

European parliament

Should it have more power?

SUMMARY

Many observers have expressed scepticism about granting more power to the European Parliament. The sceptics believe that Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) do not vote in a disciplined way and that they vote more often with their country group than with their European Party. Using a unique database consisting of all roll call votes by each individual MEP between 1989 and 1999 (over 6000 votes by over 1000 different MEPs), we show that the sceptics are wrong. Our data shows clearly that MEPs vote more along party lines than along country lines. Party cohesion is comparable to that of the US Congress and is increasing over time whereas country cohesion is low and declining. In short, politics in the European Parliament generally follows the traditional left–right divide that one finds in all European nations. These findings are valid across issues, even on issues like the structural and cohesion funds where one would expect country rather than party cohesion. In votes where the EP has the most power – those held under the so-called co-decision procedure – MEPs participate more and are more party-cohesive. In our opinion, this unique empirical analysis provides grounds for justifying a generalization of the co-decision procedure.

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More power to the European Parliament?

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1. INTRODUCTION

Proposals to give the European Parliament (EP) more power have triggered debates at the highest levels of European politics. As German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer argued persuasively: ‘Today, the EU is no longer a mere union of states, but more and more a union of citizens. Nevertheless, European decisions are still taken almost exclusively by the states. The role of the elected European Parliament as a source of direct legitimisation is underdeveloped. This role has to be further strengthened if we are to overcome the democratic deficit of the Union . . .’ Such proposals are also central to various reforms being considered by the European Convention. The exact reforms under consideration are manifold, but they typically include calls for boosting the European Parliament’s legislative and budgetary powers.

How would a more powerful EP affect decision-making in an enlarged EU? Answering this critical question conclusively is too vast an undertaking for any single article, however any sensible answer must surely be based on a clear understanding of how the EP has functioned in the past. This is especially important since astonishingly little seems to be known about how the EP operates in practice. The *Financial*

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Times, for example, wrote that the EP was ‘rarely decisive, barely coherent and often overruled’ (10/4/2002) – a comment that we shall show is almost exactly wrong.

Drawing on a unique data set that covers all recorded votes by Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) between 1989 and 1999, we are able to concisely document how the EP has operated.¹ During this period, the Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties increased the powers of the EP in important ways and EU membership was enlarged. Thus our data, which consists of several million individual votes, allows us to cast light on how the EP may react to the two most critical challenges in its future – receiving more power and adjusting to a near doubling of EU member states.

1.1. The key question

A crucial question in understanding the impact of giving the EP more power is whether coalitions are formed on the basis of country coalitions or on the basis of the traditional left–right divide. If coalitions form along left–right lines, giving the EP more power should encourage European-wide political debates and strengthen cohesion of pan-European party groups. If coalitions are based mostly on national interests, increasing the Parliament’s power may not have much effect. The point is that most EU legislation must be approved both by the Council of Ministers (where national concerns are clearly dominant) and by the EP, but majority rules are much more stringent in the Council than in the EP. An EP where voting was arranged around country coalitions would thus not have much influence since anything that could get over the Council’s majority threshold would also pass in the Parliament, as Bindseil and Hantke (1997) showed.

The question of coalition formation is even more important in the light of the future enlargement of the EU to countries from Central Europe. If the EP votes mostly along ideological party lines, enlargement will increase the size of the EP and possibly affect its ideological composition, but it would not fundamentally threaten its ability to operate. Giving more power to the EP would thus be beneficial for decision-making within the EU because it would mitigate the dangers of paralysis in decision-making that are inherent to enlargement. Baldwin *et al.* (2001) showed that with enlargement to 27 members, the ability of the EU’s Council of Ministers to take decisions would clearly deteriorate. A resolute EP with more powers may thus put pressure on the Council to overcome potential paralysis of decision-making. On the other hand, if the Euro-deputies vote mainly on the basis of national interests, more power to the EP may not help in preventing paralysis of decision-making in the EU Council, and could possibly make things even worse.

A second important question concerns the impact of greater power on the EP’s behaviour. Under current rules, EU decision-making follows several different procedures,

¹ This is part of a larger research project jointly organized with Simon Hix of the London School of Economics to put together a database on voting in the European Parliament from 1979 to 2001.

each of which entails a different degree of parliamentary power. Under some procedures, the EP's role is merely consultative; under others, the EP has veto power. Does the EP act differently on issues where it has more power? Again, the answer to this question will depend on whether the allegiance of MEPs is to their nationality or party ideology. As mentioned earlier, the former should not make much difference, given the Council's higher majority constraint, whereas the latter should encourage greater pan-European cohesion and debates. The final question concerns the behaviour of MEPs from newly admitted nations. Since our data includes the votes of MEPs from Austria, Finland and Sweden during their first term, we can see how their voting patterns differed from those of MEPs from incumbent EU member states. While the MEPs from nations admitted in the next EU enlargement may act differently, determining the impact of the last enlargement is a natural place to start when thinking about how the coming enlargement will affect the EP.

1.2. Our findings

The empirical analysis we have done suggests clear answers to the above questions:

- The data show that MEPs vote more along party lines than country lines. Party cohesion is comparable to that in the US Congress while cohesion of country delegations (MEPs from the same country) is significantly lower and is declining.
- Legislative decisions giving the EP more power exhibit higher MEP participation and party cohesion while reinforcing a visible tendency toward traditional left–right politics typical of national legislatures.
- Under the previous enlargement, MEPs from newly entering countries did not vote less with their European party group than MEPs from existing member states.

These striking results are robust to various specifications.² Though caution should obviously be exercised in drawing policy conclusions, the analysis based on this unique database suggests that giving more power to the EP by generalizing the co-decision procedure is likely to reinforce party cohesion and normal parliamentary coalitions on a left–right basis.

1.3. Organization of the paper

Interpreting the data requires some understanding of the EU legislative process and institutional arrangements in the EP, so we first provide some background on this. The following section presents the ‘meat’ of our analysis; it examines whether Euro-deputies vote primarily according to their ideology or national interest. To do so, we

² These results confirm similar results derived from smaller samples of votes, for example Hix (2001), Kreppel and Tsebelis (1999), and Raunio (1997).

measure the cohesion of party and country votes, the voting pattern of individual MEPs, and use regression analysis. We also analyse coalition formation for both party groups and country delegations. After having established the dominance of party-based voting in the EP, the natural question is: ‘Why do MEPs vote mainly along party rather than country lines?’ Section 4 considers various possible answers. To further evaluate the impact of enlargement and greater powers on EP voting patterns, Section 5 uses regression analysis to examine the effects of increased power and enlargement on voting discipline. Section 6 addresses the policy implication of our analysis and Section 7 concludes.

2. THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: HISTORY AND POWERS

The European Parliament started life as a toothless, consultative body in a Union with just six members. Today, however, it is directly elected by the citizens of all 15 EU members and has a good deal of power. Since almost all of the Parliament’s power comes from being able to shape EU legislation, understanding the EP’s powers requires a basic comprehension of the EU’s legislative process.

EU legislation is formulated under at least five different procedures, each of which is highly complex. For our purposes, however, the EP’s role in all the processes can be stylised as follows. The process is begun by a proposal from the European Commission. After a sequence of consultations and amendments involving both the Parliament and the Council of Ministers, the measure is put to a vote. With minor exceptions, all legislation requires explicit approval by the Council. The most important measures – the budget, trade agreements, enlargements, treaty changes, etc. – require the Council’s unanimous approval. While important, such legislation is infrequent. Adoption of the most common measures, including legislation concerning the EU’s internal market, involve a lower majority threshold in the Council, known as a ‘qualified majority’. A qualified majority requires 71% of Council votes but it is important to note that more populous nations have more votes than small nations. Winning 71% of Council votes thus does not require winning approval of 71% of EU member states. In addition to the Council’s approval, many types of legislation (currently about 80% of all EU legislation) also require approval by the European Parliament. Typically, EP approval entails a 50% majority of MEPs. Depending on the measure being debated, though, the 50% requirement may be based on the number of MEPs present, or the total number of elected MEPs, present or not.

The EP’s power lies in its ability to shape legislation and this, in turn, rests on its ability to reject, or threaten to reject, measures that it does not like. As a consequence, the EP’s power varies according to the exact nature of the procedure followed (the nature of the measure determines which procedure is applied). The most common procedure by far – and the procedure under which the EP has the most power – is the so-called ‘Co-Decision’ procedure (this was established in the Maastricht Treaty and improved in the Amsterdam Treaty).

Box 1. Legislative procedures

Each Procedure involves a very complex sequence of interactions, details of which can be found on http://www.europarl.eu.int/factsheets/default_en.htm. Here, we summarize their main elements as far as EP power is concerned.

The *consultation* procedure provides the EP with the least influence/power. For measures covered by this procedure, the Commission proposes and the Council decides after the EP has provided its opinion on the matter. The only requirement is that the Council ‘take note’ of the EP’s opinion.

The *assent* procedure provides more power than the consultation procedure since it gives the EP veto power. The EP’s vote, however, is a simple up-or-down decision; the EP cannot amend the measure.

The *cooperation* procedure provides a similar level of power to the EP; indeed it can be thought of as the co-decision without the conciliation committee. This procedure is rarely used since the Amsterdam Treaty.

The *budgetary* procedure is a mix of the assent procedure and the co-decision procedure. The EP must approve the overall budget but it can only table amendments to ‘non-compulsory’ expenditures; these account for about half the budget but exclude important elements such as spending on the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

The co-decision procedure puts the EP on an equal footing with the Council by only allowing a measure to become law if both bodies approve it. When disagreements arise, a ‘conciliation committee’ composed of EP and Council representatives is formed in an attempt to carve out a compromise. If a compromise fails, the proposal is rejected. Otherwise, it is adopted provided that it is accepted by the EP (simple majority) and by the Council (qualified majority). The co-decision procedure thus gives effective bargaining power to the EP as it can use its right of rejection to negotiate compromises with the Council. Co-decision now covers a great deal of EU legislation with the important exceptions of EMU, agriculture, fisheries and fiscal harmonization. Moreover, in some co-decision areas (citizenship, mobility of workers, self-employed, culture), unanimity is still required in the Council and this greatly reduces the EP’s scope for bargaining.

The four other procedures are briefly described in Box 1.

Voting in the EP can take one of three forms: by show of hand, by electronic vote, or by roll call vote. A roll call vote can be requested if at least 32 MEPs or a political group ask for it. MEPs do not know in advance whether a roll call will be requested or not. Roughly a third of all votes are by roll call but their share has been increasing over time. In 1988, the number of roll call votes per hour of plenary session was about 1.1. In 1998, it was about 1.5.

In our database, 2291 out of 6473 votes, i.e. slightly over 35% of the votes, were legislative and used one of the existing procedures. Among the legislative votes, 46% used the consultation procedure, 27% the cooperation procedure, 25% the co-decision procedure and 1% the assent procedure. Among all the proposals put to vote, 58.7% passed the majority hurdle.

2.1. The organization of MEPs

MEPs are organized in political groups. The seating arrangement in the parliamentary chamber's hemicycle resembles that of a typical national parliament, with parties ranked from left to right according to their ideology. In the current Parliament, the seating is as follows. At the extreme left, there is the radical left which regroups many of the communist, former communist or extreme left parties plus the Nordic Green Left parties from Scandinavia. Then, from left to right there is the Party of the European Socialists (PES), the Greens and allies, regrouping regional parties mostly from Spain but also from Wales, the liberal ELDR (European Liberal Democrat and Reformists), the mostly Christian Democratic and conservative European People's Party (EPP-ED), Eurosceptic Gaullists, other rightist groups and finally non-affiliated. The names of the groups change over time across legislatures and sometimes within legislatures reflecting defections from some national parties. Table 1 gives the party groups with the denominations they had over time. In subsequent tables, we will use the common abbreviation listed in the second column from the left in Table 1.

It is not by coincidence that MEPs are ranked according to ideology. The party groups to which they belong truly exist and have a structured internal organization. The EP allocates budgets to party groups. Each group has a Chair, a secretariat and

Table 1. Party families in the European Parliament

Party family	Our symbol	Party group names	Size in third parliament	Size in fourth parliament
Party of European Socialists	PES	PES	180 (34.7%)	198 (34.9%)
European People's Party – Christian Democrats and Conservatives	EPP	EPP, ED, EPP-ED	155 (29.9%)	157 (27.7%)
European Liberal, Democrat and Reform Party	ELDR	ELD, ELDR	49 (9.5%)	43 (7.6%)
Greens and allies	GR	RBW, G, G/EFA	30 (5.8%)	23 (4.1%)
Gaullists and allies	GAUL	EPD, EDA, UFE, UEN	20 (3.9%)	53 (9.3%)
Radical Left and Italian Communists and allies	LEFT	COM, LU, EUL/NGL, EUL	42 (8.1%)	28 (4.9%)
Radicals and Regionalists	RAD	ERA	13 (2.5%)	19 (3.4%)
Anti-Europeans	ANTI-EU	EN, I-EN, EDD	17 (3.3%)	19 (3.4%)
Non-attached (Independents)	NA	IND	12 (2.3%)	27 (4.8%)

Notes: Some MEPs changed affiliation during the period considered. In that case, we defined their party affiliation as their last one in the time period considered. This will tend to slightly underestimate our scores for party discipline.

staff working for them. Members of groups meet in Brussels and during plenary sessions in Strasbourg to make joint voting decisions. Groups have ‘whips’ who check the attendance and voting behaviour of group members even though groups have limited means to sanction their members. Such structures do not exist at all for the country delegations in the EP. These organizational facts alone should lead one to think that MEPs vote more along party lines than along national lines. For more on the development of European party groups and how they are organized see Kreppel (2001).

3. PARTY OR COUNTRY LOYALTY?

Do Members of the European Parliament vote along ideological lines or along national lines? With data on over 6000 roll call votes, this question can be studied in a number of ways. Here we present four distinct approaches.

Our first approach classifies MEPs according to two criteria – party membership and nationality – and then compares the voting-pattern cohesiveness of the two groupings. The idea behind this approach is to see whether we can more naturally account for MEPs’ voting behaviour by viewing MEPs as members of a particular party, or as citizens of a particular nation. After comparing these findings to similar results calculated from the roll-call votes of national legislatures, we turn to our second approach. While the first approach focuses on the voting pattern of groups, the second focuses on the voting pattern of individuals. In particular, we use statistical techniques to check whether the average MEP’s voting pattern is better explained by his/her nationality or by his/her party affiliation. These two approaches are obviously related and indeed provide similar answers, but they involve different statistical manipulations and thus provide a crosscheck on each other. The third approach relies on case studies. That is, we take a detailed look at votes on particular issues and use more qualitative evidence to evaluate what the outcomes tell us about the motivations of MEPs. The final approach involves a statistical technique that allows us to study the determinants of MEP voting in a more abstract manner.

3.1. Analysis of voting by groups

To compare the cohesiveness of national groups and party groups, we need a way of gauging the similarity among the voting patterns of a group’s members. The main measure we use is the so-called cohesion index. To calculate the cohesion index (CI) for a particular group of voters, we first calculate the group’s ‘position’ on each vote in our dataset. This is done mechanically by defining the group’s ‘position’ as ‘Yes’, ‘No’ or ‘Abstention’ according to which of the three received the most votes from group members. The next step is to calculate the difference between the number of votes for and against this position and normalize this by the total number of group votes. For example, if the position on a particular vote is ‘Yes’ and 83 members voted ‘Yes’ and 17 voted either ‘No’ or abstained, then the CI is $(83 - 17)/100$. After

performing this calculation for each vote in our dataset, we take the average over all votes. This is the group's CI.

While no formal measure can perfectly capture a concept as vague as cohesion, the CI does a good job of capturing the general notion. For example, if all the members of a group voted the same way on every issue, the group's cohesion index would be equal to 1. If the group always divided 50% for the position and 50% against it, the group's CI would be equal to 0. A higher CI thus tends to indicate a greater similarity among the voting patterns of a group's members. Zero, however, is not the lowest possible value for the CI. If the group's voting were always split in three equal parts between the Yes, No and Abstention, then the cohesion index would equal $-1/3$. The CI is not the only index of this type and indeed it can be thought of a variant of the more commonly used 'Rice Agreement Index' (Rice 1928), which ignores abstentions.

3.1.1. Party groups are more cohesive than national groups. The top panel of Table 2 presents the CIs that we calculated for parties in the third and fourth parliament. The bottom panel does the same for national groups.

Comparing the figures in the top and bottom panels of Table 2 clearly shows that cohesion is much stronger when we group MEPs by their party affiliation than it is when we group them by their nationality. The cohesion index for parties is on average 84.2% in the third parliament and 82.2% in the fourth parliament while the average for countries is respectively 74.4% and 68.8%. There is thus a 10% point difference in cohesion. This difference is statistically significant.³

The standard deviation is lower for parties than for countries showing that the variability in cohesion is much lower for parties than for countries. The cohesion of countries remains generally somewhat higher than that for the EP as a whole (58% in the third parliament and 52% in the fourth parliament). This reflects to a certain extent the fact that one party dominates many country delegations. For example, the first-past-the-post electoral rule allowed Labour to dominate the UK delegations to the EP. The large cohesion for Greece and Luxembourg can also be explained by the fact that they are mainly affiliated to the two largest political groups.

Note that the cohesion index for France is lower than that for the EP. French representatives are thus the most divided country group in the EP, a fact that may run counter to the intuition of many. Note also that cohesion is the highest among the party families reflecting the usual political cleavages in advanced democracies: Socialists (PES), Christian-democrats and Conservatives (EPP), Greens (GR) and Liberals (ELDR).

³ Note that the standard errors of the CIs equal the standard deviations, which are in parentheses in Table 2, divided by the square root of the number of votes (2733 for the third parliament and 3740 for the fourth), so a 10% point difference is enormous. Testing the null hypothesis that the average party cohesion equals the average country cohesion leads to clear rejection for the third parliament (t -stat = 32) and for the fourth parliament (t -stat = 47).

Table 2. Party versus country cohesion, evidence from the third and fourth parliaments

<i>CIs for parties</i>																
	PES	EPP	ELDR	GR	GAUL	LEFT	RAD	ANTI-EU	NA	Eur. Parl.						
Third	0.87 (0.21)	0.85 (0.22)	0.77 (0.29)	0.82 (0.24)	0.80 (0.29)	0.80 (0.33)	0.83 (0.35)	0.64 (0.4)	0.74 (0.36)	0.58 (0.32)						
Fourth	0.87 (0.2)	0.86 (0.2)	0.80 (0.23)	0.88 (0.22)	0.72 (0.33)	0.74 (0.31)	0.88 (0.25)	0.56 (0.37)	0.51 (0.38)	0.52 (0.31)						
<i>CIs for countries</i>																
	F	UK	I	IRL	FIN	S	D	GR	NL	E	B	P	A	DK	L	Eur. Parl.
Third	0.48 (0.33)	0.7 (0.35)	0.63 (0.35)	0.66 (0.35)	–	–	0.62 (0.35)	0.73 (0.35)	0.66 (0.34)	0.73 (0.3)	0.56 (0.34)	0.68 (0.35)	–	0.65 (0.38)	0.79 (0.35)	0.58 (0.32)
Fourth	0.44 (0.33)	0.76 (0.24)	0.57 (0.33)	0.55 (0.35)	0.57 (0.35)	0.49 (0.35)	0.63 (0.37)	0.62 (0.35)	0.62 (0.32)	0.63 (0.36)	0.52 (0.31)	0.58 (0.34)	0.59 (0.36)	0.52 (0.38)	0.66 (0.38)	0.52 (0.31)

Notes: Figures in parentheses are standard deviations, not standard errors (the standard errors are the standard deviation divided by the square root of the number of votes, i.e. by 52.3 for the third parliament and 61.2 for the fourth). See Table 1 for party abbreviations. Country abbreviations are F: France; UK: United Kingdom; I: Italy; IRL: Ireland; FIN: Finland; S: Sweden; D: Germany; GR: Greece; NL: Netherlands; E: Spain; B: Belgium; P: Portugal; A: Austria; DK: Denmark; L: Luxembourg. See text for explanation of the CI. Formally CI for group i equals $[2 \cdot \max(T_j, N_j, A_j) - (T_j + N_j + A_j)] / (T_j + N_j + A_j)$ averaged over all votes j ; here T_j , N_j and A_j are the number of group members voting yes, no or abstaining on vote j .

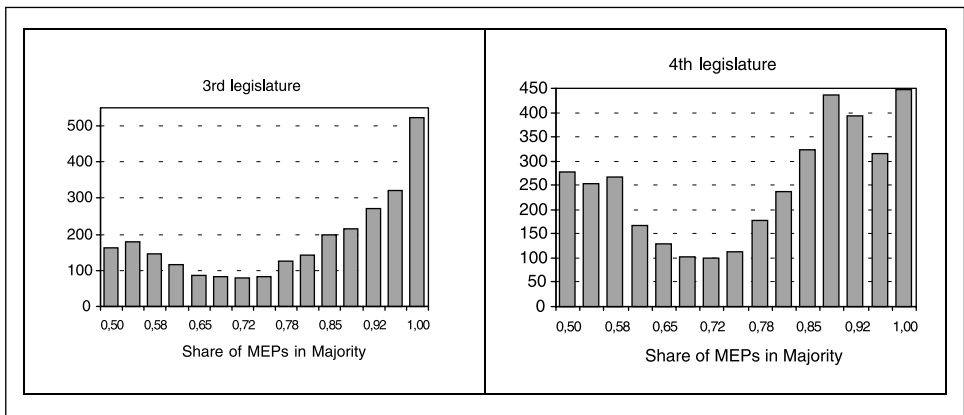


Figure 1. The distribution of majority, third and fourth parliaments

Source: Authors' database.

3.1.1.1. Adjusting group cohesion for near unanimous votes. A fairly large share of votes in the EP are unanimous, or nearly so, as Figure 1 shows. Because the CI is unity for any grouping of voters when a vote is unanimous, the dominance of unanimous and near-unanimous votes tends to dampen the difference between our CI results for party and country groupings. We will therefore adjust for this, but before doing so we comment on the fact itself. Many of these high-majority votes reflect the position of the Parliament relative to Commission proposals or Council decisions or even Parliament initiatives. Indeed, despite representing different ideologies and countries, MEPs generally share the objective of increasing the power of the EP. There is thus a concerted effort in the EP, whenever possible, to appear united in front of the Council and the Commission, especially in cases of institutional conflict. Whatever else it means, we can certainly say that the dominance of high-majority votes can reject the notion, mentioned in the introduction, that the EP is rarely decisive and barely coherent.

To mitigate the effect of unanimity or high majority votes on our average cohesion index, we calculated a 'weighted' cohesion index. This is the usual cohesion index divided by the observed majority in the European Parliament multiplied by two. Thus, a vote with a narrow majority of 50% gets a weight of one, a unanimity vote gets a weight of $1/2$ and weights decrease as the size of the majority increases. When computing the average of those weighted cohesion indices, we divide them by the average index a perfectly cohesive party would obtain so that a perfectly cohesive group would still get an average of 100%.

Using this modified CI, we find that the difference between the cohesion of parties is more pronounced than that of countries. Moreover, in contrast to Table 2, the cohesion of parties tends to be stronger in the fourth parliament as compared with the third parliament. For countries, the opposite can be observed. The lower cohesion

for countries shows that the latter picks up the effect of high-majority votes that has declined in the fourth parliament. This reinforces our basic result that voting is along party lines and not country lines. A detailed presentation of the weighted CI for parties and countries can be found in the Web Appendix (see <http://www.economic-policy.org>).

3.1.1.2. Group cohesion on divided votes. Still another way of analysing the same issue is to evaluate how cohesion changes with the size of the majority. Table 3 shows the results of party and country CIs calculated according to majority size.

In this case the results are quite striking. The cohesion of parties falls very little as the majority size diminishes. For example, in the third parliament, cohesion of MEPs in the Socialist group (PES) falls from 0.87 to 0.79 while the cohesion of German MEPs falls from 0.62 to just 0.17. The same pattern is found in the fourth parliament but the cohesion of countries falls even more sharply. What this suggests is that much of the cohesion of country groups that we saw in Table 2 was due to the sort of ‘strategic unanimity’ voting that the EP often engages in. When issues are truly divisive, MEPs tend to vote along party lines rather than national lines. Detailed results for a finer division of majority thresholds are shown in the Web Appendix.

3.1.1.3. Group cohesion by issue. A final cut at the group cohesion data focuses on the type of issue being voted on. One might imagine, for example, that MEPs voted on an ideological basis on some issues, but according to nationality on others. To explore this possibility, we classified the votes into 11 large categories, using the title of the vote as reported in the minutes of the plenary sessions. We then recalculated a separate party and country cohesion index for votes on each issue.

Table 4 lists the resulting CIs for the third parliament. The figures show that there is no striking difference in cohesion when dividing votes according to issues. The table nonetheless tends to indicate that while socialists (PES) become more cohesive on ‘Human beings’ issues (human rights, refugees, etc.), conservatives (EPP) and liberals (ELDR) are cohesive on security issues and greens and leftists are cohesive on nature and environmental issues. For the fourth parliament, the above findings remain true for conservatives, greens and radicals but not for socialists and liberals who have also become more cohesive on ‘Services’ (see the Web Appendix for the fourth parliament figures). Note that the mean cohesion index is the lowest for ‘Drugs’ and the ‘Legal System’ whereas it is the highest for ‘Services’ and ‘Security’.

3.1.2. Analysis of voting by coalitions of parties. Given that the EU is not a parliamentary system, there is no coalition government. We should therefore not expect the typical pattern of legislative voting of parliamentary systems where parties of the coalition vote together against the unified votes of the opposition parties. Coalitions, in the EP, form on a vote-by-vote basis. Nevertheless, as parties are

Table 3. Party and country cohesion indices by majority size, third and fourth parliaments

	Third parliament						Fourth parliament					
	Majority less than or equal to:											
	100% Mean	Std Dev.	80% Mean	Std Dev.	65% Mean	Std Dev.	100% Mean	Std Dev.	80% Mean	Std Dev.	65% Mean	Std Dev.
PES	0.867	0.21	0.760	0.28	0.791	0.26	0.867	0.20	0.787	0.25	0.841	0.23
EPP	0.845	0.22	0.757	0.26	0.806	0.23	0.862	0.19	0.796	0.23	0.834	0.20
ELDR	0.770	0.29	0.651	0.30	0.657	0.29	0.798	0.23	0.723	0.25	0.732	0.24
GR	0.817	0.24	0.802	0.23	0.798	0.23	0.884	0.22	0.898	0.20	0.910	0.19
GAUL	0.798	0.29	0.738	0.30	0.748	0.29	0.717	0.33	0.690	0.32	0.720	0.31
LEFT	0.801	0.33	0.767	0.35	0.780	0.33	0.739	0.31	0.748	0.30	0.771	0.30
RAD	0.830	0.35	0.791	0.37	0.788	0.38	0.876	0.25	0.846	0.27	0.856	0.27
ANTI-EU	0.640	0.40	0.623	0.41	0.630	0.42	0.556	0.37	0.503	0.36	0.502	0.36
NA	0.739	0.36	0.711	0.37	0.704	0.37	0.513	0.38	0.495	0.38	0.515	0.39
F	0.485	0.33	0.289	0.25	0.256	0.24	0.437	0.33	0.332	0.29	0.299	0.28
UK	0.696	0.35	0.405	0.32	0.338	0.29	0.760	0.24	0.590	0.20	0.569	0.16
I	0.626	0.35	0.362	0.29	0.305	0.26	0.571	0.33	0.339	0.28	0.255	0.23
IRE	0.659	0.35	0.504	0.33	0.528	0.33	0.550	0.35	0.407	0.30	0.413	0.30
FIN	–	–	–	–	–	–	0.570	0.35	0.361	0.29	0.337	0.27
SW	–	–	–	–	–	–	0.493	0.35	0.361	0.29	0.367	0.28
D	0.620	0.35	0.289	0.28	0.171	0.19	0.635	0.37	0.301	0.32	0.152	0.19
GR	0.734	0.35	0.456	0.36	0.368	0.33	0.625	0.35	0.359	0.32	0.252	0.27
NL	0.660	0.34	0.370	0.30	0.267	0.24	0.619	0.32	0.392	0.27	0.339	0.22
E	0.733	0.29	0.468	0.27	0.357	0.22	0.634	0.36	0.337	0.32	0.209	0.25
B	0.565	0.34	0.303	0.28	0.228	0.25	0.516	0.31	0.285	0.24	0.231	0.21
P	0.682	0.35	0.433	0.32	0.374	0.30	0.576	0.34	0.342	0.29	0.280	0.26
A	–	–	–	–	–	–	0.591	0.36	0.338	0.29	0.264	0.25
DK	0.650	0.38	0.510	0.38	0.468	0.38	0.520	0.38	0.390	0.35	0.391	0.35
L	0.790	0.35	0.596	0.41	0.517	0.40	0.664	0.38	0.403	0.37	0.316	0.33

Notes: See Table 1 for party abbreviations and Table 2 for country abbreviations and the formal definition of the CI.

Table 4. Cohesion per issue in the third parliament

	Foreign Policy	Internal Functioning	Agro-fish	Industry and Technology	Banking and Finance	Drugs	Services	Human Beings	Security	Nature	Legal System
PES	0.842	0.882	0.836	0.847	0.834	0.855	0.904	0.919	0.865	0.898	0.827
EPP	0.855	0.868	0.801	0.832	0.828	0.754	0.894	0.865	0.908	0.808	0.845
ELDR	0.795	0.799	0.704	0.748	0.757	0.676	0.855	0.787	0.835	0.718	0.769
GR	0.777	0.798	0.797	0.853	0.798	0.856	0.860	0.851	0.843	0.884	0.806
GAUL	0.776	0.783	0.849	0.797	0.848	0.764	0.892	0.807	0.777	0.806	0.757
LEFT	0.787	0.785	0.759	0.754	0.749	0.891	0.874	0.842	0.873	0.881	0.788
RAD	0.799	0.762	0.803	0.882	0.842	0.881	0.955	0.891	0.936	0.866	0.962
ANTI-EU	0.610	0.630	0.621	0.576	0.699	0.653	0.499	0.676	0.779	0.656	0.608
NA	0.732	0.717	0.753	0.762	0.794	0.791	0.690	0.724	0.839	0.725	0.726
Mean CI	0.818	0.835	0.803	0.813	0.819	0.799	0.872	0.859	0.867	0.830	0.776
<i>Countries</i>											
F	0.446	0.506	0.470	0.489	0.468	0.474	0.584	0.471	0.486	0.533	0.511
UK	0.666	0.765	0.717	0.590	0.741	0.644	0.689	0.648	0.699	0.711	0.656
I	0.546	0.701	0.646	0.566	0.611	0.537	0.729	0.605	0.693	0.654	0.520
IRE	0.631	0.672	0.633	0.654	0.744	0.622	0.825	0.633	0.718	0.634	0.676
D	0.564	0.684	0.618	0.532	0.583	0.596	0.674	0.563	0.718	0.724	0.603
GR	0.684	0.771	0.802	0.724	0.672	0.746	0.852	0.687	0.776	0.750	0.726
NL	0.654	0.700	0.656	0.596	0.620	0.565	0.649	0.643	0.746	0.718	0.603
E	0.713	0.767	0.749	0.684	0.726	0.685	0.788	0.692	0.796	0.755	0.745
B	0.527	0.593	0.621	0.506	0.545	0.463	0.672	0.546	0.602	0.612	0.540
P	0.646	0.700	0.725	0.668	0.636	0.678	0.751	0.632	0.751	0.755	0.640
DK	0.643	0.611	0.680	0.626	0.674	0.671	0.680	0.654	0.754	0.707	0.634
L	0.813	0.785	0.843	0.843	0.731	0.758	0.819	0.744	0.820	0.756	0.800

Notes: Mean CI is the average cohesion index weighted by party size.

cohesive, it is interesting to see which parties vote together more often. In particular, is there a left–right pattern in coalition formation across votes? If so, then votes of left-wing parties should be positively correlated with each other and negatively correlated with right-wing parties. To check for this, we measured, for each vote, the intensity of support within a party group for a majority decision (the percentage of members who voted in favour of a particular decision when it was adopted and when a majority of the group voted in favour). We call this the intensity of support.

What we find is a clear pattern of positive correlation coefficients between left-wing parties, between right-wing parties, and no correlation or negative correlation across the ideological spectrum. In the third parliament, votes of PES are mostly correlated with those of the LEFT and RAD and so are the votes of GR. Votes of EPP are mostly correlated with those of ELDR and two other right-wing political groups, GAUL and ANTI-EU. There seems to be a broad left (socialists, Greens, left and radicals) on the one side and a broad right on the other (conservatives, Gaullists, liberals and nationalists). Note, however, the very centrist role of the liberals whose votes are correlated to those of socialists but not to the other more left-wing parties. A similar picture emerges in the fourth parliament, except that the votes of PES are more strongly correlated with the votes of GR and less with the LEFT. This reflects recent tendencies of socialist parties to move from labour parties to ‘rainbow-style’ parties.

The finding that EP party groups seem to co-ordinate in a manner that would be expected in a ‘normal’ parliament provides additional support for the notion that the EP operates along traditional party lines. Further details on these findings are provided in the Web Appendix.

3.2. Comparing the EP to national legislatures

It is useful to compare these results to those obtained for a national parliament where both ideology and regional identity play a role. Among national parliaments, the Belgian Parliament is probably the most comparable to the EP because there are two communities or ‘nations’ and several political families.

3.2.1. The Belgian Parliament. In Belgium, there are distinct regional Flemish and French-speaking Socialist, Christian Democratic, Liberal and Green parties and there is no single national party. The ‘socialist family’ is thus composed of two distinct regional socialist parties. Party families in Belgium are thus conceptually close to party groups in the EP. Like party groups in the EP, these political families also include different tendencies going from left to right as well as regionalist parties. Of course, the Belgian parliament is much smaller than the EP. Moreover, unlike the European Union, Belgium has a genuine parliamentary system. Cohesion of party families should reflect cohesion of government coalitions since coalitions are based

Table 5. Cohesion index in the Belgian Parliament (30/6/1995 to 18/12/1997)

Part family	Parties	Mean	Std Dev	Size (No. of MPs)
<i>Parties</i>				
1 Christian Democrats	CVP, PSC	0.987	0.08	41
2 Socialists	SP, PS	0.978	0.10	43
3 Liberals	VLD, PRL	0.730	0.38	39
4 Regional parties	VU	0.953	0.16	5
5 Green	ECOLO, AGALEV	0.983	0.09	10
6 Extreme right	VB, FN	0.953	0.11	12
Average		0.931	0.15	25
<i>Regions</i>				
1 F	Flemish	0.315	0.29	92
2 W	Francophone	0.422	0.31	59
Average		0.315	0.29	92
<i>Parliament</i>				
CI (all Parliament)		0.356	0.28	150

Notes: Number of roll call votes is 2080. Party abbreviations are: CVP Christelijke Volkspartij, AGALEV Anders gaan arbeiden, leven en vrijen, VLD Vlaamse liberalen en democraten, VU Volksunie, VB Vlaams Blok, SP Socialistische Partij, PSC Parti social-chrétien, ECOLO Ecolo, PRL Parti réformateur libéral, FN Front national, PS Parti socialiste.

on party families, never on parties only.⁴ According to recent theories of political regimes, parties forming a coalition in parliamentary regimes are predicted to be very cohesive (Huber, 1996; Diermeier and Feddersen, 1998, Persson *et al.*, 2000).

We collected more than 2000 roll call votes from the Belgian parliament during the 49th legislature (i.e. from 30/6/1995 to 18/12/1997).⁵ Our summary results are listed in Table 5. We can immediately see that party cohesion is very much stronger among Belgian party families than among the party families in the EP, confirming the prediction about cohesion of coalition partners in parliamentary systems. Except for the Liberals who were in the opposition, all other party families have a cohesion index ranging from 95% to more than 98%. The average cohesion index is 93%. The very strong party cohesion stands in stark contrast to the cohesion on a regional or linguistic basis, which is very low. The average cohesion index for regions is one-third of that found for political families. Note, however, the lower cohesion of the Parliament compared to the EP. Compared to Belgium, the EP has a lower party cohesion and higher country cohesion. It is safe to believe that in other countries cohesion of 'regions' would be even much lower than for Belgium.

Table 6 compares the Belgian Parliament and the EP on several key criteria. As the first column shows, the average Belgian parliamentarian votes 'Yes' about 40%

⁴ Thus for example, if the Flemish Greens are in the coalition, the French-speaking Greens must also be part of it even though they could be dispensed with to form a minimum-winning coalition, which is the case today. Cohesion of families consists mainly of that commitment to participate together in a coalition or otherwise to be in the opposition.

⁵ Surprisingly, it is very difficult if not impossible to collect roll call votes for national Parliaments like Germany or France. Such data are more readily available in newer democracies such as Poland and the Czech republic. See e.g. Noury *et al.* (1999) and Mielcova and Noury (1998).

Table 6. Average abstention and presence in the Belgian and European Parliament

	Belgian Parliament 1995–97	European Parliament 1996–99
Yes votes	40.11	36.73
No votes	43.09	27.08
Abstentions	6.98	2.28
Absences	9.77	34.19
TOTAL	100	100

Note: Figures show the percentage of the number of representatives.

of the time, ‘No’ about 40% of the time, and the remaining 10% is divided between abstention and absence. In the EP, by contrast, the share of yes-votes is comparable, while the share of no-votes is substantially lower, roughly 30%. The most striking difference is the high absentee rate in the EP. Looking a bit further, we compared the percentage of proposals put to vote that were accepted and rejected. We found an acceptance rate of 40% in the Belgian Parliament compared to 58.7% in the EP. Surprisingly this fact contradicts the view one can easily derive from game-theoretic models that only votes that are likely to pass are put forward. This is not true in the EP, but even less true in Belgium that is a full-fledged parliamentary system.

3.2.2. EP compared to the US Congress. We also compared cohesion in the EP with cohesion in the US Congress. The comparison with the US is especially relevant because the US is a presidential system. The theories of democratic political regimes predict that elected representatives in a presidential system vote less cohesively than in a parliamentary system. Since the EU is not a parliamentary system (but not a presidential system either), its cohesion is not predicted to be as high as in parliamentary systems.

Specifically, we calculated the CIs for democrats and republicans between 1991 and 2000. We found that the cohesion among parties in the US Congress was lower than that of party groups in the EP. Indeed party cohesion indices for most Congresses (each Congress sits for a two-year term) was in the 70% range while it is in the 80% range for most EP party groups, and above 85% for the two main parties, the PES and EPP. However, votes are also much more polarized in the US Congress. If one looks at the ‘relative’ cohesion indices (i.e. cohesion of parties relative to the cohesion of the legislature), then one finds that cohesion of parties in the US Congress is somewhat higher. On average it was above 1.7 in the US, whereas the PES and EPP have, respectively, relative cohesion indices of 1.43 and 1.4 for the third Parliament and 1.57 and 1.56 for the fourth Parliament. However, cohesion has been increasing in the EP whereas in the US Congress, it has been declining since 1996 and has reached levels comparable to those of PES and EPP for the fourth EP (see the Web Appendix for more detail on this comparison). Cohesion in the EP and in the US

Congress are thus quite comparable and it is reassuring to see that party cohesion in the EP is comparable to that of the most mature presidential system in the world.

3.3. Analysis of voting by individuals

Overall, our analysis of voting patterns by groups suggests that party cohesion in the EP is relatively strong and is getting stronger over time while cohesion among countries is not strong and tends to be weak on the most divisive votes. We now turn to a complementary view of our dataset that focuses on individuals rather than groups.

3.3.1 The Discipline Index. Our first approach to studying individual voting behaviour is to compute a ‘discipline index’ for each MEP. This measures the frequency of votes of a parliamentarian with his or her party group. The discipline index is different from the cohesion index in that it focuses on the voting behaviour of individuals rather than groups. It provides more disaggregated data as it separates individuals according to both their party and country affiliation. Table 7 gives the average frequency of vote of a MEP from a given country with his or her party in the Fourth Parliament. The last column of the table looks at the average frequency of votes with the country delegation. This allows us to compare the relative loyalty of MEPs to their party and to their country group.

One can immediately see that in general party loyalty is stronger than country loyalty. The discipline index also allows us to see whether MEPs from the latest accession behaved differently from other MEPs. Table 7 shows that MEPs from Finland, Sweden and Austria who entered in 1995 do not behave in a less disciplined way than parliamentarians from other countries. Finnish socialists and liberals are among the most disciplined in their group. Swedish socialists are less disciplined than the other socialists but only slightly so and Swedish conservatives are very disciplined. Austrian MEPs are not less disciplined than the others.

More importantly, new entrants’ discipline with their respective country delegations is significantly lower than their discipline with their party groups. Moreover, the country discipline of the new entrants is not higher than for other countries. It is even among the lowest of all. This tends to strongly suggest that new entrants quickly follow the discipline of their party group and do not follow country discipline more than other MEPs. Note that France has the lowest national discipline index. The highest country discipline index is the one for the UK. It must be noted, however, that over half of the British MEPs were Labour MEPs and that this explains to a great extent the greater cohesion. Notice that Table 7 also shows the party distribution of MEPs across countries.

The evidence from Table 7 is encouraging in that it shows that new entrants do not display a different voting behaviour than MEPs from other EU countries. In other words, the Parliament is capable of absorbing new members and integrating them quickly into party groups. Of course, one must be careful in drawing strong

Table 7. Discipline indices for MEPs in the fourth parliament

	PES	EPP	ELDR	GR	GAUL	LEFT	RAD	ANTI-EU	NA	Country delegation
F	92.18	88.2	51.19	97.02	93.78	94.04	96.46	87.18	88.26	76.2
	37	20	12	18	31	8	14	15	14	170
UK	95	93.52	96.2	–	–	–	92.33	72.44	72.16	89.64
	69	39	2	0	0	0	3	1	1	115
I	95.46	93.32	90.44	92.9	82.7	92.82	93.06	–	69.65	80.08
	25	44	6	11	25	12	3	0	17	144
IRL	97.33	95.1	98.15	96.38	89.87	100	–	–	–	83.95
	2	4	2	3	11	2	0	0	0	24
FIN	97.36	93.43	92.31	97	–	83.57	–	–	–	78.14
	6	9	10	1	0	4	0	0	0	30
S	90.47	96.21	87.57	89.17	–	79.81	–	–	–	78.55
	16	7	4	4	0	4	0	0	0	35
D	95.64	97.57	90.08	98.36	–	–	–	n.r.*	n.r.*	84.18
	53	61	6	17	0	0	0	5	1	143
GR	94.14	96	–	–	87.25	93.52	–	–	–	84.59
	18	16	0	0	2	5	0	0	0	41
NL	97.54	96.37	95.72	98.04	83.22	–	–	76.04	–	82.71
	11	12	11	3	2	0	0	3	0	42
E	95.62	93.87	85.09	84.09	n.r.*	95.72	94.43	–	n.r.*	83.04
	32	42	6	5	1	11	4	0	1	102
B	94.25	95.63	90.32	99.45	–	–	92.13	–	86.72	79.89
	12	10	10	4	0	0	2	0	3	41
P	95.91	88.81	78.27	n.r.*	86.87	94.99	–	–	–	84.09
	20	11	6	1	5	6	0	0	0	49
A	93.16	93.7	93.99	97.44	–	–	–	–	79.13	79.38
	11	12	2	1	0	0	0	0	12	38
DK	91.12	97.73	94.98	n.r.*	–	80.87	–	71.03	–	78.06
	5	6	8	1	0	1	0	4	0	25
L	95.43	96.32	91.53	–	–	–	89.4	–	–	82.12
	3	3	3	0	0	0	1	0	0	10

Notes: The average frequency of vote of a MEP with party group or national delegation is listed first with the number of MEPs shown below each discipline index. A 'n.r.*' indicates MEP never voted Yes or No on any issue (either mostly absent or abstained).

extrapolations from such an exercise. The future accession countries do not have the same economic, cultural and historical background as the countries from the previous enlargement. Moreover, the number of entrants in the future enlargement will be much higher than in the previous one. Nevertheless, countries from the previous enlargement did have distinct characteristics from the EU. Two out of three were Nordic countries and all had a richer economy than the EU average. Despite this, their MEPs showed strong party discipline.

3.3.1.1. Voting on cohesion and structural funds issues. It is also useful to look at the discipline index for various issues. Table 8 looks at discipline on all votes related to cohesion and structural funds. Here, we would expect that the poorer countries of the EU (Spain, Portugal, Ireland and Greece) would tend to vote more with their country groups than with their party group. One can unambiguously see that MEPs

Table 8. Discipline index for votes on cohesion and structural funds

	PES	EPP	ELDR	GR	GAUL	LEFT	RAD	ANTI-EU	NA	Country delegation
F	91.77	87.81	81.85	100	97.47	92.55	97.95	90.37	82.2	76.33
	35	19	10	16	29	9	14	14	13	
UK	94.67	80.41	100	–	–	–	94.93	70.18	71.43	82.32
	72	38	2	0	0	0	3	1	1	
I	96.7	90.78	95.32	96.45	82.59	87.71	95.5	–	60.95	83.42
	33	42	7	11	24	14	3	0	16	
IRL	95.45	88.62	95.55	86.73	91.61	96.15	–	–	–	80.23
	2	4	2	3	11	2	0	0	0	
FIN	96.28	97.47	91.67	82.05	–	50.67	–	–	–	85.38
	6	9	9	1	0	3	0	0	0	
S	92.05	92.63	82.54	70.64	–	46.13	–	–	–	78.26
	9	5	3	4	0	3	0	0	0	
D	85.28	93.9	92.5	97.11	–	–	–	86.06	100	81.68
	54	62	6	17	0	0	0	5	1	
GR	92.59	89.28	–	–	86.48	92.7	–	–	–	85.63
	21	17	0	0	3	5	0	0	0	
NL	87.57	92.97	89.03	98.85	80	–	–	72.19	–	79.95
	12	12	11	3	2	0	0	3	0	
E	95.95	84.05	95.62	76.19	100	91.34	97.5	–	50	84.82
	35	42	8	5	1	10	4	0	3	
B	97.24	94.01	98.94	99.43	–	–	92.5	–	78.06	81.4
	12	10	9	4	0	0	2	0	3	
P	88.79	78.67	88.24	85	98.11	88.89	–	–	–	86.2
	16	11	6	1	4	7	0	0	0	
A	79.42	94	100	97.62	–	–	–	–	83.09	87.81
	8	11	2	1	0	0	0	0	10	
DK	98.5	95.54	96.37	0	–	–	–	64.4	0	79.72
	5	7	8	1	0	0	0	4	1	
L	98.15	98.67	100	–	–	–	100	–	–	80.85
	3	3	3	0	0	0	1	0	0	

Notes: The average frequency of vote of a MEP with party group or national delegation is listed first with the number of MEPs shown below each discipline index. A 'n.r.*' indicates MEP never voted Yes or No on any issue (either mostly absent or abstained).

from Ireland, Portugal, Spain and Greece do not have lower party discipline than MEPs from the other countries on this particular set of issues. Party discipline thus tends to dominate even on issues where country interests would seem to take the upper hand. Accession countries will all be poorer than Portugal, with the exception of Slovenia. Again, one should be cautious in extrapolating but the results of Table 7 suggest that MEPs from accession countries will not necessarily vote with their country even on issues such as structural funds and cohesion. We looked further at the discipline of MEPs on different issues. We found that in general, across issues, party discipline remained stronger than country discipline with a few exceptions (see the tables in the Web Appendix).

3.3.2. Regression analysis of individual votes. Our second approach to studying individual voting patterns is to use statistical tools to disentangle the impact of

Table 9. Estimates of voting patterns based on party and country affiliation

<i>Period</i>	<i>Party</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Adjusted R-squared</i>
Third parliament (Std Dev.)	0.8416 (0.21)	0.1733 (0.24)	230 (84)	0.51 (0.28)
Fourth parliament (Std Dev.)	0.9732 (0.08)	0.0173 (0.14)	368 (105)	0.57 (0.27)

Notes: The table entries are averages of about 2700 estimated coefficients. Standard deviations are in parentheses. N is the average number of ‘yes’ and ‘no’ votes; abstentions of all kind are discarded from the regression analysis. These estimates are from the following equation: $V_j = \alpha Party_j + \beta Country_j + \varepsilon_j$ where V_j is a dummy variable indicating the ‘yes’ vote of legislator j , $Party_j$ ($Country_j$) is the proportion of MEP j ’s party (country) members voting ‘yes’, and ε_j is the error term. Since V_j is a binary variable, the regression model is also called ‘linear probability model’. It is well known that the estimates of V_j by linear probability model may not belong to the admissible range $[0,1]$. This, however, is not a major concern here given that we are primarily interested in the relative importance of *party* versus *country* on voting behavior, not on the predicted values of V_j . The linear probability model has the advantage compared to standard probit (or logit) analysis that coefficients are directly interpretable. To avoid the problem of endogeneity we excluded MEP j ’s vote from the right-hand side variables. We did not constrain the coefficients to be positive or to add to one. On average, they are both positive and their sum is approximately equal to 1.

party affiliation and nationality on voting behaviour. In particular, we try to explain how the probability that a given legislator will vote ‘Yes’ depends upon the share of his/her party group that votes ‘Yes’ and the share of his/her national delegation that votes ‘Yes’.

Table 9 shows the average coefficients for the third and fourth parliament. Three important findings can be observed. First, the average *party* coefficient is always greater than the average *country* coefficient. Second, while party effect increases over time, country effect decreases. Third, standard deviations become smaller, meaning that estimates become more precise. In addition, not only the number of ‘yes’ and ‘no’ votes (N), but also the fit of the model increased over time. The regression results thus show that party vote is a much better predictor of an individual’s vote than country vote.

Figure 2 clearly shows the dynamics of the evolution of average coefficients for batches of 200 votes.

As illustrated in the diagram, the average country coefficient (on the left vertical scale) decreases over time and converges toward zero whereas the party coefficient (on the right vertical scale) increases and converges towards 1. As a result, we conclude that MEPs vote increasingly in accordance with party groups and less and less with their country.

3.3.3. Spatial analysis. The analytic methods we have applied so far imposed a good deal of structure on the voting behaviour of MEPs. For instance, the regression analysis *assumed* that MEPs’ voting patterns depended on party voting and/or national delegation voting. While this statistical method is absolutely standard, it may hide important aspects of voting patterns. If, to take an example, MEPs’ voting were marked by an important urban/rural distinction, the method applied above would have missed it.

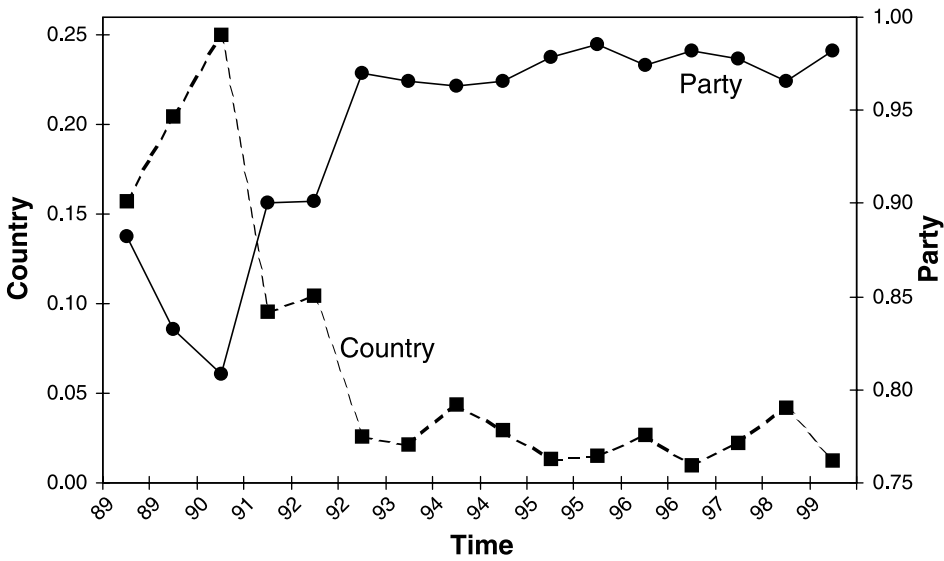


Figure 2. Dynamics of average party and country coefficients

Note: Each point is an average over 200 coefficients. The horizontal axis presents the approximate year. Before computing the averages we excluded unreasonable estimates (negative *R*-squared, extremely large as well as negative coefficients) as well as votes with small numbers of participants, (i.e. $N < 250$).

Fortunately, there is an analytic technique that allows us to explore the data in a less structured way. The technique – called ‘spatial model of voting’ – is straightforward, but takes a bit of explaining.⁶ Consider the example of Belgian national parliamentarians. Surely Belgian MPs evaluate each issue along a number of dimensions: ‘Does it suit my left-right politics?’ ‘Does it serve Walloon or Flemish interests?’ ‘Is it good for the environment?’ In this example, the MPs’ preferences over issues are said to be multi-dimensional, in particular, three-dimensional (left-right, Walloon-Flemish, green). It is also clear that not all dimensions come into play on all issues. Indeed it may be that one can explain almost all of a given MP’s votes based on a single dimension (say, left-right), but some votes just make no sense unless one considers other dimensions (say, Walloon-Flemish).

The great merit of spatial analysis is that it does not require us to assume in advance which dimensions are important in determining voting patterns. Indeed, given the vast quantity of data – for the fourth parliament, for example, we have over 2.3 million individual roll call votes – it is possible to determine both how many dimensions matter and where each MEP’s preference lies along each dimension. The actual statistical procedure is somewhat involved (see the Web Appendix), but the results are easily interpreted.

As Noury (2002) shows, there are at least two dimensions to the EU policy space. The first dimension, which correctly predicts about 90% of MEP votes, can easily be

⁶ See also Downs (1957), Poole and Rosenthal (1997) and Heckman and Snyder (1997).

interpreted as the traditional left-right dimension. MEPs that belong to left-wing parties (PES, GR, LEFT) are estimated to have preferences that are located on the left-hand side of the space, whereas those belonging to right-wing parties (EPP, ELDR, GAUL) are on the opposite side. The second dimension adds only 2% more correct vote prediction and can also easily be interpreted as related to attitudes towards further European integration. MEPs belonging to parties that are traditionally viewed as favourable to European integration are located on the upper part of the space whereas anti-Europeans are located on the lower part (a schematic representation of this policy space is reproduced in the Web Appendix).

Higher dimensions explain a negligible fraction of votes and are not easily interpretable. This is particularly the case for the third parliament. For the fourth parliament however, Noury (2002) finds third and fourth dimensions with sensible interpretations, although these seem to explain only a minor share of votes. In these dimensions, MEPs from Nordic countries tend to be in opposition with Southern European MEPs. The projection for the third parliament does not show any particular sorting of MEPs in the North–South dimension. Thus, enlargement to Nordic countries did lead to the crystallization of a North–South dimension. This dimension is, however, very modest compared to the left–right dimension. While the latter correctly predicts 90% of votes, the former adds a mere 1.2% to the fit measured by correct classification scores.

The results from the spatial model once again suggest that legislators in the EP vote predominantly according to their European political group affiliations, mostly along the traditional left–right divide but also along the dimension of European integration. The presence of this dimension makes voting somewhat more complex than traditional legislative politics but positions on European integration are more clearly defined across parties than across countries even though support for integration clearly varies across countries. By considering the dynamics of voting over time, Noury (2002) shows that in a multi-dimensional space, members of the European Parliament vote more and more according to party affiliation. The results of the spatial model further indicate that the two main dimensions of conflict are very stable across time. The third and fourth dimensions are highly unstable.

The results of the spatial model thus confirm our previous findings that political parties are the main players of the policy-making game in the European Parliament.

3.4 Examples of votes

Statistical analysis gives a comprehensive picture that is more accurate than the inferences one may draw from looking at specific votes. It is nevertheless useful to complement the statistical analysis by specific examples to get a feel of coalition formation and cohesion with particular votes or voting sequences. Even here, however, we cannot go into details because of the large number of votes and amendments on single bills and the different political stakes of each amendment.

We looked at the debates on the 1999 budget that was approved by a large majority. The EP has limited power in changing the budget proposals of the Commission. Nevertheless, our impression is that it uses the little power it has to focus on issues like employment, education, the environment, regional development and convergence rather than on agriculture or fishing. Corbett *et al.* (2000), who are intimate insiders to the EP, make similar observations. Thus, the EP would tend to care more for expenditures that benefit larger groups rather than targeted interest groups. It seems also that the EP acts more as a check on the Commission's spending plans rather than as a big cash-spender. Various spending items get sent back to the Commission to ask for clarification before getting the EP's approval.

We also looked in detail at many particular events of voting sequences that we only briefly report here. We looked at important votes in 1998 on cohesion funds, reform of Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), structural funds and fisheries. None of these votes were about radical changes to existing policies. They tended to be consensual and were most often the results of compromises worked out between the important party groups after discarding amendments proposed by the smaller parties. Many votes also concern the particular formulation of sentences and are hardly consequential. Quite a few votes have a low party and country cohesion, especially in the area of CAP. This impression is, however, not validated by the broader statistical analysis. Another casual impression is that MEPs tend to amend Commission proposals by adding pro-environment sentences, and emphasizing general goals like employment creation and other social objectives. This reinforces the impression that the EP pays particular attention to aspects of legislation that are relevant to broad groups of the population rather than narrow interest groups.

In the Web Appendix, we provide a detailed account of some of the most dramatic votes in the EP that were given wide publicity in the European media. For example, we looked at the attempt to bring down the Commission by a vote of censure in the context of the scandal around commissioners Cresson and Marin. These votes show a rather clear division along party lines with the PES and RAD trying to defend the commissioners, GR and ELDR in favour of censure and the EPP split. Even though voting was mostly along party lines, one also detects some voting along country lines. MEPs from Italy and Spain tended to vote against censure while the French MEPs were very divided along party lines in this episode.

Another particularly heated debate took place in the EP when a Renault plant was closed in Vilvoorde in Belgium to be relocated in France. In this case some of the workers came to the EP to protest. Apart from the staunch support for the workers on the left and the outright hostility on the right of the hemisphere, the EP considered a resolution recommending that the Commission propose legislation on job transfers by multinational enterprises and asking for an evaluation of EU directives on collective redundancies. Several right wing amendments to the initial resolution were voted down. Moderate amendments were accepted with GR, RAD and LEFT voting against. The final resolution was supported by the left and opposed by the

right. The EPP voted for the resolution with a 10% defection in its ranks. Most votes in this episode were clearly on the left–right dimension and parties showed relative cohesion. No precise pattern could be detected in the country votes.

4. WHY DO MEPS VOTE ALONG PARTY LINES?

There are two main potential explanations for the voting behaviour of legislators: (1) policy preferences; and (2) career incentives. Those who emphasize policy preferences assume that individual legislators simply follow their preferences when voting. It follows that members of a party vote cohesively because they have similar preferences. Those who emphasize career incentives assume that legislators vote so as to maximize their probability of re-election and to further their career within their party. While the first potential explanation requires no elaboration, understanding the second requires the knowledge of some facts on how MEPs are elected.

Party groups are composed of elected representatives of national parties and all EU countries are parliamentary democracies where party discipline is strong. National parties thus have obvious instruments to discipline MEPs. They can choose not to put them in a favourable place on the list for the election of the next EP. Moreover, national parties may affect the future careers of MEPs in their own country by denying them eligibility for country elections or denying them other public mandates. Party groups in the EP are also organized in a similar way to party fractions in national parliaments. There are group ‘whips’ who round up MEPs to vote in a particular way on bills. Presence at EP sessions is rather low. In the third parliament, an average of 17.6% of the MEPs were absent and 35.5% were present in the Parliament but did not vote (for the fourth parliament the figures are 16.8% and 21.6% respectively). Rewards for party loyalty are therefore lower in the EP than in national parliaments, but they are still important. If career incentives are dominant, party cohesion is brought about because legislators have the incentives to vote together with their party because of the rewards associated to party loyalty.

It is very difficult to dissociate in practice the two motivations. On the one hand, if one assumes that legislators are driven solely by policy preferences, a French socialist ought to vote more like a German socialist rather than a French conservative. On the other hand, if one assumes that legislators are driven solely by personal career incentives, then party cohesion is explained only by institutional factors. Within the EP, party groups, and not country delegations, have the power to punish or reward MEPs, by favouring special committee membership, for instance. It follows that MEPs are influenced more directly by their parties than by their national delegations. This effect is reinforced by the grouping of parliamentarians according to party affiliation rather than nationality.⁷

⁷ In addition one may argue that cultural and/or historical factors explain MEPs voting behaviour (see Hix *et al.*, 2002).

4.1. The role of the Council and EP majority hurdles

The above explanations, inspired mostly by studies of the US Congress, assume implicitly that legislation is decided in the assembly. This may be a good approximation for the US Congress but certainly not for the EP. A good explanation of MEP behaviour must take into account the whole legislative process. This is done in the theoretical literature on the EU (Tsebelis, 1994; Crombez, 1996). However, in that literature, the EP is usually modelled as a single actor with specific preferences. The literature therefore does not explain why MEPs vote along party lines and not along country lines.

Here we suggest a simple explanation based on the fact that the majority hurdle in the Council is higher than the EP's majority hurdle (qualified majority or unanimity versus simple majority most of the time). Assume for simplicity's sake that policymakers' preferences over EU legislation have just two dimensions (a country dimension and a left–right dimension). Moreover, assume that we can approximate the actual EU legislative procedure with the stylization that we introduced in Section 2. Namely, that the Commission formulates legislative proposals but these only become law if both the Council of Ministers and the EP approve them. To get a bill approved in the Council, the measure must attract at least 71% of country votes, keeping in mind the fact that big nations have more votes than small nations. To pass in the EP, the measure must attract the support of at least half of MEPs (there is one vote per MEP, but large nations have more MEPs than small ones).

In this set-up, the EP and the Council have power in the sense that they can veto any Commission proposal that does not suit their preferences. To avoid such vetoes, the Commission crafts the proposals in a manner that it believes will please at least 50% of MEPs, and nations with at least 71% of Council votes. The crux of our argument relies on the fact that the distribution of MEPs per nation in the EP is similar to the distribution of votes per nation in the Council (Baldwin *et al.*, 2001: p. 28). Given this, it is reasonable to assume that if MEPs were to vote solely along country lines, the EP would have no influence. Any proposal by the Commission that can attract 71% of Council votes would also attract at least 50% of MEP votes. To put it differently, if MEPs voted on purely national lines, the Commission could entirely ignore the preferences of MEPs – any proposal that pleased enough Council members to pass the 71% hurdle, would also pass the 50% hurdle in the EP.

By contrast, suppose the opposite extreme, namely that Council members voted on purely national lines, but MEPs voted on purely party lines. In this case, there will be instances in which the MEPs have real power in the sense that the Commission will have to modify their proposals in ways that take account of MEPs' preferences. This reasoning suggests that the EP can influence the EU legislative process when coalitions are formed along party lines rather than along country lines.

Note that this very simple reasoning is consistent with a high occurrence of unanimity voting in the EP. MEPs form coalitions so as to weigh in the decision-making

process via the majorities that form on precise bills. The reasoning also suggests that party cohesion should be stronger in cases where the EP has legislative power compared to the votes where it can exercise no power. In other words, national party delegations have an incentive to create cohesive supranational party groups to mobilize MEPs to vote according to agreed party lines. If MEPs vote purely according to their policy preferences, voting behaviour should not be necessarily more cohesive in cases where the EP has legislative powers. We will test this prediction in the next section.

If the above reasoning is true, does it mean that in the absence of a higher majority hurdle in the Council, the EP might vote along country lines? If this were the case, we conjecture that we should observe MEPs voting along country lines in cases where the EP has no power. Since the votes where the EP has real power are less numerous than the others, our results that party cohesion is stronger than country cohesion suggest that ideological divisions in the EP are deeper than divisions between countries.

We conclude that both policy preferences and the desire to weigh in the legislative process along the left-right dimension appear to be reasonable explanations of why MEPs vote mainly along party lines.

5. THE IMPACT OF POWERS AND ENLARGEMENT ON PARTY COHESION

We now investigate via regression analysis the effect of increased powers and of enlargement on the voting behaviour of MEPs. The analysis focuses on party cohesion. Essentially, we ask whether more power and a larger parliament size lead to larger cohesion.

5.1. Determinants of party cohesion

We estimate the cohesion index (CI) for each political group on each vote. We thus have a ‘time-series’ of over 6000 observations for each political group. The main exogenous variables of interest are:

- RELPRES, measuring the relative presence of a party group with respect to other groups. A high value for RELPRES should indicate that the issue voted on is relatively more important for that party group. We can thus expect tighter control over voting behaviour and thus higher cohesion.
- ENLARGE, a dummy variable taking a value of 1 for votes taking place after enlargement to Austria, Finland and Sweden.
- CO-DECISION, a dummy variable taking a value of 1 if the voting procedure is co-decision, the one giving the most power to the parliament.

We also include a large number of control variables:

- QM, a dummy taking a value of 1 if the vote is by qualified majority;
- LEG4, a dummy to differentiate between the third and the fourth parliament;
- PCT-GVT, measures the percentage of national parties of a group that are in government in their respective countries (we used the data from Müller and Strøm, 2000). The idea is to test whether representation of a party in the Council via the national governments has a positive or a negative effect on the cohesion of the MEPs of the same party;
- 11 dummies indicating the vote's policy issues as follows (with abbreviations in parentheses): foreign policy (FORPOL); internal functioning of the EU (INTERNAL); agriculture, fishing and food (AGROFISH); industries and technology (INDUSTRY); banking system and finance (BANK); drugs and dangerous substances (DRUG); services; human beings (HUMANS); security; nature; legal system (LEGAL).

The results of the regression analysis are reported in Table 10. Each column shows the estimates for a given political group. The results show that RELPRES is statistically significant with a positive sign in all cases. This finding indicates that more participation leads to more party discipline, thus showing that the channel for more discipline is indeed the 'rounding up' effect. The dummy for the fourth parliament is positive for a majority of political groups. However, neither the ENLARGE nor the CO-DECISION variables are significant. Note also that presence in national governments of the same party does not affect cohesion. The main effect on cohesion is thus via party mobilization.

5.2. Determinants of MEP attendance

The physical presence of MEPs at EP sessions is clearly not exogenous. We thus also estimated an equation aimed at explaining the presence of party members of a given group (we call this variable PRES). We used the same explanatory variables as above and added closeness of the votes in the estimation of the presence equation, assuming that whips can mobilize their group more effectively in case of a close vote. The results are shown in Table 11.

The results of the PRES equation show that participation in the EP increases with the EP's power. The estimated coefficient of the LEG4 variable is significant with a positive sign meaning that there is less absence in the fourth parliament as compared with the third. The increase in participation over time can be explained, at least in part, by the decision (in 1996) to modify the rules governing reimbursement for attendance in Strasbourg. It is nevertheless compelling evidence for the increase in power of the parliament. The results also show that CO-DECISION is significantly positive, thus showing that the co-decision procedure mobilizes a larger number of legislators. Thus in the areas where the EP has more power, all political groups become more active. This result indicates that giving more power to the parliament has an unambiguously positive effect on participation. Note that this increase in

Table 10. Results of the estimation of the weighted cohesion equation

Dependent variable: Relative Cohesion Index								
	PES	EPP	ELDR	GR	GAUL	LEFT	RAD	ANTI-EU
PCT_GVT	-0.021 (0.20)	0.035 (0.56)	-0.093 (0.55)	-0.146 (1.61)	0.110 (1.98)*	-0.281 (2.50)*	– –	– –
RELPRES	0.294 (2.35)*	0.610 (4.96)**	1.364 (3.67)**	2.190 (6.75)**	1.074 (2.27)*	1.330 (2.40)*	-3.605 (3.42)**	-8.117 (9.27)**
ENLARGE	-0.036 (0.73)	-0.015 (0.37)	-0.057 (0.81)	-0.009 (0.15)	0.115 (1.97)*	-0.018 (0.31)	-0.031 (0.51)	-0.150 (1.97)*
CO-DECISION	-0.033 (1.59)	-0.028 (1.38)	-0.016 (0.73)	0.013 (0.57)	0.033 (1.20)	-0.021 (0.75)	0.011 (0.39)	-0.140 (4.40)**
QM	0.043 (2.23)*	-0.022 (1.13)	0.026 (1.26)	0.056 (2.55)*	0.002 (0.09)	0.100 (3.79)**	0.040 (1.54)	-0.009 (0.32)
LEG4	0.113 (2.37)*	0.093 (2.20)*	0.123 (2.21)*	0.221 (3.89)**	-0.236 (3.68)**	-(0.002) (0.04)	0.148 (2.38)*	0.119 (1.56)
FORPOL	0.002 (0.10)	0.028 (1.12)	0.093 (3.54)**	-0.047 (1.69)	-0.074 (2.32)*	-0.059 (1.76)	-0.064 (1.89)	-0.086 (2.25)*
INTERNAL	-0.023 (1.01)	-0.013 (0.56)	0.006 (0.24)	-0.091 (3.61)**	-0.105 (3.59)**	-0.150 (4.91)**	-0.021 (0.70)	-0.031 (0.89)
AGROFISH	0.005 (0.21)	0.011 (0.46)	0.016 (0.64)	0.054 (2.03)*	-0.029(0.94)	-0.021 (0.64)	0.012 (0.37)	-0.026 (0.71)
INDUSTRY	0.029 (1.11)	0.091 (3.51)**	0.073 (2.62)**	0.113 (3.83)**	0.011 (0.31)	-0.028 (0.79)	0.041 (1.16)	-0.105 (2.58)**
BANK	-0.033 (1.09)	0.004 (0.12)	0.037 (1.13)	-0.055 (1.61)	0.006 (0.16)	-0.147 (3.55)**	-0.025 (0.58)	-0.040 (0.85)
DRUG	-0.011 (0.31)	0.016 (0.45)	-0.062 (1.65)	0.025 (0.63)	0.053 (1.16)	-0.058 (1.19)	0.087 (1.80)	-0.069 (1.28)
SERVICES	0.119 (2.72)**	0.099 (2.31)*	0.114 (2.42)*	-0.017 (0.34)	0.058 (1.01)	-0.037 (0.61)	0.085 (1.41)	-0.105 (1.51)
HUMANS	0.059 (2.37)*	0.043 (1.76)	0.050 (1.89)	0.045 (1.61)	-0.040 (1.25)	0.027 (0.81)	0.014 (0.41)	-0.037 (0.96)
SECURITY	-0.020 (0.71)	0.068 (2.41)*	0.045 (1.51)	-0.065 (2.03)*	-0.191 (5.19)**	-0.074 (1.93)	-0.020 (0.51)	0.011 (0.26)
NATURE	0.005 (0.17)	-0.013 (0.48)	-0.002 (0.08)	0.073 (2.33)*	-0.013 (0.37)	0.037 (0.95)	0.019 (0.50)	-0.053 (1.24)
LEGAL	-0.033 (0.96)	0.024 (0.70)	-0.014 (0.37)	0.011 (0.28)	-0.066 (1.48)	-0.026 (0.55)	0.142 (2.94)**	-0.081 (1.51)
Constant	0.978 (11.64)**	0.828 (13.66)**	0.895 (10.44)**	0.901 (25.01)**	0.987 (23.17)**	1.057 (29.13)**	1.111 (32.95)**	1.046 (25.61)**
N	6444	6443	6430	6426	6349	6311	5788	6179
No. of days	479	479	479	478	476	476	454	472
Chi ² (19)	61	91	82	261	102	123	68	141
P-value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

Notes: Absolute value of z statistics in parentheses, * significant at 5%; ** significant at 1%. See Table 1 for Party abbreviations and the text for other abbreviations. Estimation by random-effects technique. Also, since many unobservable factors matter, a day-specific dummy was included. To account for the fact that CI is bounded by 1 and heavily concentrated around 1, we used our weighted index as the dependent variable (see Section 3.1.1). The un-weighted CI was also estimated with Tobit; the results are not fundamentally different from the ones reported here.

Table 11. Results of the estimation of the PRES equation

Dependent variable: Presence								
	PES	EPP	ELDR	GR	GAUL	LEFT	RAD	ANTI-EU
CLOSE	49.036 (3.59)**	33.255 (3.04)**	8.589 (3.07)**	7.232 (3.40)**	5.727 (1.99)*	11.125 (5.22)**	4.138 (3.59)**	3.658 (2.82)**
ENLARGE	21.855 (2.46)*	11.442 (1.60)	8.409 (4.68)**	4.535 (3.88)**	1.232 (0.65)	4.069 (3.08)**	1.817 (2.35)*	2.827 (3.35)**
CO-DECISION	9.270 (6.18)**	5.718 (4.75)**	0.664 (2.16)*	1.163 (4.89)**	1.639 (5.18)**	0.213 (0.90)	0.689 (5.44)**	0.712 (4.99)**
QM	13.728 (9.86)**	12.125 (10.86)**	2.681 (9.39)**	1.154 (5.22)**	2.599 (8.85)**	0.824 (3.77)**	0.635 (5.41)**	0.400 (3.02)**
LEG4	19.927 (2.24)*	31.008 (4.34)**	3.241 (1.81)	-3.523 (3.01)**	14.634 (7.72)**	3.887 (2.94)**	4.904 (6.34)**	2.065 (2.45)*
FORPOL	4.120 (2.28)*	2.604 (1.80)	0.882 (2.38)*	0.877 (3.06)**	0.941 (2.47)*	1.060 (3.74)**	0.818 (5.37)**	0.413 (2.40)*
INTERNAL	24.187 (14.71)**	18.748 (14.21)**	4.101 (12.16)**	2.025 (7.76)**	4.356 (12.55)**	2.291 (8.88)**	1.665 (11.99)**	1.676 (10.71)**
AGROFISH	10.995 (6.26)**	6.678 (4.74)**	1.741 (4.83)**	1.197 (4.30)**	3.516 (9.48)**	0.479 (1.74)	0.764 (5.15)**	0.955 (5.71)**
INDUSTRY	4.817 (2.45)*	0.424 (0.27)	0.143 (0.36)	0.510 (1.64)	1.564 (3.78)**	-0.500 (1.62)	0.378 (2.28)*	0.241 (1.29)
BANK	13.735 (6.18)**	12.376 (6.94)**	1.810 (3.97)**	0.547 (1.55)	2.956 (6.30)**	0.823 (2.36)*	0.607 (3.24)**	0.753 (3.56)**
DRUG	1.848 (0.70)	-2.592 (1.23)	0.007 (0.01)	0.202 (0.49)	0.330 (0.60)	-1.818 (4.42)**	-0.279 (1.26)	0.020 (0.08)
SERVICES	7.249 (2.12)*	2.736 (1.00)	1.124 (1.61)	0.225 (0.42)	0.706 (0.98)	-1.657 (3.10)**	-0.198 (0.69)	-0.447 (1.38)
HUMANS	3.243 (1.77)	-2.546 (1.73)	0.057 (0.15)	0.141 (0.49)	-0.063 (0.16)	0.432 (1.50)	0.361 (2.34)*	-0.059 (0.34)
SECURITY	12.554 (6.06)**	8.328 (5.01)**	2.358 (5.55)**	1.886 (5.74)**	1.655 (3.79)**	1.284 (3.95)**	0.844 (4.83)**	1.078 (5.47)**
NATURE	7.731 (3.82)**	5.440 (3.35)**	1.183 (2.85)**	1.286 (4.01)**	3.145 (7.37)**	0.228 (0.72)	1.117 (6.54)**	1.208 (6.28)**
LEGAL	11.684 (4.66)**	7.515 (3.74)**	2.585 (5.03)**	1.217 (3.06)**	1.690 (3.20)**	0.480 (1.22)	1.206 (5.70)**	1.327 (5.57)**
Constant	67.232 (17.66)**	56.836 (18.57)**	10.641 (13.72)**	11.730 (21.09)**	3.104 (3.84)**	3.462 (5.94)**	-0.317	2.148 (5.93)**
N	5967	5967	5967	5967	5967	5967	5967	5967
No. of days	421	421	421	421	421	421	421	421
Chi ² (17)	786	1007	761	235	1068	506	862	586
P-value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

Notes: Absolute value of z statistics in parentheses, * significant at 5%; ** significant at 1%. See notes to Table 9 for abbreviations and statistical issues. Closeness (close) is instrumented by lagged closeness.

participation is not an artefact of the absolute majority requirement (which is the case for a large number of co-decision votes), since we explicitly control for the qualified majority requirement. The votes with a qualified majority indeed increase participation. Finally the enlargement estimates are either statistically positive (in six cases out of eight) or non-significant, but they never take a negative sign. Interestingly, this finding indicates that enlargement does not reduce but increases participation. Against popular opinion, enlargement does not seem to imply more free-riding and more chaotic voting behaviour.

Note that the joint estimation of our cohesion and presence equations produced qualitatively similar results. These results did not change when we excluded from the sample the fully lopsided votes (i.e. when all MEPs voted in the same way).

The results of the two equations show that empowerment of the European Parliament has a direct and positive effect on the cohesion and party discipline of political groups, as well as an *indirect* effect via a higher presence which leads to greater cohesion.

6. POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF OUR ANALYSIS

What policy conclusions can we draw from our analysis? On the basis of our empirical analysis, we can conclude that an increase in the power of the EP would, everything else equal, reinforce participation of MEPs in votes and thus cohesion of party groups. This result clearly comes out of our regression analysis and also makes intuitive sense. When votes carry no consequence, MEPs have less incentive to participate in EP debates and votes. Even when they vote, they will have no incentive to be cohesive because the majority decision will not matter. Individual MEPs will prefer to stick as closely as possible to the interests of their constituency and to express their individual opinions through their vote. This is not a new idea. It is well known that less powerful assemblies tend to behave in a more chaotic way. When votes are consequential, however, then party groups will actively try to mobilize the MEPs of their group to vote in a disciplined way in order to weigh effectively on decision-making.

What does one mean, however, by ‘more power to the EP’? What we have in mind, and what comes naturally out of our analysis, is increasing the power of the EP via a generalization of the co-decision procedure as the normal legislative procedure in the EU, or at least, its generalization to all decisions that require qualified majority voting in the Council. Our analysis of the EP shows that MEPs have behaved more cohesively under the co-decision procedure. There is thus little to fear on that front from generalization of co-decision. Another argument for a generalization of co-decision is that simplification of legislative procedure by the adoption of a standard procedure will make the functioning of the EU seem less Byzantine and complex and more transparent to EU citizens. This is certainly very important in terms of enhancing legitimacy of the EU to European citizens, especially in the light of the ongoing

European Convention chaired by former French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing that will make recommendations for changes to the current Treaties.

Our empirical analysis suggests that left–right politics is the dominant motive for coalition formation in the EP. A more powerful and visible EP may contribute to enhance European-wide debates along the left–right dimension while the Council continues to play the role of guardian of country interests.

Some words of caution are necessary, however. The mobilization effect of EU party groups may have more to do with closeness of preferences among members of a same party than with the disciplining power of the European party groups. If important tensions arose in the future between, say, French and German social democrats on a given issue, it is doubtful whether the EP party group will be able to force them to vote cohesively; whereas we are quite confident that the French and German party would impose cohesion on their members. In order to ensure stronger discipline of EP party groups, one would need to give the latter the power to establish the electoral lists for the EP in the various member country districts (power that is currently entirely in the hands of the national parties). Another reason for caution is that our results do not allow us to say how the EP would vote if the role of the Council were strongly reduced. In the extreme, if the role of the Council were abolished, would coalition formation in the EP still be based on left–right politics rather than on country interests? Maybe not. Our results are based on the – plausible – assumption that the Council will keep its current powers and thus its role of guardian of country interests. Legislative projects in the EU go through two ‘filters’: the ‘left–right filter’ of the EP and the ‘country filter’ of the Council. It is important to have and keep those two filters.

A less safe conclusion that can be drawn from our analysis is related to the effect of the coming enlargement on voting behaviour in the EP. Our analysis of the previous enlargement suggests that party cohesion may not be negatively affected and may even be positively affected. This conclusion is, however, only based on the experience of past enlargement. It is a big logical leap to conclude that the next enlargement will have similar effects. Although we cannot be certain, there are grounds to be optimistic in that respect. Indeed, even if party cohesion drops dramatically after enlargement, there will be competitive forces driving party groups in that direction. A cohesive party will realize that it can weigh more in decision-making when its role is pivotal. Cohesion will make votes of the group more predictable. This in turn will make it easier for a cohesive group to negotiate compromises with other groups. Less cohesive groups will thus have an incentive to become more cohesive.

7. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have used a unique database to analyse the voting behaviour of individual MEPs in the European Parliament for the third and fourth parliament (1989–94 and 1994–99). We found that the cohesion of party groups was strong and

increasing over time, even if the size of majorities in the EP has declined during that time period. Cohesion in the EP is comparable to cohesion in the US Congress but remains smaller than in the one parliamentary democracy we looked at, namely Belgium. In contrast, country cohesion is low and generally not higher than cohesion of the EP as a whole. These findings are valid for a wide range of policy issues, something we did not necessarily expect.

Our empirical analysis shows that the major dimension of coalition formation is ideology. In other words, party groups of the left tend to vote together against party groups of the right. However, the left–right dimension is not the only one. There are other dimensions at play like pro- versus anti-European integration and Northern versus Southern country interests. These additional dimensions, however, are much less important than the left–right dimension.

We found that the channel for increased party cohesion works via the mobilization of MEPs by their party group to come and vote. Participation, we found, is stronger when the EP exercises more power through the co-decision procedure. The last wave of enlargement had a positive effect on participation and thus on cohesion. We also found that MEPs from newly entering countries are not less disciplined than those from other countries. Discipline across issues is strong for all countries.

Our empirical analysis provides grounds for justifying a generalization of the co-decision procedure in the EP.

Discussion

Thomas Piketty

CEPREMAP, Paris

This paper asks whether giving more power to the European Parliament will generate chaotic coalitions and paralyse decision-making or will lead to stable coalitions and efficient decision-making. This is obviously a key policy question for the future of Europe (arguably the most important question), and Noury and Roland rightly point out that there has been very little research on these issues. Their analysis relies on a unique data base using all roll call votes from individual deputies in the EP between 1989 and 1999 (third and fourth legislatures), which allows them to analyse voting patterns by country and party origin, coalition formation, the impact of new entrants, etc. As such, this paper is a very useful contribution to knowledge. It should stimulate both policy debates and future academic research.

My main criticism is that the authors might be a little bit too optimistic in their conclusions. Noury and Roland find that European MPs are voting more and more along party lines (rather than on the basis of country origin), and conclude that giving ‘more power to the European Parliament’ is a relatively safe option. I see two limits with their argument.

First of all, it is not entirely straightforward how one should interpret the cohesion index estimates given in the paper. For instance, Noury and Roland find that cohesion is much stronger for MEPs from a given party than for MEPs from a given country, and country cohesion tends to decline relative to party cohesion. In order to go beyond this qualitative conclusion and to better understand what these numbers mean, it would be useful to know what similar indexes would look like for MPs in national parliaments. Presumably, the cohesion index for national MPs from the same region (say, French MPs from Burgundy, or German MPs from Saxony) is fairly small in most countries. Comparing regional loyalty in national parliaments and country loyalty in the European parliament would give a way to measure how far we've got in terms of political integration.

In that respect, the figures computed by Noury and Roland for the Belgian Parliament are a bit frightening. They find that the cohesion index for the Flemish and Francophone parts of Belgium are around 30–40%, i.e. twice as low as the country cohesion indexes observed in the European Parliament (around 70%). Given that Belgium can hardly be viewed as an ideal point (Belgium is generally considered as a country that is deeply divided along community lines, and regional cohesion indexes would probably be much lower than 30–40% in countries like France or Germany), this suggests that Europe has still a long way to go. Unfortunately, Noury and Roland were not able to compute similar figures for other countries. Surprisingly enough, there seems to exist no systematic database on roll call votes in most European countries. This shows how useful the EP database constructed by Noury and Roland really is. Their pioneering work should be complemented by similar research on national parliaments.

Next, and most importantly, one limit of the analysis is that we don't really know what MEPs are voting upon. Noury and Roland do use some classification of roll call votes based on broad issues (agriculture, foreign affairs, etc.), but it is hard to know how important these votes are. Many observers assume (maybe wrongly) that MEPs have no real power and vote for the most part on secondary issues, so that it's hard to predict how they will behave when they will vote on real budgets. Noury and Roland use an indirect indicator of how important a vote is (i.e. whether or not the co-decision procedure is used), but they find that it has no direct impact on cohesion (it only has impact on participation). Ideally, one would like to weight each vote by the amount the money at stake, but it is unfortunately very hard to construct such data.

Another way to reply to this criticism would be to give more concrete examples of real votes and coalition formation on important issues, for instance for votes where one would have expected country loyalty to be dominant and where party loyalty turns out to be more important. In that respect, the detailed analysis of the Cresson–Marin crisis (when two socialist Commissioners were accused by the EP of mismanagement and diversion of funds) offered by Noury and Roland is not fully convincing. The fact that there was little cohesion among French MEPs at that time is hardly

surprising. Cresson had been a very unpopular socialist Prime Minister several years before, and it would have been very strange if right-wing French MPs had voted in favour of Cresson during the crisis (even the French left-wing press was against Cresson at the time of the vote). There is no way one can infer from this vote that country cohesion would remain low in case MEPs were voting on real issues. If MEPs were asked to vote on agricultural subsidies, country cohesion would probably be much stronger than party cohesion (especially among French MEPs). As suggested by Noury and Roland, the ‘filtering’ role of the European Council and of EP factions is probably needed to make sure that MEPs do not vote on issues that are too divisive on a country basis. Whether it will remain so in the future is very much an open issue at this stage.

Thierry Verdier

DELTA, Paris

This is a very timely and useful paper for several reasons. First, given the present policy debates on the so-called ‘democratic deficit’ of European institutions and the perspective of future enlargement of the EU to countries from Central Europe, investigating the functioning of the European Parliament (EP) and the voting pattern of European MPs is obviously crucial for European policymaking. Second, this paper undertakes a very useful task to the profession as it brings together an impressive new database on roll call votes of European MPs during the third and fourth EPs. Without doubt, this will trigger a host of quantitative research on legislative politics.

The paper addresses two sets of questions. First, it investigates how voting coalitions within the EP are likely to form. In particular, do MEPs vote along ideological lines or more along a ‘national interest’ line? The second set of questions considers some kind of comparative statics exercise. What are the effects of increased powers to the EP on the cohesiveness of MEPs and what are the effects of European Union enlargement on the voting behaviour of MEPs? The answers are surprising and provocative. MEPs seem to have more ‘party’ loyalty than ‘country’ loyalty, party cohesion and participation are stronger when the MEPs have more power, and MEPs from the new entrants are just as party oriented as MEPs from incumbent nations.

From these findings, the authors derive important policy implications for reforms of the European institutions. As right–left politics is the main game in the EP, the EP seems to function then more or less like a national Parliament. In such a context, giving more power to the EP seems to be particularly appropriate. This is appropriate because more power to the EP will in a sense countervail the nationalistic tendency of the Council’s politics. Therefore, by making European politics more representative of the average European citizen, it will reduce the democratic deficit of European institutions. According to the authors, empowerment of the EP is also good in the context of the coming enlargement, as, they argue, it will facilitate decision-making. Contrary to what happens at the level of the Council and the Commission, bringing new countries in the EP will basically just increase the number of MPs reorganizing

themselves along the right–left divide line, without much affecting the complexity of political coalitions in decision-making.

I would like first to discuss one of the authors' discussion main points, namely the degree and nature of cohesiveness of MEPs. Then I will turn to the policy implications derived in their conclusions.

On the issue of party-versus-country issue, let me say that while I do share overall their views, there are still a few points to be cleared up. My first concern stems from how political cohesiveness is measured. The authors' cohesion index (CI) reduces information in some particular way, as is the case with all indices. In particular, a given value of the CI can correspond to very diverse types of voting patterns. Consider two different voting situations. In situation 1, there are 50 Yes votes, 50 No votes and 0 abstentions. In situation 2 there are 50 Yes, 25 No and 25 abstentions. It is easy to see that the CI gives the same value (zero) for both situations. Intuitively though, I would have found it more natural to say that situation 1 is less cohesive than situation 2. It is easy to show that this simple example can be further generalized and to see that there may be a continuum of different voting patterns associated with the same value of the cohesion index. Though certainly common to all studies using indexes, one may then wonder about the degree of robustness of higher party cohesiveness to changes on the measure of cohesiveness.

Another aspect comes from the fact that all votes in the EP are somehow considered equal in the statistical analysis. But are they all equally important in MEPs' eyes? Given that MEPs vote on so many things, many of them of little importance, it may be that there exists a few 'important' votes for which 'country loyalty' appears to be crucial, while for most other non-consequential votes, MEPs are happy to follow their party line. In such a situation, one would see a high degree of party cohesiveness on average. Still, for the few votes that matter, MEPs could exhibit a strong degree of country cohesiveness.

A related issue is the fact that one may observe votes in the EP organized along 'party' lines simply because, by construction, the EP actually does not have to vote decisively on issues with a strong country-specific component. MEPs may be happy to vote according to party lines because their vote does not imply much at stake for their own countries. For instance, I am quite surprised to see in the spatial analysis of voting behaviour of the authors that the EU integration dimension explains so little of the voting pattern of MEPs. After all, one would expect the EP to be quite concerned with European integration questions. One way to understand this paradox perhaps is to note that a number of important European policy areas (like foreign policy or CAP) are not covered by the co-decision procedure. These areas have obvious country-specific redistributive aspects and the EP has little effective power on them. The explanatory weakness of the EU integration dimension may then simply be reflect the fact that many important European policy dimensions are not decided within the EP and therefore that MEPs are just content to signal their party royalty at no real cost for their own country's interest. Typically, though, the authors find

French representatives to be among the least disciplined in terms of nationality. I cannot help thinking, as a Frenchman myself, that things would be rather different if the EP had effective powers on the CAP!

This brings me to a final caveat of the authors' analysis, namely the fact that the voting pattern is explained, taking as given what happens inside the Commission and the Council. Clearly, in order to understand the voting behaviour of the EP, one would want to take explicitly into account the strategic interactions with the other two institutions, the Council and the Commission. Building up a structural model of the functioning of the whole set of European institutions would then be the natural (and daunting) route to follow. While I understand perfectly that this task is beyond the scope of the present paper, I also think that without such a framework, the comparative statistical conclusions of EP's empowerment and EU enlargement on the voting behavior of the MEPs have to be taken with a grain of salt. Indeed any reform that positively affects the power structure of the EP will also affect negatively the power structure of at least one of the other two institutions. This in turn will affect their political behaviour and the outcome they can achieve. If MEPs do in fact integrate these changes in their behaviour, then explaining MEPs' voting patterns, taking the Council and the Commission actions as given, may provide misleading predictions on the final outcome reached by the EP.

This observation leads me then directly to the policy implications of the paper. Should we give more power to the EP? According to the authors, yes. Yes, because it increases the participation of MEPs, brings the functioning of European Institutions closer to what happens within individual national states and thereby reduces their democratic deficit. Yes, also because it will make EU enlargement easier in terms of the functioning of European institutions. While both assertions follow logically from the paper's analysis, I would be a bit less enthusiastic than the authors to reach these conclusions so quickly.

First, and as emphasized before in my discussion, the effect of more power on the voting pattern is obtained by taking implicitly as fixed what happens in the other institutions. In other words, bringing in new issues with strong country-specific interests in the realm of the decision-making power of the EP, may indeed affect dramatically the voting behaviour of MEPs, internalizing how these changes have implications on the outcomes reached by the other two institutions. In such a context, 'party loyalty' may be more difficult to preserve than what this paper predicts. Second, I also think that the authors somehow underestimate the impact of EU enlargement on the EP's functioning. The likely impact of EU enlargement to central Europe is extrapolated from the voting of MEPs from Austria, Sweden and Finland. Given that MEPs from Central Europe do not necessarily share the same political culture as those from Scandinavia, one may wonder how far one can go with this extrapolation.

Clearly, the issue, from a policy point of view, is to understand when there might or might not be a structural break in voting behaviour after integration. Again, my

own feeling is that a good answer to that question will require the elaboration of a full-fledged structural model of the functioning of the whole set of European institutions. This paper, by bringing together and discussing an impressive data set on the EP's voting patterns over 10 years, hopefully paves the way for a whole line of research in that direction.

Panel discussion

Ray Rees thought that the results of the paper might be biased in favour of cohesion of party groups for the European Parliament because its members are held accountable by their constituencies to a smaller extent than national members of parliament. In response, Gérard Roland emphasized that the members of the European Parliament are elected through a list system so that parties can put pressure on them along the party line. This is not possible with respect to the country dimension.

Xavier Vives mentioned that cohesion of party groups rather than country cohesion is not necessarily desirable if preferences are relatively heterogeneous across countries.

Charles Goodhart thought that it would be necessary to control for the number of party seats per country. Otherwise, the effects of party concentration and cohesion would be confused because countries with a big majority of one party have a high index of country cohesion. Moreover, the study should adjust for the size of a country. Gérard Roland agreed, but pointed out that without the bias introduced by party concentration the main result on party cohesion should be even stronger.

Rafael Repullo agreed with the discussion of Thomas Piketty that the results on declining country and increasing party cohesion are emphasized too much in the paper, in particular, because the standard deviations of the reported means are wide. He suggested to weigh important votes relatively more to reduce the noise of the estimates. He put forward participation in the votes as a suitable weight. Gérard Roland replied that the authors wanted to follow this suggestion and he was confident that the main results would be robust to this extension. Concerning the time trend he agreed that the time trend might not be significant. He stressed that the most important result of the paper is not the time trend, but that cohesion is much stronger for the party than for the country dimension.

Referring to the German example with two chambers, *Bundestag* and *Bundesrat*, George de Ménil was not sure that giving more power to the European Parliament increases the efficiency of decision-making. If two chambers could stop legislation, the decision-making process would become less efficient. He thought a justification assigning more power to the European Parliament could be democracy, i.e., the control of the executive power, the European Commission.

Phillip Lane pointed out that country cohesion might vary over time depending on how close elections were and how pro-European a country would be. He suggested

looking at individual representatives and following how their voting behaviour changes over time. Moreover, he thought that the voting behaviour of members of parliament of new EU member countries might become more pro-European over time as countries become more integrated.

Several panellists questioned the fact that the dataset contained only roll call votes. Abdul Noury agreed that roll call votes are only a fraction of all votes in the European Parliament. He pointed out, however, that roll call votes are the most important votes.

In reply to the discussions of Thomas Piketty and Thierry Verdier, Gérard Roland noted that they had done various robustness tests such as using different measures for cohesion, various weights such as size of the majority and performing a truncation analysis. Moreover, Abdul Noury replied to Thierry Verdier that the authors had experimented with an alternative cohesion measure that would address the problem of symmetric treatment of Yes-votes, No-votes and abstentions. The main result that party membership is most important for coalition formation turns out to be very robust.

WEB APPENDIX

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