

**Strength in numbers?
An evaluation of the 2004-2009 European Parliament**

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By Sara Hagemann

The EPC's Programme on EU Integration and Citizenship

The European Policy Centre's Programme on EU Integration and Citizenship focuses on the EU's institutional framework; the prospects for, and consequences of, further enlargement; the search for appropriate policy responses to the challenges posed by Europe's increasingly multicultural societies; and broader citizenship issues.

Continued discussion and creative thinking on the EU's governance is essential to ensure that the European project can move forward and respond to the challenges facing it in the 21st century in a democratic and effective manner.

This debate is linked to key questions of how to involve European citizens in the discussions over the Union's future; the opportunities raised, and challenges posed, by the prospect of more countries joining the EU in future; and the issues raised by our increasingly diverse societies and moves towards common immigration and asylum policies.

This programme, which is chaired by former EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator Gijs de Vries, focuses on these core themes. It brings together all the strands of the debate on these key issues, addressing them through a number of fora, task forces and projects. It also works with other programmes on cross-cutting issues such as the links between the EU's internal debate on migration issues and the wider one on globalisation and migration, the international ramifications of the debate on intercultural dialogue, and the integration of the Balkans in the Union.



For details of the EPC's activities under this programme, please visit our website: www.epc.eu

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About the author

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Thanks are due too to the senior officials and experts in the European Parliament who have provided detailed insights into the institution's workings and helped to explain how the 2004-2009 European Parliament has developed as a political and legislative institution.

Foreword

By Antonio Missiroli

One of the most worrying trends in EU politics has been the widening gap between the ever-decreasing number of citizens who bother to go to the polls on the occasion of the continent-wide elections for the European Parliament and the ever-increasing powers of the assembly. While the Parliament has constantly strengthened its prerogatives in each Treaty reform since Maastricht, its 'input' legitimacy has simultaneously diminished: voter turnout was particularly low in 2004, especially in the new Member States which had officially joined the Union just a few weeks earlier.

This is one of the reasons why the European Policy Centre felt it was worthwhile to carry out and publish an in-depth analysis of the functioning of the 2004-09 Parliament, with particular emphasis on the impact of the MEPs from those ten new Member States. Indeed, one of the purposes of this paper is to ascertain whether and to what extent the assembly has made up for its declining 'input' legitimacy with enhanced 'output' legitimacy – i.e. more (and more effective) legislation.

This paper's findings will not influence the way in which the *next* European Parliament is going to be elected in a few weeks' time. For a number of different, but convergent reasons, the forthcoming European elections are likely to remain a collection of 27 separate 'national' campaigns. The current worldwide economic downturn will be a common theme everywhere, but coupled with distinctly national debates over who is to blame for it, and how to respond.

While a variety of factors are expected to further affect the turnout and outcome in individual EU countries (a referendum here, a local or even national election there), another opportunity to promote a cross-national discourse and campaign will be missed – despite the last-ditch call from some leading Europeans for the European parties to 'nominate' their candidates for President of the European Commission and engage in a EU-wide competitive campaign capable of making the vote more significant and appealing to the citizens.¹

As a result, the next European Parliament is likely to suffer from a similar divergence between the assembly's powers and its public support – and possibly an even wider one, if turnout keeps plummeting and, in a few months' time, the Lisbon Treaty provisions do enter into force.

In terms of 'input' legitimacy, the hope is that the opportunity missed this year to launch a truly European debate will not be missed again in 2014. In terms of 'output' legitimacy, the post-enlargement adjustment and learning process of the past five years should help to raise it significantly over the course of the next parliamentary term. If so, the long-standing 'accountability deficit' that affects virtually all EU institutions may at last begin to be tackled effectively.

This study by EPC Policy Analyst Sara Hagemann builds on work developed in the past two years under the auspices of the EPC's EU Governance Forum chaired by Professor Simon Hix. For Sara, this represents the crowning and conclusion of an intensive research – and policy-oriented – activity with EPC that has made her a well-known expert and commentator on EU politics and decision-making. She will now take up a position as Lecturer in EU Politics at the London School of Economics and Head of VoteWatch.eu, while staying in touch with EPC as an external expert.

For the EPC, this paper represents another major contribution to the analysis of EU institutions at a critical juncture for the Union – on an issue which will require continued monitoring and further work in the future.

Antonio Missiroli is Director of Studies at the European Policy Centre.

Strength in numbers? An evaluation of the 2004-2009 European Parliament

By Sara Hagemann

Introduction

The European Parliament elections on 4-7 June 2009 will take place against the backdrop of economic and political turmoil. By the time voters go to the ballot box, many of them will have felt the consequences of the financial and economic crisis first-hand.

Will any of this have an impact on the European elections in June? While it is difficult to predict precisely how it will affect the turnout and outcome of these elections, the crisis will clearly be one of the dominant issues in the campaign and is likely to strongly influence if and how citizens decide to cast their votes.

The European Parliament may have little direct responsibility for many of the most serious issues arising from the economic crisis, but voters could nevertheless see the elections as an opportunity to voice their concerns, with candidates already orienting their campaigns to reflect their priorities for dealing with the formidable challenges now facing Europe.

On the eve of considerable change on the European political scene – with a new Commission due to take office later this year and an end to the uncertainty over the fate of the Lisbon Treaty in sight – the aim of this publication is to provide a ‘status’ report on the current European Parliament as a legislature and as a political body.

This Parliament, the sixth since direct elections were first held in 1979, is the first to include representatives of 27 EU Member States, with a total of 785 individual MEPs. The institution has also seen a comparatively high number of EU laws and regulations debated and – in most cases – adopted.

There has, however, been relatively little factual analysis to date of precisely how the Parliament has coped with the significant increase in the number of MEPs or how members from both the ‘new’ and ‘old’ Member States have behaved in the enlarged Parliament. Have new alliances formed? Is there a divide between East and West? Are there more differences between MEPs due to greater economic inequalities between the Member States? Are the central cleavages in the Parliament between small, medium and large Member States or is the dominant climate more one of left-right political cleavages, as highlighted in research on previous parliamentary sessions?

Drawing on statistical information and interviews with senior officials in the European Parliament, this paper presents and discusses the latest research findings on the Parliament’s overall performance and the development of MEPs’ activities and voting behaviour. Investigating the nature of political activities and alliances in the outgoing, enlarged Parliament may also provide insights into what we can expect from the next one.

The analysis presented in this Issue Paper is divided into two parts: the first addresses the general performance of the Parliament, while the second presents the latest research on coalitions and bargaining between the European political groups. The results have been generated from Simon Hix, Abdul Noury and Gerald Roland’s extensive data on the European Parliament, which will also form part of a recently initiated transparency project, VoteWatch.eu.² Simon Hix and Abdul Noury’s recent publication *After Enlargement: Voting Patterns in the Sixth European Parliament*³ gives further detailed analysis of MEPs’ voting behaviour in the current Parliament.

The Appendix describes the data in more detail and provides information about the 15 interviews that have been conducted with senior officials in the European Parliament in order to elaborate and reflect on the findings.

I. General changes

A polity in the making

This year's European Parliament elections are taking place as the institution marks the 30th anniversary of the first direct elections to the assembly in 1979. These were remarkable in many respects: they were not only the first international elections ever held, but they also indicated a change in the European integration process, with the Parliament beginning the process of transformation from a weaker consultative body to a more ambitious, political institution.

Prior to 1979, several prominent political leaders envisioned that direct elections to the European Parliament would transform the EU into a 'genuinely democratic polity'. Amongst them, former European Commission President Walter Hallstein said direct elections would force those entitled to vote to engage in the questions and policy alternatives on which the European Parliament would have to decide. "It would give candidates who emerged victorious from such a campaign a truly European mandate from their electors; and it would encourage the emergence of truly European political parties," he said.⁴

The gap between President Hallstein's vision and today's reality is all too visible. The European Parliament is not constructed in the same way as a national parliament, where the electoral outcome results in governments being 'hired and fired'. Nor does it visibly change or directly dictate the EU agenda for the immediate future. While national elections naturally lead voters to expect such visible changes either in government structures and/or in policies, candidates for the European Parliament have to deliver a more complex message to voters.

The election of MEPs certainly influences EU policies and the composition of the European Commission, but only insofar as agreements are reached between the EU institutions and, within the Parliament, between the main political groups.

The results are well-known and well-documented: with no clear government/opposition dynamics and few perceived political 'pay-offs' from voting, citizens have not used European elections as an opportunity to voice their preferences on EU issues. Rather, they have used this as an opportunity to express their opinions on national parties, national politicians and national policy issues. They have found little evidence to suggest that the way they cast their vote will influence their daily lives in any significant way, and voter turnout continued its downward trend in the 2004 elections.

That said, the European Parliament should perhaps not be compared so much with national parliaments in Europe as with the US Congress, in that it scrutinises legislation and has developed a detailed committee system to introduce amendments and influence legislation.

The European Parliament – and the EU in general – is also in many respects still a polity in the making. Over the last decade important steps have been taken towards an EU representative democracy of the kind envisioned by President Hallstein, with more explicit competition between the political groups and a greater role for the European Parliament in EU law-making.

Research on the Parliament's internal dynamics before the 2004 enlargement showed that MEPs increasingly voted along party lines rather than national ones; that the 'cohesion' of the European political groups had increased; that they had become increasingly competitive, with left-right splits becoming more common than the 'grand coalition' between the two largest groups – the European People's Party (EPP-ED) and the Socialists (PES); and that the main dimension of politics in the European Parliament before enlargement was the classic left-right divide.

The conclusion of these analyses was therefore that, within the wider EU structures, the Parliament was on a path towards 'traditional' democratic politics, with the representation of interests being dominated by parties and left-right politics⁵ – a highly significant development in light of the institution's ambition to 'reconnect' the EU with its citizens.

Expectations for the enlarged European Parliament

The 2004 'big bang' EU enlargement prompted many to question whether these trends would continue or be reversed. A demanding legislative workload combined with a significant expansion in the number of MEPs coming from very different social, political and economic backgrounds led many experts and observers to predict that politics in the Parliament would change radically during this term.

Two main hypotheses regarding the political consequences of the enlargement for the Parliament were voiced around the time of the 2004 expansion.

The first was that the new representatives would simply join existing party structures, as they would come from party political systems which were similar to those found in the 'old' 15 Member States. In this case, it would be reasonable to expect a further increase in the Parliament's competitive internal dynamics as many more MEPs would compete for important posts and roles in the political groups and in the Parliament's committees and working groups.

The second, alternative, hypothesis was that political cleavages would develop in line with geographical differences, such as, for example, a North/South/East political divide. Some observers and practitioners argued that such clusters could quite naturally emerge in the more heterogeneous Parliament.

In terms of the administrative and organisational changes resulting from the increase from 626 to 732 MEPs in 2004, and then 785 in 2007, the senior officials interviewed for this paper explained that enlargement was seen both as a great challenge and as an opportunity.

The challenge was to provide support services for 785 MEPs, with members from 12 additional countries speaking 11 additional languages imposing a massive administrative burden on everything from the distribution of information and translation to the coordination of political positions.

The opportunity stemmed from the fact that the arrival of the new members could bring fresh thinking from competent and ambitious newcomers. Combined with a promise of institutional reforms, several interviewees said enlargement was indeed an opportunity to address apparent problems in the system.

The European Parliament's administration prepared for the enlargement very extensively, and all those interviewed argued that both the 2004 and 2007 expansions were a great technical and linguistic achievement. They said much of the credit for this must go to the very professional officials from the new member countries, as well as to the well-planned preparatory work carried out by 'incumbent' officials. The intention was not to merely squeeze the new Member States' MEPs and officials into the already existing administration, but rather to take into account all the features of the newly-enlarged European Parliament.

Still, while enlargement has largely been a success in administrative terms, according to the Parliament's own officials there is still progress to be made in integrating MEPs from the old and new Member States better. Interestingly, officials seem to believe that, for the most part, the most notable differences between the 'old' and the 'new' are most visible between the MEPs themselves, with a much greater degree of integration between officials and administrations.

A changing profile for MEPs?

The 'demographic profile' of MEPs before enlargement showed the (usual) representative picture of an assembly predominantly made up of men in their 50s and 60s (see for example, Richard Corbett, Francis Jacobs and Michael Shackleton's book: *The European Parliament*⁶). However, in the last decade the Parliament has in fact been more representative of the wider population than most national parliaments, particularly in terms of the representation of women, which is higher than in many national assemblies.

Senior officials said they had been curious to see how MEPs from the new Member States – with a different political history, and perhaps with different political profiles and ambitions – might change the make-up of the institution. In particular, they expected that the average age would go down, and that several MEPs with senior and lengthy track records in national politics would join the Parliament.

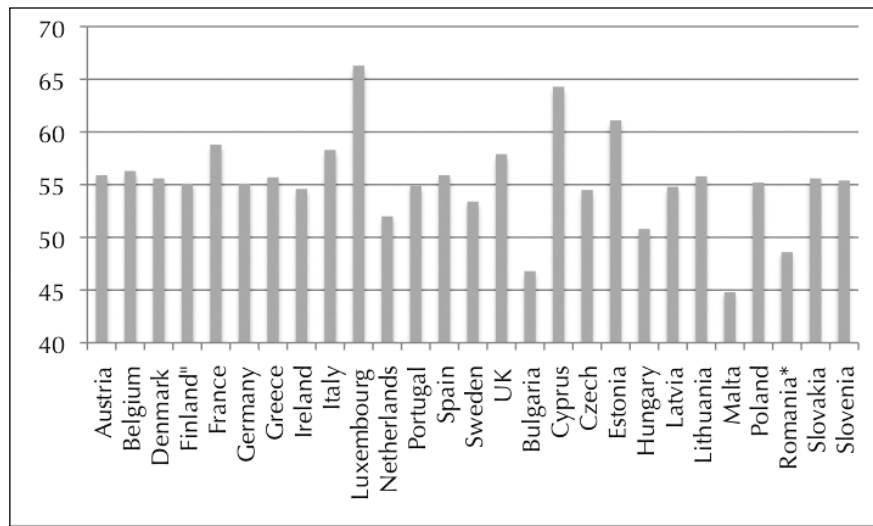
So was this borne out? Table 1 together with Figures 1 and 2 show the profile of MEPs in this Parliament.

Country	Start MEPs	Total MEPS	Turnover	Turnover %
Romania	35	64	29	83%
Bulgaria	18	29	11	61%
Italy	78	113	35	45%
Denmark	14	19	5	36%
Greece	24	31	7	29%
Finland	14	17	3	21%
Sweden	19	23	4	21%
Malta	5	6	1	20%
Netherlands	27	32	5	19%
Estonia	6	7	1	17%
Slovenia	7	8	1	14%
France	78	89	11	14%
Poland	54	61	7	13%
Spain	54	61	7	13%
Austria	18	20	2	11%
Hungary	24	26	2	8%
Portugal	24	26	2	8%
Ireland	13	14	1	8%
Lithuania	13	14	1	8%
Germany	99	106	7	7%
UK	78	82	4	5%
Belgium	24	25	1	4%
Cyprus	6	6	0	0%
Czech Rep	24	24	0	0%
Latvia	9	9	0	0%
Luxembourg	6	6	0	0%
Slovakia	14	14	0	0%
Total	785	932	147	17%
Old15	570	664	94	16%
New10 (excl. Rom&Bul)	162	175	13	8%
New 10 (incl. Rom&Bul)	215	268	53	25%

First, it is interesting to note that although the European Parliament now has 785 seats, there have in fact been 932 active parliamentarians during this term, with a turnover rate of 17% (see Table 1). This would be regarded as a high figure in a national parliamentary setting, but in the context of the European Parliament – where general elections and changes in national politics also influence EU-level posts – it is perhaps not entirely surprising.

It is also interesting to note that the high turnover rate has been driven primarily by changes in the old Member States rather than the new ones (with the exception of Romania and Bulgaria, where a general election in the former in late 2008 and an additional vote in the latter in 2007 inflated their figures). Among the new Member States, the turnover rate is just 8% – half the 16% recorded in the old Member States. One country which stands out in this respect is Italy: with a turnover rate of 45% among its 78 MEPs, Italian seats have changed hands much more frequently than those of any of the other large Member States (the turnover rate in France is 14%, Germany 7% and UK 5%), and far above the average of all the Member States combined.

Figure 1: Average age of Members of the European Parliament, per country



¹ Information about the age of one Finnish MEP was not available

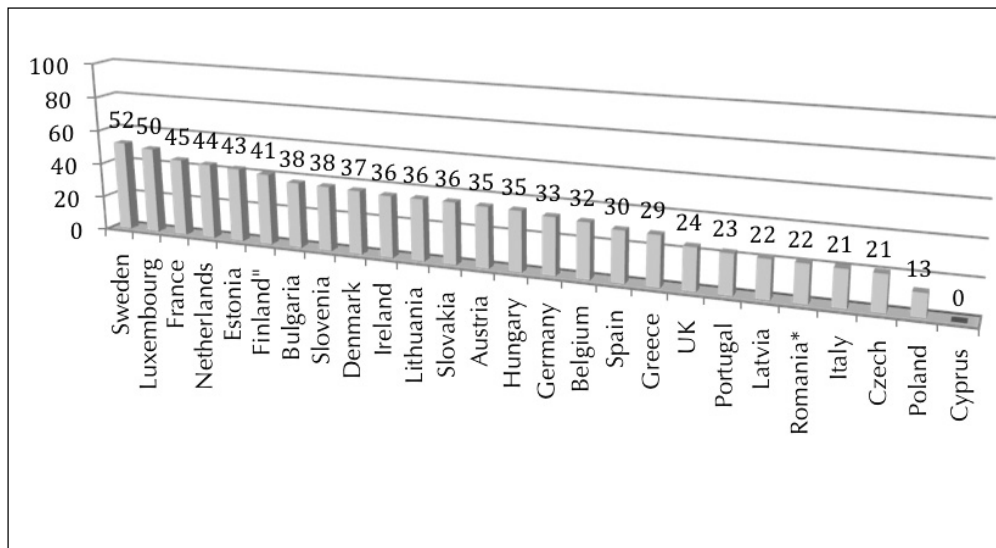
² Information about the age of three Romanian MEPs was not available

Figure 1 shows that the expectations of a fall in the average age of MEPs with the entry of the 12 new countries have been realised, although perhaps not as notably as anticipated by the officials interviewed for this paper: the average age in the 2004-2009 European Parliament is 54.8 years, compared to 57.2 years in the previous Parliament.

There is, however, a slightly more significant difference of 4.3 years in the average ages of MEPs from old and new Member States; 56.5 for the former and 52.2 for the latter. But not all the new Member States have younger profiles compared to the older ones: for example, the average age of MEPs from Cyprus and Estonia is well above the rest of the Parliament (more than five years), and Lithuania, Slovakia and Slovenia are also slightly above the average.

In summary, the age distribution among MEPs from old Member States is more concentrated around the average of 54.8, while it varies significantly among those from new Member States.

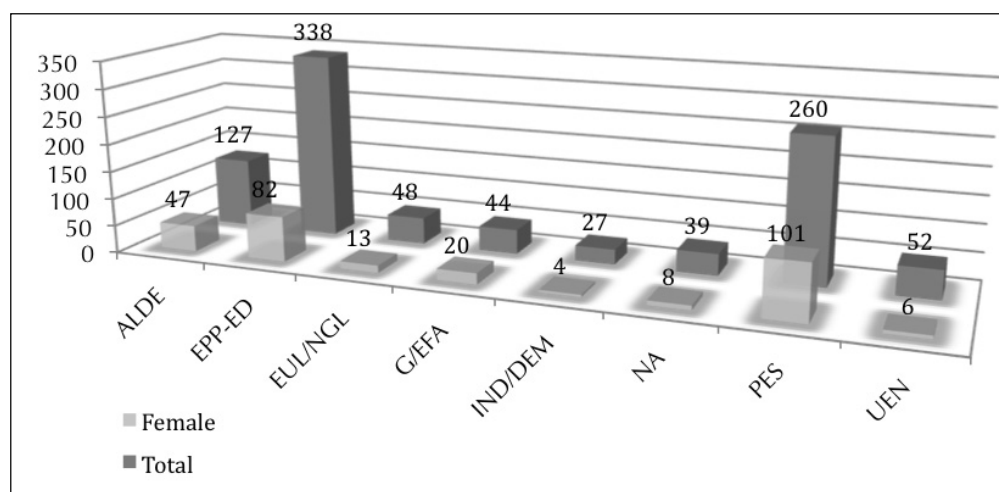
Figure 2: Percentages of women in the European Parliament, per country



The proportion of women has decreased in the enlarged Parliament, where, as Figure 2 shows, they account for only 280 out of the 932 active parliamentarians (30%). Although this figure is still well above the average in national parliaments across Europe (just above 20%), the picture is in fact more nuanced, with significant differences between old and new Member States: 35.5% of MEPs from the former are women, compared with just 25.2% of those from the latter.

Exploring these numbers further, it is interesting to also note that women are not evenly represented in the Parliament's various party political families (see Figure 3): they are most strongly represented in the centre-left political groups, with the Greens holding the record in percentage terms, at 45%; the Socialists next with 39%; and ALDE in third place with 37%. The EPP-ED is lagging behind with just 24%, and the smallest groups have even fewer.

Figure 3: Gender balance in the European Party Groups



The Parliament's legislative record

Despite the delay in implementing a series of reforms after enlargement (partly as a consequence of the difficulties in ratifying the Lisbon Treaty), the enlarged European Parliament has an impressive policy-making record. But some senior officials say a question mark hangs over the details and content of these policies, as the current structures are simply not designed for a Parliament of this size. In their words, the 'machinery' is starting to experience post-enlargement fatigue.

This issue will be addressed below, after first analysing the Parliament's measurable 'performance' in terms of legislative turnover and recorded policy activities.

The current Parliament has dealt with a similar number of proposals presented by the Barroso Commission as its predecessor did under the previous Commission led by Romano Prodi. This shows that the Parliament is continuing to legislate at an impressive rate: internal Parliament estimates suggest that it has dealt with a total of 1,014 legislative policy proposals have been dealt with by the assembly since July 2004. Although this not only covers legislation adopted under the co-decision procedure (where the Parliament enjoys equal decision-making powers with the Council), but also other decision-making procedures where the Parliament only has the right to express its opinion and give its consent to legislation, 1,014 pieces of legislation is far beyond the average level of legislative activity in, for example, national parliaments.

Furthermore, the European Parliament not only decides on legislative proposals, but also adopts positions on non-legislative and budgetary proposals. While information is not yet available on the full body of proposals passed in this parliamentary term, the table below shows the quantity of positions adopted in the plenary when the Parliament decided its position by formal voting (as distinct from a simple show of hands).

From September 2004 until end of 2008, the Parliament handled 1,336 proposals by voting, with 475 of these falling under the legislative procedure, 778 were non-legislative acts, and 83 were adopted under the budgetary procedure. Again, these are relatively high figures and leave this Parliament with an average annual adoption rate comparable to that of its predecessor.⁷

	2004*	2005	2006	2007	2008	Total
Acts	79	231	255	267	504	1336
Legislative	14	78	95	92	196	475
(%)	17.7	33.8	37.3	34.5	38.9	35.6
Non-legislative	31	142	153	168	284	778
(%)	39.2	61.5	60.0	62.9	56.3	58.2
Budgetary	34	11	7	7	24	83
(%)	43.0	4.8	2.7	2.6	4.8	6.2

**The 2004 figure dates from when the Parliament's legislative term began in September.*

In summary, the figures show that the Parliament's legislative performance has not declined in terms of quantity during this term, as some observers and practitioners had feared. As with any start of any new parliamentary term, the first months did see a slightly lower 'output' rate, but by 2006 the quantity of decisions adopted at plenary sessions was already up to full speed compared to the years before enlargement.

The results for 2008 in particular show that the institution has been able to maintain its 'productivity' and the interviewees confirmed that it has continued to develop its position and right to influence legislation *vis-à-vis* the Council. Article 192 of the EU Treaties, which grants the Parliament certain rights to propose new legislation to the Commission, has also been used more often than in the previous Parliament. Interviewees said the Commission had reacted swiftly and positively to these initiatives – perhaps under the assumption that the Parliament will continue to play an increasingly pro-active role in future.

Efficiency and coordination

'Efficiency' has been a key priority in this Parliament, and the fear of deadlock in the system due to enlargement has been a key driver for a number of internal reform initiatives as well as for an increased emphasis on coordination mechanisms and leadership structures. Specific roles within the political groups and within the committee system have developed particularly significantly during this parliamentary term.

The 2004 enlargement provoked a new review of the committee structure, which increased the number of committees to 20 and re-introduced two sub-committees, reversing the results of a previous evaluation in 1999 which had both reduced the number of committees and abolished the sub-committee category altogether. While it is always easier to increase than to reduce the number of committees, removing certain policy areas from existing committees and moving them into other committees' portfolios was not universally popular: for example, the Legal Affairs Committee was not entirely convinced of the benefits of removing Internal Market issues from its remit.

The Parliament's ability to pass legislation and decisions at the rates reported above is partly due to an increased formalisation – or 'discipline' – in both committee work and in the political groups. The committees are where the legislative work is carried out and where the real scrutiny of EU legislation takes place. The resulting stronger 'centralisation' effect in both the political groups and the committees therefore touches upon the important, and sensitive, issues of 'top-down' decision-making and transparency.

The most important formal positions in the committees are the Chairs and the Vice-Chairs, who are responsible for the agenda, while the Political Group Coordinators are key in the political negotiations. The balance between these positions varies considerably between the committees, but the Chair is often seen as the most 'powerful' or prestigious position, while the Political Group Coordinators play an important role in terms of allocating rapporteurships and discussing the political agenda.

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the data, backed up by the interviews carried out with senior Parliament officials.

The interviewees all agreed that enlargement has meant an increased emphasis on the role of the Chairs and Vice-Chairs, and the majority of MEPs and officials agree that some degree of discipline is necessary in a Parliament of 785 members and in its committees (where numbers range from 28 to 86 MEPs per committee).⁸

But only four out of the 22 Chairs in the committees and sub-committees were held by MEPs from the new Member States in the first half of the 2004-09 legislature, with 24% of the Vice-Chairs also coming from the new EU countries (17 out of 70). In the second half of this parliamentary term, only four of the Chairmanships have been held by new Member State representatives and 38 out of 106 (36%) of the Vice-Chair positions are in the hands of MEPs from the new Member States.⁹

Some of the officials interviewed also commented on the role of the Political Group Coordinators. As they usually meet in advance and increasingly seek to broker agreements which are then presented to fellow group members and subsequently brought to the committee as a whole, informal structures increasingly seem to dominate the negotiating process between the political groups. This development has raised concerns as to whether sufficient deliberation takes place in the committees, and, indeed, whether the agreements brokered in the committees correspond with the preferences of the full Parliament.

In addition, there were concerns about how possible it was for new Member States' representatives to hold these key Political Group Coordinator positions within the committees. Some interviewees said that, at the start, the new MEPs did not seem to have been made aware of the importance attached to this role and therefore missed out on securing these positions, as their focus was naturally on gaining the formally recognised Chair and Vice-Chair posts.

However, as the numbers above indicate, relatively few Chair and Vice-Chair positions went to new Member State representatives. Interviewees said this was because the new MEPs did not pursue even these posts fiercely, partly because they seemed to play more of an observer role in the first part of the Parliament's term. But some senior officials regretted that greater efforts were not made to allocate more of these high-profile positions to MEPs from the new Member States, with one predicting that senior politicians from these countries would make stronger demands in the next Parliament.

Transparency

All of this relates to a common recognition among the interviewees that the Parliament's committees have become more 'political': whereas before they were for a focused mainly on legislative and technical scrutiny, much of the political brokering now also occurs within the committee framework.

Again, the Political Group Coordinators have become particularly important; and the fact that they have to rely heavily on informal networks – in order to get everyone on board on particular issues both within the relevant committee, in the political groups 'at large' and in other committees – implies that business is being steered in a somewhat top-heavy manner. Not surprisingly, not all MEPs and officials are impressed with this system, and measures are currently being discussed to address these issues.

Related to this, four interesting results can be identified from the data.

First, whereas the previous Parliament saw about 26% of legislation adopted at the First Reading stage, this has risen to 63% in this Parliament. A First Reading agreement means that the Parliament and Council reach a final decision on a proposal without going through several negotiating stages, adopting the proposal after only one 'reading' in the Parliament and a subsequent, final 'reading' in the Council. The advantage of First Reading agreements is that this speeds up the legislative procedure (although it still takes an average of 11 to 18 months), but by default, it also pre-empts wider debate in the Parliament. As senior officials highlighted, this raises questions about the negotiators' mandate for reaching such agreements without in-depth debates, hence raising issues of transparency in the negotiations.

Second, when the Political Group Coordinators in a committee have reached an agreement, the committee may propose amendments to legislation in the form of a report and a draft resolution, which it then submits to the plenary in a 'take-it-or-leave-it' form. However, during this Parliamentary term, amendments have been proposed even to the committee resolutions in the full plenary on a number of occasions. While such amendments are usually unsuccessful without support from a committee and the political groups, this development may be relevant in light of the concerns expressed by the interviewees about just how representative committee agreements are. It may also lend some support to a proposal currently on the table to introduce a 'cooling-off' period between committee agreements and votes in plenary in order to allow sufficient time for all MEPs to scrutinise the proposal.

Third, as mentioned above, the number of so-called 'Own-initiative reports' submitted to the plenary has increased. Committees spend much of their time drawing up reports on legislation proposed by the Commission, but they can also draw up an 'own-initiative report' on issues that fall within their competence. The Conference of Presidents, the body responsible for organising the Parliament's work, authorises the forwarding of 'Own initiative reports' to the plenary, and the data shows that this is happening more frequently.

Lastly, the number of 'trialogues' (preparatory meetings between the Commission, Council and the Parliament representatives) has also increased quite significantly. As only committee representatives

holding positions such as Rapporteur, Shadow Rapporteur, Chair, Vice-Chair, etc. are involved in these negotiations, the political weight of these roles in the Parliament's external 'representation' - in particular in its dealings with the other EU institutions – has also increased significantly.

Voting

The European Parliament adopts its decisions in plenary on the basis of the work done in the committees, and MEPs support, oppose or abstain on a proposal in the plenary either by a show of hands or by electronic voting. Electronic voting is used if a roll-call vote has been requested by at least 40 members or a political group or if the result of a show of hands is unclear. A roll-call vote records each individual MEP's position ('Yes', 'No', 'Abstain') and is usually called by a political group either to collect evidence of their own members' voting records, to embarrass other members and groups, or to underline their own positions on an issue.

The senior officials interviewed for this paper all perceived that voting is on the increase, with a substantial rise in requests for roll-calls from the political groups (see Table 3). This is a general trend among *all* political groups, although the percentage of requests for roll-call votes from the Conservative-Christian Democratic group (EPP-ED) and Group of the European United Left-Nordic Green Left (GUE-NGL) group has risen most markedly.

	2004*	2005	2006	2007	2008	Total
Total RCV	208	1063	1015	1314	1560	5160
Simple Majority	162	928	914	1243	1372	4619
(%)	77.9	87.3	90.0	94.6	87.9	89.5
Rejected legislative	2	187	116	193	196	694
(%)	1.0	17.6	11.4	14.7	12.6	13.4
Rejected non-legislative	75	246	286	407	284	1298
(%)	36.1	23.1	28.2	31.0	18.2	25.2
Rejected budgetary	22	29	27	19	24	121
(%)	10.6	2.7	2.7	1.4	1.5	2.3

**The 2004 figure dates from when the Parliament's legislative term began in September.*

Based on the work carried out in the committees, the groups' leadership issue voting instructions to their members on how to vote on each amendment and text, and give an indication of which votes are important. As a group's position is defined not just by instructions received from above, but also by a process of discussions within the group – involving its Coordinator in the relevant committee, its leadership and the leaders of the component national party delegations – most members usually accept these instructions.¹⁰

Table 3 suggests that the proposals negotiated and put forward by the committees are likely to be accepted in the plenary. Legislative and budgetary proposals are particularly likely to be passed, while proposals of a non-legislative character have a higher rejection rate (but still an average of only 25.2%).

The figures in Table 3 also reflect the increase in First Reading agreements: the first row shows the number of votes that have been taken applying the simple majority rule (i.e. the proposal is passed if a majority

of the members present are in favour). Since the simple majority rule changes to absolute majority (i.e. a majority of all 785 MEPs) at the Second Reading stage in the Parliament, these figures again point to a rise in First Reading adoptions.

This development has two consequences. First, as it is easier to pass legislation at the First Reading stage with the lower majority threshold in place, the emphasis on reaching agreement more quickly may speed up the decision-making process. However, it may also result in MEPs being unable to scrutinise proposals sufficiently, or make them more likely to oppose decisions more often, if they feel their interests have not been taken into account during such quick negotiations.

Second, there is little doubt that both the lower threshold and the emphasis on 'efficient' and quicker decision-making processes give the party leadership greater influence: the daunting work load and pressure to perform mean MEPs have to rely more on instructions from their group leaders.

Despite these findings, enlargement might nevertheless have been expected to have affected the coherence of the political groups, with more members 'defecting' from the party line, simply due to the increase in numbers. Some groups might also have been expected to be more coherent than others, as the make-up of each group differs according to its political 'roots': For example, the pan-European identity of the Greens compared to the more nationally-defined identities of EPP-ED or PES delegations could perhaps lead to more splits within the two biggest political groups if a larger number of delegations seek to promote national party interests.

The second part of this paper further investigates the votes taken in the plenary and examines how MEPs have voted, whether the European political groups have been able to gather MEPs from both 'new' and 'old' Member States around common party political agendas, and how coalitions form in the 27 Member State Parliament.

II. Parties and coalitions

MEPs are elected as representatives of their national party delegations and it is the coalitions of national parties which make up the political groups in the European Parliament. As a result of enlargement, the number of national party delegations rose from 122 to 175, sitting in seven political groups in this parliamentary term.

Table 4 shows the distribution of MEPs from the old and new Member States by political group. The figures show that, as in each of the previous Parliaments, neither of the large parties is able to command a majority on its own. Out of the 785 seats in the Parliament, the EPP-ED currently holds 288 and the PES 217, while the ALDE group has 100 seats.

The table also shows that MEPs from the new Member States are distributed across the various political groups in a different way to those from the old Member States. While both have a high percentage of MEPs within the three largest groups, the new Member States have slightly higher percentages of members in groups towards the centre-right of the political spectrum (the EPP-ED and ALDE) and in the EUN and Non-Affiliated categories. The PES has captured 21.5% of the new Member State representatives compared to 30% of those from old Member States, while the Greens are quite poorly represented amongst the new Member State MEPs with only 0.8% (just two members, to be exact).

	ALDE	EPP-ED	EUL/NGL	G/EFA	IND/DEM	NA	PES	UEN	Total***
New	44	99	8	2	6	14	54	28	255
%	17.2	38.7	3.1	0.8	2.3	5.5	21.5	10.9	100
Old	83	239	40	42	21	25	203	24	677
%	12.2	35.2	5.9	6.2	3.1	3.7	30.2	-3,5	-100
Total number of registered MEPs in 6 th Parliament*	127	338	48	44	27	39	257	52	932
Total seats in the Parliament**	100	288	44	43	22	30	217	41	

* These figures refer to the total number of MEPs who have been registered for each political group in this Parliament.
 ** These are the total number of seats currently held by each political group.
 *** Totals are the sums of the rows.

A cohesive party system

One way to establish how 'cohesive' the political groups have been in this Parliament is by investigating how often group members vote together. If they rarely follow the same line when votes are taken, it should be safe to conclude that the group is not very coherent in implementing a given party line, whereas cohesive groups could be assumed to vote together on most proposals.

With a strong reference to the findings also presented in Simon Hix and Abdul Noury's latest publication,¹¹ the data analysed in this paper shows that the general picture is one of a very cohesive party system. MEPs

generally vote in line with the instructions issued by their group's leadership, and the pattern has changed very little from the last Parliament to this one. The increase in the overall number of MEPs has not led to a significantly higher or lower degree of 'loyalty' to the party line among the majority of members.

These conclusions stem from first analysing the data based on a 'cohesion index'¹² which – briefly explained – calculates how frequently members of a group vote together, while taking into account majority requirements and coalitions with other political groups.

This analysis shows that the PES and the Greens are the most cohesive groups in this Parliament, with the UEN (Nationalists) and the IND/DEM (Anti-Europeans) groups the least cohesive. Compared to similar analyses of the previous Parliament, the Greens' cohesion scores have fallen slightly, but they nevertheless remain very 'coherent'.

The ALDE group has changed more markedly and is rather less cohesive in terms of voting than in the 1999-2004 Parliament. This may not be linked to the enlargement, however, since ALDE is now more ideologically heterogeneous after integrating two more right-leaning parties from Italy (the Margherita Party) and from France (the Union for French Democracy Party (UDF)). The two largest groups, the EPP-ED and PES, have become slightly less cohesive, while the EUL/NGL (Radical Left), the UEN (Nationalists), and the IND/DEM (Anti-Europeans) are now slightly more cohesive in their voting patterns.

Turning to how often national delegations – rather than groups – vote together, there have generally been only minor changes among old Member State representatives. Again, compared to similar analyses of the previous Parliament, 'nation-based' voting increased slightly for MEPs from Ireland, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain, Finland, Denmark, France, and Italy, but decreased slightly for MEPs from Germany, Austria, Sweden, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom.

National delegations from several of the new Member States have been more cohesive than those from the older Member States, but this trend may also be related to the fact that Member States with fewer MEPs appear more cohesive than those with larger numbers.

Still, it is clear that MEPs generally vote along party political lines rather than national lines, so their 'loyalty' to their national delegations is generally secondary to their loyalty to their political groups.

Who votes with whom?

Coalitions in the Parliament are formed on an issue-by-issue basis, rather than according to pre-arranged coalition agreements between either the political groups or national delegations. Nevertheless, as case-by-case negotiations place greater demands on individual MEPs – and on Political Group Coordinators – in terms of scrutinising and deciding on positions, several MEPs have argued that alliances of a more permanent nature could be considered.¹³

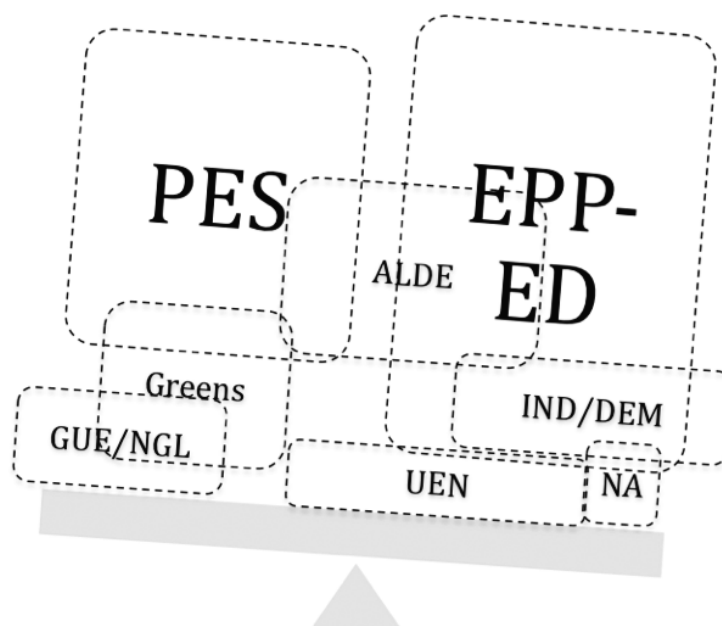
But how could such alliances potentially develop? In order to investigate how party competition and coalitions have emerged in a 27 Member State Parliament, the data is further analysed here by applying recently-developed statistical tools¹⁴ which allow for a generic comparison of MEPs' individual voting records.

In brief, the results of this analysis show how often the individual MEPs vote together – or not – across the full range of policy proposals (please refer to the Appendix for details). Based on this, it is possible to deduce whether any stable voting patterns exist in the Parliament and analyse how coalitions are formed.¹⁵

This analysis confirms that the trends detected in research on previous Parliaments have continued: the groups have formed coalitions according to their party political interests. Any political group is more likely to vote in the same way as other groups close to it on the left-right spectrum than with groups located further away.

Figure 4 below provides a reader-friendly illustration of the results. The data shows that more than 87% of the votes have been cast in line with the ‘left-right’ dynamic: MEPs have ‘clustered’ together according to their party political platforms and the parties themselves are grouped much as one would expect from a traditional party political system: the Greens are on the left of the spectrum, alongside the EUL/NGL group (Radical Left), the PES is on the centre-left, the ALDE (Liberals) are in the centre, the EPP-ED is on the centre-right, and the UEN (Nationalists) and IND/DEM (Anti-Europeans) are furthest to the right.

Figure 4: Left-right balance in the 2004-09 European Parliament



Simon Hix and Abdul Noury’s latest research¹⁶ provides further details on these dynamics and also shows how frequently each of the political groups have voted together: starting with the group furthest to the right, the UEN Group voted with the centre-right EPP-ED Group 84% of the time, with the liberals in ALDE 72%, with the centre-left PES 63%, with the Greens (G/EFA) 45% and with the Radical Left (EUL/NGL) 42%. The centre-right EPP-ED Group voted with the liberal ALDE Group 78% of the time, with the centre-left PES 68.4%, with the Greens (G/EFA) 47.4%, and with the Radical Left (EUL/NGL) 39.5%. Only the Anti-Europeans (IND/DEM) and the Non-Attached members (NA) bucked this trend, but this is not surprising since their primary objective is to protest against the main political groups. They therefore vote least often with the two biggest parties and more often with the parties on the extremes of both left and right.

Compared with the results from previous Parliaments, the two biggest parties – the EPP-ED and PES – have voted together slightly more frequently (68% of the time) than in the previous Parliament (65%).

All about the ‘grand coalition’?

Although each of the results presented so far suggests that the European Parliament has continued to develop on the basis of a left/right dynamic, several smaller – but important – changes from the previous Parliament should be pointed out.

First, the ALDE Group has voted with the EPP more often than with the PES in this Parliament than in the previous one. In fact, the data shows that whereas ALDE represented a more or less mid-way position between the PES and EPP-ED in the 1999-2004 Parliament, it has been closer to the EPP-ED than to the PES in this parliamentary term.

Second, patterns of behaviour between the groups further to the right and left have changed slightly. On the right, the EPP-ED and UEN (Nationalists) have voted together more often during this Parliament, as have ALDE and the UEN. Conversely, on the left the PES has voted with the Greens and Radical Left (EUL/NGL) slightly less often.

In addition to these distinct left-right dynamics, the data also suggests that, compared with the previous Parliaments, the larger centrally-placed groups have moved closer together while the smaller parties on each side of the left-right divide now appear to be located further towards the margins. One could speculate on whether this division between the parties in the centre and those on the 'wings' may in fact reflect anti- and pro-European policy tendencies, with the main centre parties traditionally more pro-European (PES, EPP-ED and ALDE), while those on the 'sides' are more anti-European (EUL/NGL, Greens, UEN and IND/DEM).

An additional explanation could be that this dynamic reflects government/opposition interests in the EU, with MEPs from national parties that either currently hold, or have recently held, power centrally located and those from national parties that are in opposition further out towards the margins.

Finally, some distinct trends are also notable with regard to a few of the national party delegations' behaviour within the European political groups: most strikingly, a group of MEPs from the EPP-ED group has voted differently from the rest of the EPP-ED approximately 30% of the time. It requires little knowledge of the EPP-ED group to deduce that this 'rebellious' behaviour comes from the UK Conservatives. Conversely, the Grand Coalition formed in Germany (the EU country with the highest number of MEPs) in autumn 2005 has reportedly brought about more marked convergence towards the centre on legislation in Strasbourg as well.

Not all votes are important

Each of the findings presented here suggests that the balance in this Parliament has shifted towards greater centre-right dominance, as indicated in the illustration in Figure 4, with a centre/periphery effect.

Of course, these results are generated on the basis of all the votes taken in the 2004-2009 Parliament, and one can – rightly – argue that not all votes are equally important. In fact, some important decisions may be taken in the Parliament's plenary without any formal vote taking place, merely on the basis of a show of hands.

Nevertheless, three observations confirm that the findings of this paper are representative of the general dynamics in the Parliament.

First, case studies on the most controversial policies handled during this Parliament's term (such as the REACH, Services and Mobile Roaming Directives) all conclude that while national party groups may 'defect' from the overall line taken by the collective European political groups from time to time, negotiations are predominantly defined and carried out by the political groups on the most important policies.

The fact some national delegations may choose to follow national rather than political group lines on certain issues is a reminder that the European political groups are collectives of party interests from different backgrounds and constituencies rather than traditional party entities. This potential dilemma for national delegations within the European political groups was demonstrated graphically by the British Labour MEPs' decision to vote with their European political group (the PES Group) rather than follow the UK Labour government's line in a decisive vote on the Working Time Directive in December 2008. The coherence of the European political groups is, on this basis, quite remarkable, with MEPs voting with their groups in more than 80% of all votes.

Second, and as shown in the first part of this paper, formal voting is on the increase, which in itself makes the findings more conclusive. The more often votes are taken in the plenary, the more robust, sophisticated and detailed analysis is possible, and the data for this parliamentary term is already more extensive than that available for previous Parliaments.

Third, the senior officials inside the Parliament interviewed for this paper all regarded this data as clear evidence of the party-political nature of the day-to-day dynamics, both in more important policy negotiations and in voting situations in general. Hence, it should be safe to conclude that the results give a fair picture of decision-making in the enlarged assembly and that the European Parliament has continued to develop its party political profile.

May 2009

Conclusions

One of fears often voiced prior to the EU's 2004 and 2007 enlargements was that the Union's institutional set-up was simply not cut out for the 'big bang' expansion of any of its bodies. How could the EU institutions cope with the policy demands placed upon them with so many more decision-makers around the table or, in the case of the Parliament, in the plenary?

While many important organisational issues have had to be addressed – and many certainly still need to be improved – the overall performance of the Parliament as a policy-making institution has been quite impressive. Five years after enlargement, its problems are not related to *if* the Parliament can deliver on policies, but rather *how* these policies are negotiated internally.

This paper has shown that the Parliament has coped remarkably well in terms of 'efficiency in numbers'. The quantity of legislation passed by the Parliament has not decreased; nor have there been noticeable bottlenecks in policy 'production' which are directly attributable to the institution's expansion.

Much of the credit for the Parliament's legislative performance is given to the European political groups and the organisation of the committee system. Fears of new divisions, for example of a geographical nature (North/South/East divides), have not materialised in terms of decision-making – instead, the 2004-09 assembly has continued to develop its profile as a party political negotiating forum.

The political groups have, in this way, continued to act as platforms that provide guidance to individual MEPs on how to position themselves both in general debates and on specific policy issues. Similarly to many national parliamentary systems, the political groups work under a 'division-of-labour' system, where individual MEPs can use the instructions from the group's leadership as a 'translating tool' on policy proposals (assuming they agree with the core, underlying values behind the party line).

Given the European Parliament's heavy workload, and the fact that MEPs find it impossible to acquire advanced, detailed knowledge of all the policy proposals in front of them, the continued development of the political groups' profile can be seen (contrary to some expectations) to have added to the efficiency and performance of the Parliament.

However, the picture is certainly not all rosy: there are complaints within the institution, particularly about a lack of genuine debate and about the strenuous, demanding decision-making processes. Critics repeatedly complain that the plenary has largely turned into a forum for tightly-scheduled statements instead of exchanges of views or 'question times', and many key debates and negotiations have had to be referred to the committees.

At the same time, the way the committees function – and the dominant roles played by a few specific positions such as the Political Group Coordinators, Rapporteurs and Committee Chairs in brokering agreements within a very short time frame – challenges the assumption that committee decisions are in fact representative of the views of the Parliament as a whole.

This, of course, begs the question of whether the democratic performance of Parliament can be improved without losing sight of efficiency?

A number of important suggestions are already being discussed internally in the Parliament to address these challenges. This paper's findings have highlighted that particular attention needs to be paid to the increase in First Readings and to how representative the policy positions negotiated in committees really are. These are coupled with concerns that MEPs who do not have a seat in the relevant committee do not have enough time to discuss and sufficiently scrutinise proposals submitted for final decision in the plenary,

There is also another reason for questioning the current 'division-of-labour' system within the committees and within the European political groups, where MEPs have to rely on the expertise and recommendations of fellow

MEPs who have been involved in the formulation of a policy position. This system is, of course, only democratically efficient if all MEPs have an equal opportunity to obtain key posts (in line with their group's share of the total number of seats), and responsibilities are fairly distributed.

The figures for the current Parliament show that representatives from the new Member States have not held a proportional number of the key posts within either the committees or in the political groups. The expectation is, however, that this may change in the next Parliament, as the 'new' MEPs are now familiar with the system and know better how to secure their share of the most prestigious and influential posts.

It is also important to stress that in this parliamentary term, more seats appear to have been held by ambitious 'career politicians' (from both old and new Member States) than in the past, and many of the MEPs from the new Member States are seen as having contributed positively to strengthening the European Parliament as a political and legislative institution. Enlargement brought a number of ambitious and senior politicians to the Parliament, and new professional (and younger) officials have given added impetus to the system.

That said, the average age of an MEP is still relatively high at 54.8 years and the findings in the first part of this paper show that women are particularly badly represented amongst the new Member State representatives.

The benefits of competitive politics

Although left/right party dynamics have continued to dominate the political picture during this Parliament's term, this paper has underlined the changes that have occurred both within and between the political groups.

The extent to which the groups have remained very politically coherent in the enlarged assembly is, however, quite remarkable. With the inclusion of 12 additional countries, 11 extra languages and a total of 785 parliamentarians, the continuation – and even further development – of the party political structures in the Parliament is highly significant.

Many had expected more significant splits to emerge, with 'defections' by various national delegations. While this has happened on a few occasions, and in a few delegations, the overall 'loyalty' of MEPs to the group line has remained strong.

The most significant change in voting behaviour between the previous Parliament and this one relates to the ALDE Group, which has voted significantly more often with the EPP-ED than with the PES. This change may have a significant effect on the balance of power within the Parliament. Whereas previous research has shown that the left and right blocs were quite evenly balanced in the 1999-2004 Parliament – with the ALDE group determining which side would command a majority in any particular vote – its behaviour in this Parliament has resulted in domination by a centre-right coalition.

The same majority constellations can be found in the Council and Commission, and the expectation is that this centre-right domination will continue in the next Parliament and Commission.

What do each of these findings mean for the Parliament as a decision-making institution and as a political, directly-elected assembly? The conclusion of this paper is that, clearly, the European Parliament's evolution has (unfortunately) been a twin-track process: while its internal dynamics and political and legislative responsibilities have moved the EU towards becoming a European parliamentary democracy, the link between voters' preferences expressed at the ballot box and the EU's policy choices has not developed to the same extent.

There are two main reasons for this. First, as discussed in the start of this paper, there is a 'missing link' between MEPs and European citizens, with very few mechanisms for engaging the public in EU politics and holding MEPs to account for their behaviour in day-to-day decision-making. Second, there are simply

too few incentives for voters to take an interest in the European Parliament elections as they are not presented with any real, visible consequences of the way they cast their votes.

While one can only speculate on the impact of the current economic crisis on the political landscape in Europe, the key finding outlined in this paper – that the Parliament’s party-political profile has continued to develop in an EU of 27 Member States – is very relevant to the debate over how to connect the EU more closely to its citizens. Will some political groups be strengthened by the debate and consequences of the crisis? If the potential for such developments were clearer to voters, this could increase their interest in the European Parliament and provide new incentives for citizens to understand and consider different policy options.

For all its achievements, the Parliament needs to find ways to better balance pluralism, debate and representative politics with efficient policy-making. The increased party political organisation and discipline in the assembly identified in this paper should also be more visible outside the walls of the institution, in order to reconnect the public with their representatives in the EU institutions. The key question for the next Parliament is whether MEPs will demonstrate the commitment to go beyond rhetoric and actually make this happen.

Appendix: Research material and methodology

The research for this report has been conducted by combining qualitative and quantitative analyses of information from the European Parliament. The quantitative material consists of an extensive data set obtained from records from the European Parliament's public archives. The collection, coding and descriptive statistics of the data set are described in detail below. Advanced statistical methods and geometrical scaling techniques have been used to analyse this data and the conclusions in the last section of this paper also draw on the latest research results from Simon Hix and Abdul Noury. Although the models behind these analytical tools have important implications for how the analysis is carried out, space constraints prevent a detailed explanation of the models themselves in this paper. However, clear references to full accounts of these methods are cited for the interested reader.

Interviews

As for the qualitative part of the analysis, the findings are based on 15 in-depth semi-structured interviews with key figures in the European Parliament. All of the interviews helped to clarify the explanations of some of the statistical results and have provided useful insights into issues such as the differences in working methods between the various committees and the full plenary. Many issues related to the 'negotiating culture' since enlargement – which cannot be measured statistically – have also been elucidated from these sources, all of whom were assured anonymity. No extensive conclusions are drawn exclusively on the basis of these interviews, but they are used to help explain and elaborate on the statistical results, and they provide valuable insights into the more detailed aspects of the European Parliament's working procedures.

Data

The data used for the quantitative analysis consists of two parts.

One part is drawn from a sample of a larger data set collected by Professor Simon Hix, London School of Economics, Abdul Noury, *Université Libre de Bruxelles*, and Gérard Roland, University of California, Berkeley. A second part builds on this data, but includes additional material collected by the VoteWatch.eu team, which provides further details on the MEPs and decisions adopted during the 2004-2009 parliamentary term. Simon Hix, Abdul Noury, and Gérard Roland retain full copyright of all of this data.

The data covers all decisions passed in this parliamentary term from July 2004 until 31 December 2008. The data is collected from the European Parliament's official records and consists of all information available on the 932 MEPs who have been active during the July 2004-December 2008 period, as well as details of the decisions adopted in plenary.

The most detailed information available on the decisions adopted in plenary concerns the 1,336 acts which have been decided by formal voting during this period. The analysis in the last section of this paper particularly relies on this part of the data, with 5,160 roll-call votes taken, leading to a total of 4,050,600 individual votes cast (785 MEPs x 5160 decisions taken by voting) between July 2004 and December 2008.

For further information about the data and about the statistical results, please refer to www.votewatch.eu or contact s.hagemann@epc.eu.

Endnotes

1. See for example EPC's contributions to *Think Global – Act European* published by Notre Europe and Fondation Pour l'Innovation Politique 2008.
2. VoteWatch.eu is an independent monitoring website of EU politics. It provides detailed information about parliamentarians' voting records and formal political activities – from committee work to parliamentary reports – and includes easy-to-access information on the political coalitions that are formed around policy issues. The website was launched on 11 May 2009 and is online on www.votewatch.eu.
3. Simon Hix and Abdul Noury (2009) 'After Enlargement: Voting Patterns in the Sixth European Parliament' *Legislative Studies Quarterly* XXXIV, 2, May.
4. Walter Hallstein (1972) *Europe in the Making*, London: Allen and Unwin, p.74.
5. For an overview, please refer to Simon Hix, Abdul Noury and Gerard Roland (2007) *Democratic Politics in the European Parliament*, Cambridge University Press.
6. Please refer to Richard Corbett, Francis Jacobs and Michael Shackleton (2007) *The European Parliament*, 7th edition, J Harper Publishing.
7. See Corbett, Jacobs and Shackleton (2007), *Ibid*; and Simon Hix *The Political System of the European Union*, 2nd edition, London: Palgrave, for more details.
8. The smallest committee is the Committee on Petitions; while the largest is the Committee on Foreign Affairs (the AFET Committee – which, interestingly, is an area where the Parliament has few legislative powers).
9. The actual numbers are 17 out of 70 positions in the first half and 38 out of 106 positions in the second half. The positions in the committees are allocated on a two-and-a-half-year basis, but some committees have seen a rather high turn-over rate as a result of some MEPs leaving or joining the Parliament. The figures presented here include the total of all MEPs registered in each committee during the 6th Parliament.
10. Corbett, Jacobs and Shackleton (2007), *Op. cit*.
11. Please see Hix and Noury (2009), *Op. cit*.
12. For further explanation of the cohesion index please refer to Simon Hix, Abdul Noury and Gérard Roland (2006) 'Dimensions of Politics in the European Parliament', *American Journal of Political Science* 50(2) 494–511.
13. See for example Graham Watson interviewed in 'European Parliament needs ideological coalition', *EurActiv.com*, 6 November 2008.
14. Several measures have been developed for this purpose, but the most popular are the NOMINATE or Optimal Classification methods, while more recent and sophisticated models are based on so-called Bayesian analysis methods. Please refer to Keith Poole (2005) *Spatial Models of Parliamentary Voting* New York: Cambridge University Press for further details.
15. For the interested reader, a description of the methods can be found in a number of political science publications; an overview is available in the reference listed above for Keith Poole (2005). Two recent examples of related analyses where such methods have also been applied are Hageman and De Clerck-Sachsse (2007) *Old Rules, New Game: Decision-making in the Council of Ministers after the 2004 Enlargement*, Centre for European Policy Studies, and Hix and Noury (2009), *Op. cit*.
16. For further details see Hix and Noury (2009), *Op.cit*.