full of symbolic and moral value, elaborated to inspire a sense of kinship with the protesters and persuade on greater action on behalf of the EU. By reminiscing the horrors of European past, the EPP is linking an event to which people may not feel very involved, to a much more personal recollection. In so doing, it makes the protest seem less distant from EU realities and brings up a sense of sympathy which may lead to greater commitment in helping. In the same way, in his intervention the MEP of Renew Europe, Bernard Guetta recalls the events of Tiananmen Square and invites the EP to act against the modern and sophisticated dictatorship represented by China. He underlines how the EP has the power to confront the PCR, given that in its fight with Trump and the USA, China cannot afford to alienate the EU as well. He goes even further, announcing Mr Ilham Tohti -an imprisoned economist fighting for the rights of Uyghur minority in China- as the winner of the Sakharov Prize for freedom of thought.

The speech made by Maria Arena on behalf of S&D contains some harsh tones as well, she calls upon the EU and its member states in regard with the sale of

technologies -such as tear gas and surveillance equipment- employed in the disproportional repression of protesters. She reminds about the request by the EP in the resolution of the 18th of July, to work on a system that would deny China access to such technologies and urges the EU to take real action. To stress the point, she mentions the testimonies by activists heard in the EP, who fear for their security and life. Again, this is a meaningful speech that indicates the clear stance that the Parliament is taking. Her fellow S&D member Neena Gill, in her intervention stresses the need to protect the protesters from state violence and proposes to grant them refugee status in Europe, were the predicament to continue.

In general, the tones and expressive gestures demonstrate a strong urgency by part of the MEPs, who address the Commission various times to understand how it plans to clarify the EU opposition to the developments in Hong Kong. The GUE/NGL group specifically denounces the Commission as well as the Parliament because they show no problem in condemning human rights violations outside its borders, but they turn a blind eye when those breaches happen within the EU. For instance, the speaker on behalf of the group mentions the free trade agreements that member states have with the PRC, emphasising how this international framework needs to be revisited considering the geopolitical situations of the XXI century. Some other members of the group deplore the simplification of the protests, that have been depicted as a fight between authoritarian China and Hong Kongers, asking for their rights and freedoms. They state how nothing is ever this simple and the fact that there are proofs of external interference as well as reasons for protesting that go beyond basic rights, like economic interests.

ID group is another parliamentary group that differs in the vision of what the EU should do in regard to the situation. While on the speech on behalf of ID MEPs, it is argued that the main worry of the EU should be the respect of democracy in Europe, rather than focus on other regions of the world; other members express their solidarity to Hong Kong, recognising that democracy and rule of law go beyond national boundaries. Therefore, the EU should not shy away from acknowledging the special status of Hong Kong, including this in the framework of the relations with China. In this sense, one can witness a stronger involvement of ID MEPs in the issue, if compared to the initial stand during the 18th of July debate.

The outspokenness of the MEPs is obviously shown by the many striking statements made throughout the debate. They mention self-determination for Hong Kong has a right that should be recognized to every human being. They reiterate the universality of democracy and urge for real actions by part of the EU, instead of only releasing resolutions. In her intervention Catherine Rowett of the Greens/EFA even calls on the UK to step up and ensure the respect of Hong Kong freedoms as stipulated in the Sino-British Joint Declaration. Moreover, the use of rhetorical questions in many of the speeches is a strategy to trigger moral and ethical answers; to make listeners questions themselves and reach an answer following a logic of appropriateness, rather than consequence.

The EP is clearly pushing for stronger actions that, in some propositions, would affect the economic relations with China, because they believe that the EU has leverage to do so. By this debate it is obvious that the actions taken so far by the EU are not deemed sufficient by the Parliament, who strongly believes in a European responsibility to defend human rights and democracy. The voices of dissent are few, as it is possible to see a quite unite position of the Parliament on the matter.

Moreover, it once again showed that the main discourse employed by the EP on the matter is the one of human rights and the existential battle between two conflicting systems.

- **Vice President/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy position**

Considering the EP resolution, it is possible to note that the official response to Hong Kong protests on the part of the member states was, as expected, much more moderate. The declaration released the 17th of August 2019 by the VP/HR Federica Mogherini and approved by all member states, is a perfectly crafted diplomatic document, in which the EU reports the events and recalls international obligations without explicitly naming the SAR government or PRC. However, during the speeches held in the plenary sessions of the EP, the spokespersons on behalf of the VP/HR, clearly expressed the support of the EU to the protesters.

In the position expressed by the EEAS, although the violation of human rights is still one of the stressed issues; it can be noticed how the economic aspect is more prominent in comparison to the EP stance. The spokespersons remind the relevance of the “one country, two systems” framework in relation to Hong Kong financial and economic hub status, highlighting that legislative changes would not only affect Hong Kong people and foreigners, but also the business confidence in the SAR. This would hit both Hong Kong and China’s prosperity. In other words, the human rights dimension is treated in relation to the economic consequences that it would entail. Another noticeable difference stands in the more undefined role of the EU. The EP resolution urges the EU to raise the issue of human rights in all political opportunities and convey the European position on the matter; on the other hand, in the interventions made by EEAS officials, there is no clear statement about the role the EU should play within the predicament. They call for all stakeholders to seek the resolution of the tensions, however they don’t specify who these stakeholders may be.

Similarly, while the EP calls for the establishment of international export mechanisms that would prevent China and Hong Kong access to technologies used to violate human rights, the EEAS does not mention any action in that direction. As clearly explained by an investigation about tear gas carried out by Amnesty International, the so-called “less lethal weapons” are now used by police forces as an alternative to firearms. However, even though they are not designed to kill, there is still the possibility of a lethal outcome. Patrick Wilcken, a researcher, summarized the issue stating:

“Part of the problem with tear gas is simply that some police forces misunderstand how and when it can be used lawfully, while others choose to ignore such guidance and some have weaponized it. But part of the solution also needs to be greater scrutiny of the poorly regulated global trade in tear gas and other riot control agents. Tear gas should be covered by the international controls on less lethal weapons and restraints, currently being discussed at the UN.”

(Wilcken, 2020)

The issue with such equipment is that it is poorly regulated and consequently its trade is hard to track. Since the improper use of such devices by the police has contributed to the escalation of the protests, the EP echoed the demand of the protesters to conduct an independent and impartial investigation on police brutality. Such request has not been indulged by the VP/HR, who merely invoked restraint from all parties to end the tensions.

Conclusion

The starting point for this thesis has been that the EP is an interesting actor that throughout its history was able to increasingly gain more powers within the EU. It is not a simple parliament, it does not answer to an actual government and so, it is able to challenge the institutional constraint in which it operates. Concerning foreign affairs, officially the EP still maintains a marginal role, however having achieved much influence in EU legislative and budgetary procedures, it obtained more leverage to negotiate with other actors. Its actual impact in foreign policy is particularly difficult to quantify, as in this field informal factors play a pivotal role. Moreover, even the potential impact of the Parliament can preventively affect policies, as executives often anticipate and calculate the costs and benefits of parliamentary reactions when reaching foreign policy decisions. (Bajtay, 2015: p. 09)

Nonetheless, the EP has undoubtedly become its own international actor, with innovative roles to instruct its ideals and agenda. Given the absence of an executive directly responsible for the legislature, the MEPs suffer less pressure from the Commission if compared to the interplay between national governments and their parliaments. In an equal manner, MEPs also have more freedom of action from national governments given the distance from national politics. These factors highly contributed to the development of EP place in the EU.

In constructivism, the behaviours of an actor have an essential role in defining the ways in which it wants to be perceived and the logics behind its actions. To tackle the Hong Kong situation, and more in general the relations with China, the EP has clearly adopted a “logic of appropriateness” suitable for its role as watchdog of democracy and human rights as well as in line with EU international identity. As pointed out, the EP role in foreign policy as well as its actions are constrained by formal EU Treaties, which clearly designate the powers and competences of the body; however, the Parliament was also able to create innovative mechanisms to somehow defy the position it was given by Treaty provisions.

In its position toward China, and specifically the situation unfolding in Hong Kong, the EP has adopted a strong normative stance to denounce and condemn human rights violation in the region. In both the debates and proposed resolutions, it is possible to identify a highly normative charged language with the use of words such as: strongly condemn, deplore, criticize, urges, concerned etc. The employment of these terms is part of a strategy to shame China, therefore willing the latter to initiate a reaction to rectify its breaches. Specifically, during the debate held in September, MEPs used very strong terms to address the unrests. Some expressively called China a dictatorship, even recalling past horrors like Tiananmen Square as well as European totalitarianisms. The harsh tones of the debates show the discontent of the EP in regard to European actions, as they clearly believe the EU has the leverage to act more decisively on the matter. Accordingly, the EP is the only international body with enough credibility, legitimacy and independence to face a rival such as China. In this sense, the EP framed the behaviour of the PRC as unlawful, pointing out all the infringements to international agreements triggered by their actions. It concentrated its discourse on human rights violations and the common values of democracy and rule of law shared between European society and Hong Kongers to justify its commitment to the settlement of tensions.

The problem with human rights discourses is the fundamentally different conception of what the notion entails. While for the PRC the ultimate human right is the right to life and existence, the EU considers freedom of expression, of demonstration and so on, as equally fundamental rights. Consequently, the persistent focus on human rights infringements by part of the EP does not resonate in the Chinese headquarters, because to them the Hong Kong issue is connected to sovereignty and security matters. Nonetheless, the EP clarified the inalienability of human rights that play a crucial role in all policies of the EU. These apparently uncompromisable views expressed by the EP show a very outspoken approach of such issues with China, with a very vocal diplomacy that differs from the quieter approach used by the Commission or the Council. At the same time, it is relevant to note that in its final resolution the EP emphasised the European commitment in respecting the “one China” policy which indicates the desire of the EP to maintain a common position among EU institutions toward China. Indeed, showing a unique

and clear stance ensures a greater impact in international affairs. In this sense, the moderation of the final resolution, if compared to other passages of the previous drafts, makes sense. After the Lisbon Treaty the EP has gained more powers which enhanced its prominence within the international community; consequently, its resolutions must consider its new role and regulate its demands correspondently. Similarly, as resolutions in foreign policy are not binding, they need to be moderate in their terms in order to be considered in the final decisions.

If considering the EEAS final stance, it is clear that the economic and financial aspects are crucial in the EU response. Hong Kong represents a bridge for EU and Chinese markets and the continuous instability threaten the workings of businesses. These worries are shown in every speech or declaration made by the VP/HR or its spokespersons, where there is always a reference to these issues. At the same time, in their interventions it is observable how the protests have been framed resorting to human rights discourse as well. In this sense, this stance could be the response of the executive to the actions of the EP, which strongly addressed the situation in key of human rights, as well as a preventive action undertaken to avoid any reprimand by the Parliament. As previously mentioned, it is hard to measure such impacts, however it is not possible to exclude them either.

The relationship between the EP and the VP/HR is a close one; throughout the years it evolved significantly, at first assuming the shape of a reluctant collaboration, in which the HR intervened in the Parliament more out of a sense of courtesy than obligation -the EP was considered more as an equal partner rather than an institution to which the HR was accountable to-. Later on, it changed with Treaties' provisions, specifically with the Lisbon Treaty in which the role of the High Representative was combined with the Commissioner for External Relations. This last update fully clarified that the VP/HR is not only accountable to the Council, but to the EP as well. Consequently, the VP/HR listens carefully to the discussions and propositions of the EP and it is always possible to find a representative in its stead to hear and participate in the debates. Thus, the EEAS in its actions must remember that it will be held responsible in front of the Parliament, which has the power to dismantle the Commission. In this regard, it can be affirmed that the EP has become a relevant player in EU affairs and that it got hold on important internal procedures, not to

mention its great legitimizing power. It would be reckless from other EU bodies not to take into account EP wishes while making decisions.

In conclusion, the role of the EP in the EU response to the Hong Kong protests of 2019 does not stray from the identity that it built itself within the EU, as the watchdog of EU values. Its outspokenness on the issue carried a significant symbolic meaning and moral authority. In its debates, the EP sought to define the EU policy-making process by shaping the discourse on the issue through human rights lenses and invoking the pertinent international norms to remind EU role and commitment to democracy, rule of law and fundamental freedoms on the one hand, and to shame the PRC in its actions and continuous undermining of the autonomy of Hong Kong as stipulated in the “one country, two systems” framework, on the other hand. It is hard to measure its final impact, however it can be definitely affirmed that the EP has been engaging in many activities to leave its mark on foreign policy exploiting informal tactics that helped its development throughout EU history. It might not have overturned the EU general policy on human rights toward China, however as a norm advocate it has exercised a lot of pressure to maintain a focus on human rights in every EU statement.

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