

The Integration of MEPs from Central and Eastern Europe into the European Parliament¹

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Abstract: *This article evaluates the level of integration of Members of the European Parliament from Central and Eastern Europe in the European Parliament after the EU enlargements of 2004 and 2007. The main objective is to address the puzzle of how the European Parliament's political groups could maintain or even increase their voting cohesion after the influx of a significantly large number of new MEPs coming from countries with different historical experience, socio-economic characteristics, and political and party systems. Three indicators of MEP integration are defined: integration into parliamentary leadership, integration into parliamentary work, and integration into voting patterns. The article uses data from the VoteWatch.eu website on MEPs' activities and voting between the years 2004-2011, as well as data from official documents of the European Parliament and its political groups. Analysis of the data reveals that the new member states' MEPs were significantly under-represented in parliamentary leadership and key legislative activities, despite the fact that their voting loyalty to their political groups was greater than that of their colleagues from older member states.*

Keywords: *European Parliament, Enlargement, Integration, New MEPs*

Introduction

In this article we reveal the way Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) integrated themselves in the Parliament's work and decision-making structures and thus we provide an explanation of how the political groups of the European Parliament (EP) were able to maintain or even increase their voting cohesion after the eastern enlargement. The voting behaviour of MEPs has been the subject of research and analysis of various scholars over the last few years (for example Hix, A. G. Noury, and Roland 2007; Kreppel 2002; Raunio 1997; Ringe 2009). More specifically, Hix, Noury, and Roland (2007) examined roll-call votes from 1979 to 2004 and revealed that MEPs vote increasingly along

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political group lines and decreasingly along national lines. The cohesion of political groups in the EP has been increasing and the political groups have become gradually more competitive, with left-right cleavages becoming more common than big voting coalitions across the political spectrum. The question is how this clear trend has been affected by enlargement.

The eastern enlargements of 2004 and 2007 have, among other changes in European Union institutions, introduced a significant number of new politicians representing citizens from Central and Eastern Europe to the European Parliament. The assembly has grown from 626 members before Enlargement to 785 members (732 after 2004), with the new representatives amounting to about one quarter of the new Parliament. Such an increase in the number of MEPs from new Member States, moreover from countries with structurally distinct political, socio-economic and, in particular, party systems was unprecedented³. It was thus expected that this would affect the inner workings of the European Parliament, its political groups and especially their voting cohesion. However, we know that legislative production in the European Parliament after enlargement has been faster compared with the previous parliament (e.g. Hagemann 2009) and that voting cohesion among the political groups has even slightly increased (Hix and A. Noury 2009; data VoteWatch.EU).

The absolute cohesion score introduced by Hix et al. (Hix, A. G. Noury, and Roland 2007, chap. 5) shows the extent to which the members of a EP party group vote as a block. This so called Agreement Index equals 1 when all the members of a group vote together and equals 0 when the members of a group are equally divided between all three voting options, i.e. Yes, No and Abstaining (for a precise formula see Hix, A. G. Noury, and Roland 2007, 91). The cohesion scores for the political groups in the 5th EP (1999-2004) and the 6th EP (2004-2009) were as follows: European Peoples Party-European Democrats 0.87 and 0.88, Party of European Socialists 0.90 and 0.91, Liberals – ALDE 0.88 and 0.89, Union for Europe of the Nations 0.75 and 0.76, Greens/EFA 0.92 and 0.91, European United Left-NGL 0.80 and 0.85, Independence/Democracy 0.50 and 0.47, Non-attached 0.44 and 0.44 (Hix and A. Noury 2006, 16, data for the 5th EP; “VoteWatch.eu European Parliament” n.d. http://www.votewatch.eu/cx_european_party_groups.php for data for the 6th EP).

This finding is rather surprising, as the entrance of many new politicians was, to a certain extent, expected to complicate the existing structures. One hypothesis suggested that the influx

³ Since the EP has been directly elected, MEPs from newly accessed countries constituted 5,53 % (1981), 16,21 % (1986), and 9,42 % (1995) of all the MEPs.

of many new MEPs from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE)⁴ would make the Parliament more heterogeneous and that, consequently, new political cleavages would develop in line with geographical or socio-economic differences, such as, for example, a North-South-East political divide. Another, alternative hypothesis anticipated that the representatives from the new member states would join the existing political structures, but that, with the growth in the number of MEPs competing for a relatively limited number of posts and roles in the political groups and parliamentary committees, internal competitive pressure would increase. In general, it was expected that the MEPs from CEE countries would behave somewhat differently from the MEPs from old member states (theoretical expectations voiced before enlargement are reflected in Hageman (2009, 10), Hix and Noury (2009, 160)).

This article aims to address the following puzzle: How could the European Parliament's political groups maintain or even increase their voting cohesion after the influx of a significantly large number of new MEPs, moreover coming from countries with different historical experience, socio-economic characteristics, and political and party systems. In order to answer this question we will analyse how these new MEPs became integrated into the 6th European Parliament in terms of their representation in parliamentary leadership and parliamentary activities, and their voting behaviour.

The article is organized in the following way. In the first section we discuss the existing literature and the first published empirical findings concerning the representation and integration of MEPs from the accession countries into the 6th EP. The second section introduces general theoretical assumptions, upon which we can evaluate these empirical findings. In the third section we present our hypothesis and methodology. The fourth section describes the three kinds of data we employ and presents the results of their analysis. The last section summarises our conclusions.

1. Literature and empirical findings

The question we are addressing in this article is not entirely new and has already appeared in several papers looking at the effects of enlargement on the European Parliament. However, the analysis provided here is more complex and employs new data analysis. Stefanie Bailer (2008)

⁴ In our analysis we include MEPs from the ten new member states from Central and Eastern Europe which joined the EU in May 2004 (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia), and January 2007 (Bulgaria and Romania). We exclude Cyprus and Malta, which also joined in 2004, but do not belong to the same region and do not share the burden of a post-communist legacy or other political and cultural similarities with the other ten countries.

asks how it is possible that the EP's political groups, which are internally ideologically quite diverse and, after enlargement, had to integrate MEPs from new member states, continue to show a relatively high level of cohesion, measured using roll-call vote data (Hix and A. Noury 2009). As one possible explanation she suggests that roll-call votes do not reflect typical voting in the EP. They are used in only one quarter of all voting procedures and often in order to keep group members in line or to show a group's position. As another explanation Bailer suggests that MEPs from new MSs "have impressively adapted to the parliamentary decision-making in the party groups" (Bailer 2008, 200). She finds it conceivable that the new deputies consciously choose a certain behaviour strategy following a "logic of appropriateness" in order to adapt well to the new environment.

Towards the end of the 6th European Parliament (2004-2009) several empirically-based papers appeared comparing the trends from the 5th Parliament (1999-2004) with the post-enlargement Parliament. Simon Hix and Abdul Noury (2009) analyzed all roll-call votes in the first part of the Sixth Parliament (July 2004 – December 2006) and compared aggregate- and individual-level MEP behaviour in these votes with MEPs' behaviour in the Fifth Parliament (July 1999 – May 2004). They found a stable level of political group cohesion and inter-group coalitions that formed mainly around a left-right division. Even though Hix and Noury found a relative decrease in political group cohesion in the first half of the 6th EP, their overall conclusion was that enlargement did not change the way politics works inside the EP. In fact, data for the whole of the 6th parliamentary term show an increase in absolute group cohesion rates and thus confirm the long-term trend regardless of the influx of the new MEPs.

These findings are also confirmed by Sara Hagemann (2009) using the same data, additional material available at VoteWatch.EU, and also her own in-depth semi-structured interviews with key figures in the European Parliament. Besides the fact that political group voting cohesion has slightly increased, the "Parliament has coped remarkably well in terms of 'efficiency in numbers'. The quantity of legislation passed by the Parliament has not decreased; nor have there been noticeable bottlenecks in policy 'production' which are directly attributable to the institution's expansion" (Hagemann 2009, 24). Much of the credit for this is given to the centrally organized political groups, whose leadership provides voting instructions to individual MEPs.

However, an emerging lack of genuine debate, especially in the plenary, was criticised as a drawback of this efficient, well-organized and bureaucratized legislative process in the EP. The principle that committee decisions should be representative of the views of the Parliament as a

whole is questioned by the fact that the brokering of agreements within a very short time frame are dominated by a few specific positions such as the political group Coordinators, Rapporteurs and committee Chairs. Concerns especially arise regarding the role of the group Coordinators, “[a]s [they] usually meet in advance and increasingly seek to broker agreements which are then presented to fellow group members and subsequently brought to the committee as a whole, informal structures increasingly seem to dominate the negotiating process between the political groups” (Hagemann 2009, 15). Moreover, MEPs from new member states were clearly under-represented in these key positions and efforts were reportedly not made to allocate more such positions to the newcomers. Hagemann notes that this system, however effective in terms of legislative production, can only be considered also as democratically efficient if all MEPs have an equal opportunity to obtain key posts, and responsibilities are fairly distributed.

De Clerck-Sachsse and Kaczyński (2009) have also looked at the 6th EP from a comparative perspective. Their findings confirm that in the first half of the 6th EP term (2004–2006) the MEPs from new member states were rather under-represented in key decision-making offices (such as the Bureau, the Conference of Presidents, and the Conference of Committee Chairmen) and posts. Moreover, De Clerck-Sachsse and Kaczyński found that the new member states’ MEPs did not sit on the committees which have major legislative output such as the Environmental and Transport Committee (measured as the amount of co-decision files). However, the authors conclude that in the second half of the 6th EP term, after the new MEPs “underwent a considerable learning process, integrating themselves more and more” (2009, 5), their representation in key offices and parliamentary jobs began to correspond to the share of their representation in the chamber. In this article we challenge this conclusion.

Emanuel Emil Coman (2009) studied the roll-call votes in the first 16 months of the sixth EP (2004–05) and looked at the influence of political groups and national delegations on the voting behaviour of individual MEPs. One conclusion which is especially relevant for this article is that the new MEPs from CEE are more likely to side with their political group than with their national party group. Coman does not offer an explanation of this as it was outside the scope of his study, but it corresponds with our assumptions about the adaptation of the new MEPs and it corresponds with our findings.

Michael Kaeding and Steffen Hurka (2010, 2011) examined the allocation of reports in the 6th European Parliament using data on each individual MEP at VoteWatch.EU. They found that MEPs representing the new member states were significantly under-represented in the allocation process for committee reports under the most important procedures (co-decision,

budgetary and discharge). Representing over one quarter of the whole Parliament, these MEPs were responsible for only 16% of these reports. Moreover, the overall share of MEPs from new member states who were responsible for at least one report in the 2004-2009 parliamentary term was lower than the corresponding share among new MEPs from EU15. “Our data show that newcomers from ‘old’ Members States were clearly advantaged in the report allocation process when compared with their first-time peers from the accession countries” (2011, 15). According to Kaeding and Hurka, this significant under-representation of rapporteurs from accession countries “questions the integration efforts of the EP over the last five years” (2011, 15).⁵

2. Hypotheses

The eastern enlargement of the EU can be studied as the growth in size of a group. This approach is favoured by Stefanie Bailer, Robin Hertz and Dirk Leuffen (2008, 2009), who propose the use of three general theoretical assumptions in research into the effects of enlargement on EU institutions. These are oligarchization, formalization and adaptation. Bailer and her colleagues argue that since eastern enlargement represented a significant growth in size of a group, i.e. in the number of members of a group (in our case the EU, or more specifically the European Parliament), it is possible to apply these assumptions originally developed in sociology, even though, in the case of EU enlargement, we are dealing with collective actors rather than individual ones. These assumptions are not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary, as they predict the effects of group size growth from different perspectives. Therefore effects predicted by all three theoretical assumptions can be found simultaneously.

Oligarchization theory was originally introduced by Robert Michels (1999 [1915]) as the famous “Iron Law of Oligarchy” in the context of the organizational development of political parties. This theoretical assumption expects that in larger groups there is a tendency to establish informal decision-making structures from which only a few decision-makers at the top benefit. If applied to EU institutions, we can see member states or political parties interacting as collective actors in form of their representatives, e.g. in the Council or in the European Parliament. The oligarchization assumption expects that some countries or national party groups informally take decisions which are then followed by the rest. Furthermore, according to the oligarchization scenario we could assume that the entry of many new member states pressed the former EU members to defend their positions vis-à-vis the newcomers. This assumption consequently

⁵ The assumptions of significantly distinct political preferences of CEE MEPs is however questioned by Schmitt and Thomassen (2009).

predicts that as more members join an EU institution, in our case the European Parliament, the more former members will try to increase their power at the expense of the new-comers (Bailer, Hertz, and Leuffen 2008, 7–8).

However, the actual formation of an ‘oligarchy’ in an organization is not an intended goal of the old members. It is rather a natural result of the technical and mechanical dynamics of big organizations. In order to maintain effective decision-making in an organization with many members, it is necessary to move the decision-making powers from open fora, such as an EP political group meeting, to more centralised bodies, such as the EP political group presidency (Bressanelli 2011, 6). In concrete terms, the prediction of the oligarchization scenario is that the MEPs from the old Member States would try to maintain their positions through the formal centralisation of decision-making structures, which they would try to keep under their control and from which they would try to exclude the new MEPs as much as possible. At the same time the old ‘oligarchy’ would maintain informal procedures in order to distribute important ‘jobs’ among themselves. Since the Iron Law of Oligarchy was originally formulated for political parties it is more natural to apply it to the party political groups in the European Parliament than to any other organs in the EU.

On the basis of the assumption of oligarchization, we can formulate our first two hypotheses with regard to the tendencies in political groups of the European Parliament after eastern enlargement.

H1: MEPs from the older member states will try to maintain their positions in the leadership of the European Parliament and political groups at the expense of the new MEPs, which will result in the under-representation of the new MEPs from CEE in these leadership positions.

H2: MEPs from the old Member States will try to maintain their control over decisive parliamentary assignments at the expense of the new MEPs, who will in turn be under-represented in such assignments.

The second theoretical assumption proposed by Bailer and her colleagues is *formalization*. This assumption draws on the sociological works of Georg Simmel, which predict that larger groups lead to more complex group dynamics. Growth in size makes it more difficult to provide collective goods optimally and therefore results in organizational changes. Such changes lead to the establishment of formal structures that can replace the personal and immediate cohesion and consensus-oriented decision-making typical for smaller groups. In the EU context, the formalization scenario predicts a growing tendency to use formal rules of decision-making (Bailer, Hertz, and Leuffen 2008, 5–6, 8) or the introduction of new formal rules of procedure which were not perceived necessary before enlargement.

Organizational change and substantial reform of the rules of procedure of the European Parliament's major political groups in anticipation of eastern enlargement was well documented by Bressanelli (2011). The major political groups anticipating the 2004 enlargement made significant organizational changes in order to maintain their performance and efficiency vis-à-vis the perceived shock of enlargement. The main changes occurred in the mechanisms of intra-group coordination and particularly in shifting power to more restricted bodies such as the groups' bureaus and presidencies and strengthening procedures and bureaucracies (Bressanelli 2011, 28–30). These reforms of the rules of procedure can be viewed as the formalization of *de facto* informal rules securing the positions of the MEPs of the old member states.

Whereas oligarchization and formalization explain the tendencies of the longer-standing group members (in anticipation of the entrance of new members), *adaptation*, the third theoretical assumption proposed by Bailer and her colleagues, focuses on the newcomers. According to sociological institutionalism and organization theory, new members in a group are expected to adapt to existing norms (Bailer, Hertz, and Leuffen 2008, 8). In other words, they are supposed to adjust to a dominant “logic of appropriateness” (March and Olsen 1989). When applied to EU enlargement and specifically the European Parliament, we can say that the new MEPs joined already existing political groups and were uncertain how to behave in the new decision-making structures. Therefore, the new MEPs tended to copy the other MEPs' behaviour. Consequently, despite the presence of structural differences and the potentially distinct preferences of the MEPs from new member states, the adaptation assumption predicts that they will actually follow the voting behaviour of their political groups. One possible reason for such behaviour is simply a lack of access to information which would allow the new MEPs to formulate their preferences more independently of the political groups. Following this assumption we can formulate our third hypotheses:

H3: MEPs from the CEE will adapt their voting behaviour to the existing norms in the political groups and will thus vote at least as cohesively with their groups as their fellows from the older member states.

Having formulated these three complementary hypotheses we can now introduce our methodological approach. We have identified key indicators of the integration of MEPs to the European Parliament, its political groups, and its work. The first hypothesis is concerned with the leadership of the European Parliament and the political groups. We assume that if representation of the MEPs from CEE in leadership positions corresponds to their overall share in the whole EP and the respective groups, we can conclude that they are well integrated in parliamentary leadership. Similarly, regarding the second hypothesis, we can assume that the CEE MEPs are

well integrated in key parliamentary work if they are well represented in the group of MEPs who are assigned with responsibility for committee reports and other important jobs. The third hypothesis concerns the voting behaviour of the MEPs. We can assume that the new MEPs are well integrated if they adopt similar voting patterns as their peers from older member states.

Thus, we propose the following three indicators of the integration of new MEPs: integration into *parliamentary leadership*, integration into *parliamentary work*, and integration according to *voting patterns*. Each indicator is operationalized in a specific way and for each indicator we have collected different data. The following section describes the data we have employed and elaborates on the data analysis and its results.

3. Data description and analysis

The present section looks at the integration of MEPs from CEE countries into parliamentary leadership and parliamentary work, and with regard to voting patterns. The analysis focuses on the period covering the whole of the 6th European Parliament (July 2004 – July 2009) and the beginning of the 7th Parliament (July 2009 – July 2011). We focus on data concerning the three biggest EP political groups: the Group of the European People's Party (EPP; in the 6th EP called the European People's Party-European Democrats), the Socialist Group (PSE; in the 7th EP called the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats), and the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE). During the relevant period, these three groups together included around three quarters of all MEPs, as well as about three-quarters of all CEE MEPs.⁶

Figure 1: Proportion of MEPs in the big three EP groups

| | All MEPs | CEE MEPs |
|---------|------------------|------------------|
| 2004-06 | 75,95% (556/732) | 72,84% (110/151) |
| 2007-09 | 77,07% (605/785) | 77,94% (159/204) |
| 2009-11 | 72,41% (533/736) | 76,31% (145/190) |

We could have included also other groups in our analysis, but there are three methodological reasons why we focused only on the three biggest. Firstly, the proportion of CEE MEPs in the three biggest groups was comparable to the proportion of all MEPs in those groups, whereas the

⁶ We looked only at the first part of the 7th Parliament from July 2009 to July 2011. During this period, the EP had in total 736 Members. It was only in December 2011 that 17 additional MEPs started their mandates (the Netherlands had still to appoint the 18th MEP), implementing a Protocol amending Protocol 36 of the Lisbon Treaty on transitional provisions (increasing the number of MEPs to 754 until the end of the 7th Parliament).

proportion of CEE MEPs in all the other groups was significantly different from that of all MEPs (most notably, in the 6th EP there were 5.4% of all MEPs in the Green group, but only 0.5% MEPs from CEE countries). Secondly, two of the four smaller groups not only changed their names but also their national parties during the observed period (with the European Conservatives and Reformists Group created only in the 7th EP from national parties whose MEPs were in different groups in the 6th EP), which would make comparison throughout the whole observed period difficult. Finally, as mentioned above, the three biggest groups represented around three quarters of the MEPs from all member states as well as from CEE countries; therefore, the analysis of the integration of CEE MEPs based on data concerning these three groups can be considered representative. The level of integration of CEE MEPs in some of the smaller groups might have been different, but this would not change the overall picture.

3.1. Integration into parliamentary leadership

The first indication of the integration of MEPs from CEE in the European Parliament is their representation in leadership positions of the Parliament and political groups. As mentioned earlier, key decision-making positions such as membership in a group presidency, or key roles such as group coordinator became more important in the 6th EP both formally (due to reforms of the groups' rules of procedure (Bressanelli 2011)) and informally (Hagemann 2009).

What do we mean by leadership positions? Parliamentary leadership together with political groups and committees constitute the three main organizational structures that facilitate control of the EP agenda. There are three major leadership bodies in the EP: the Bureau (consisting of the president and vice-presidents), the Conference of Presidents (consisting of the EP president and chairmen of the political groups) and the Conference of Committee Chairmen (e.g. Dinan 2005, 281; Hix 2005, 90). We can also add the Conference of Delegation Chairmen made up of the heads of EP delegations, which do not deal with the main EP legislative agenda but can still be considered as important and influential positions.

The Bureau deals with various financial and administrative matters regarding organization, including drawing up the EP's draft estimates and deciding on the composition and structure of the EP secretariat. The Conference of Presidents is the main political leadership body. It deals with matters other than routine, including deciding on seating arrangements; arranging the EP's work programme, such as assigning the drafting of reports to committees and drawing up the draft agendas for plenary sessions; and authorising the drawing up of its own initiative reports. The Conference of Committee Chairmen undertakes such tasks as arranging for

necessary liaison between committees, settling inter-committee disputes, and generally monitoring the progress of business through the committee system. The Conference of Delegation Chairmen discusses common organizational and planning matters concerning the four types of EP delegations, i.e. inter-parliamentary committees, joint parliamentary committees, delegations to the ACP-EU, and Euro-Med joint parliamentary assemblies (Nugent 2006, 272–274).

As far as political influence on the legislative agenda is concerned, we consider the importance of the four considered bodies to be in the following order, from the most important to the least important: (1.) The Conference of Presidents, (2.) The Conference of Committee Chairs, (3.) The Bureau, and (4.) The Conference of Delegation Chairs. All of these bodies are elected for a two-and-a-half-year term of office (as detailed in the Rules of Procedure (European Parliament 2011)). In our analysis, we consider the two terms in the 6th EP, the first from July 2004 to December 2006 and the second from January 2007 to July 2009. It is necessary to treat the 6th Parliament as two distinct terms not only because parliamentary positions changed after the first half-term, but also because of the entrance of MEPs from Bulgaria and Rumania as of January 2007, which changed the overall share of CEE MEPs. As a control, we also include the first term of the 7th Parliament elected in 2009.

In addition, we consider leadership positions within the political groups, which are the central posts for structuring debate and coalition formation in the EP legislative process (Hix 2005; Kreppel 2002). Here, we look at the two biggest groups, which together make up almost two thirds of the whole EP. The leadership of the groups is represented by the group Presidency composed of the president and vice-presidents of the groups. Another important indicator of importance within a group is the post of group coordinator in an EP committee. Group coordinators are responsible for coordinating the work of their group members in the respective committees. Therefore, each major group nominates usually one coordinator for each committee. Together with the committee chair, the coordinators negotiate the distribution of rapporteurships between the groups. Once a group has been assigned a report, the coordinator allocates it to a member of his/her group (EPP-ED Group in the European Parliament 2007, 14, 29; Mamadouh and Raunio 2003, 340).

Figure 2: Proportion of MEPs from Central and Eastern Europe

| CEE MEPs | EP whole | EPP | PSE | ALDE |
|----------------|------------------|-----------------|--------------------|----------------|
| 2004-06 | 20,63% (151/732) | 23,88% (64/268) | 14,00% (28/200) | 20,45% (18/88) |
| 2007-09 | 25,99% (204/785) | 29,90% (87/291) | 20,00% (43/215) | 29,29% (29/99) |
| 2009-11 | 25,82% (190/736) | 30,57% (81/265) | 24,46% (45/184) | 22,62% (19/84) |

The following table shows the proportion of MEPs from the new CEE member states in the four most important leadership bodies. We can see that the CEE MEPs were under-represented in each of the bodies relative to their representation in the whole plenary in each of the observed terms of office (except for the least relevant delegation chairs in 2004-06). What is, however, most striking is that their representation among all leadership posts combined did not increase from one term to the other, as expected or claimed by some of the studies cited above, but, on the contrary, slightly decreased. This trend continued also in the first term of 7th Parliament.

Figure 3: Proportion of CEE MEPs in the Leadership Positions

| CEE MEPs | Presidents | Committee Chairs | Bureau | Delegations Chairs | Sum |
|----------------|---------------|---------------------|---------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| 2004-06 | 0,00% (0/10) | 18,18% (4/22) | 20,00% (3/15) | 21,62% (8/37) | 17,86% (15/84) |
| 2007-09 | 0,00% (0/10) | 17,39% (4/23) | 13,33% (2/15) | 21,62% (8/37) | 16,47% (14/85) |
| 2009-11 | 20,00% (2/10) | 4,35% (1/23) | 21,05% (4/19) | 20,00% (8/40) | 16,30% (15/92) |

Despite the fact that in 2004 CEE MEPs constituted over one fifth of the whole EP, none of them was a member of the politically most important body – the Conference of Presidents – for the whole 6th Parliament. Only 4 out of 22 or 23 committee chairs came from CEE and their representation in the Bureau was no better. Contrary to the expectations of scholarly observers of the first half-term of the 6th Parliament, the proportion of CEE MEPs in leadership positions did not increase in the second half-term, but in fact decreased after the accession of Romania and Bulgaria in 2007. The influence of CEE MEPs on the political and legislative management of the European Parliament was limited due to their under-representation in the EP leadership. Moreover, if we look at the level of representation of CEE MEPs in the first term of the 7th

Parliament, even though the EP President came from a CEE country, their representation especially among committee chairs was extremely poor (just 1 out of 23!).⁷

It should be noted that all leadership posts are first allocated to political groups according to their size in the EP; only afterwards do the political groups choose individual MEPs to fill the allocated places. Meanwhile, the biggest groups have more places at their disposal. Therefore, it matters whether CEE MEPs join bigger or smaller groups. This fact, however, has no significant implications for our conclusions, because the proportion of all MEPs in the three biggest groups is comparable to the representation of CEE MEPs in these groups.

For a more complex picture we add analysis of the representation of CEE MEPs in the Presidencies of the two biggest political groups, namely the European People's Party (in 2004-2009 the European People's Party – European Democrats) and the Socialists and Democrats (in 2004-2009 the Socialist Group / PSE)⁸. We look at the representation of CEE MEPs in the group Presidencies (President and Vice-Presidents of the groups) and among the groups' committee coordinators. From the table below, we can see that CEE MEPs in the EPP-ED group were especially underrepresented in the first term. The fact that CEE MEPs did not have any committee coordinator in the first term can be understood as a logical consequence of the necessity for coordinators to have parliamentary experience and expertise. However, CEE MEPs continued to be underrepresented in the two following terms particularly among coordinators, which can hardly be explained by a lack of parliamentary experience.

⁷ This quantitative approach provides highly relevant findings. However, we should not overlook the qualitative approach focusing on the different weights of the observed data. For example, CEE MEPs were underrepresented in the period 2007-2009 regarding committee chairs; however, they held two important ones – the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) and the Environmental Committee (ENVI). Similarly, in the 2009-2011 period, the CEE MEPs were significantly underrepresented in quantitative terms; however, a CEE MEP held one of the most important positions - the EP Presidency (Jerzy Buzek). The measurement of the importance and influence of these particular positions would require much deeper qualitative inquiry.

⁸ The ALDE group was not included because comparable data were not available to the author.

Figure 4: Proportion of CEE MEPs in Group Leadership

| EPP-ED | | Total | Presidency | Coordinators |
|--------------------|-------------------|--------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| 2004 - 2006 | CEE MEPs | 23,88% | 10,00% | 0,00% |
| | Total MEPs | 268 | 10 | 22 |
| 2007 - 2009 | CEE MEPs | 28,82% | 18,18% | 4,35% |
| | Total MEPs | 288 | 11 | 23 |
| 2009 - 2011 | CEE MEPs | 30,57% | 18,18% | 25,00% |
| | Total MEPs | 265 | 11 | 28 |

| PSE | | Total | Presidency | Coordinators |
|--------------------|-------------------|--------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| 2004 - 2006 | CEE MEPs | 14,00% | 11,10% | 3,70% |
| | Total MEPs | 200 | 9 | 27 |
| 2007 - 2009 | CEE MEPs | 14,00% | 18,18% | 3,70% |
| | Total MEPs | 216 | 11 | 27 |
| 2009 - 2011 | CEE MEPs | 24,46% | 27,27% | 4,35% |
| | Total MEPs | 184 | 11 | 23 |

The representation of CEE MEPs in the PSE group was higher than in the EPP group. However, regarding group coordinators, CEE MEPs were dramatically underrepresented. Despite minor deflections, generally the new MEPs from CEE seemed to be systematically under-represented in key bodies and positions relative to their number in the EP Plenary and in the two biggest political groups. This fact supports our first hypothesis that MEPs from the old member states maintain their dominance in leadership positions vis-à-vis the newcomers.

All the data in this sub-section were collected from the websites and official publications and internal documents of the European Parliament and the two biggest groups (EPP-ED/EPP and PSE/S&D).

3.2. Integration into parliamentary work

The second hypothesis predicts that CEE MEPs will be under-represented in assignments of paramount parliamentary work such as drafting reports or tabling amendments. That this hypothesis actually holds for committee reports was confirmed by Kaeding and Hurka (2010, 2011), who found that the chances of new member states MEPs becoming rapporteurs were

lower than those of their peers from the old member states and that this pattern holds even when comparing MEPs from the accession countries with first-time MEPs from the old member states.

In our analysis we look not only at the reports, but also at amendments to reports and other parliamentary activities such as speeches in the plenary, motions for resolutions, written declarations, opinions, and parliamentary questions. The engagement of MEPs in these activities indicates the level of their participation in parliamentary work. Precise data for each MEP are available at the official website of the European Parliament under the profiles of individual MEPs (<http://www.europarl.europa.eu>). All these data were collected by the website VoteWatch.eu and made available through different filters, which make comparison of the data more accessible. We employed the data for each MEP listed on the VoteWatch.eu website for the period of the 6th and 7th EP till July 2011 and divided them according to the three sub-periods of 2004-2006, 2007-2009 and 2009-2011⁹. In the whole observed period all MEPs in total drafted 2 876 reports and 2 057 opinions; they made 101 155 single speeches in the plenary, tabled 22 677 motions for resolutions, submitted 1 787 written declarations, tabled 39 348 amendments to reports, and put 64 620 parliamentary questions to the Commission or Council. That makes in total 234 520 single parliamentary activities for the considered period from July 2004 to July 2011.

To analyze the data systematically we ran 112 individual t-tests (unequal variance assumed), one for each combination of parliamentary activity, party group, and period. So for each parliamentary activity we assessed whether CEE MEPs were engaged in those activities less than MEPs from the old member states, considering separately the group of all MEPs (from all the political groups), the group of EPP MEPs, the group of PSE MEPs and the group of ALDE MEPs, in the three sub-periods (2004-2006, 2007-2009 and 2009-2011) as well as in the whole period (2004-2011). A summary of the results of all the t-tests is shown in the following table, where 1 means that CEE MEPs engaged in the respective activity statistically significantly less often than other MEPs, 0 means that there was no statistically significant difference between the activity of CEE and other MEPs, and 2 means that CEE MEPs were actually engaged significantly more often in the respective activity than other MEPs. For all the tests the level $\alpha < 0.05$ was used as the threshold.

⁹ It should be mentioned that the VoteWatch.eu website shows a certain amount of error. Most importantly it does not reflect changes in the status of the MEPs during the parliamentary term, including transfers from one political group to another. The list of MEPs also includes those who were members for only part of the term. This may cause some minor distortion of the results if we consider the activities of CEE MEPs of the three biggest groups.

However, the results concerning all MEPs should not be affected by this imperfection in the source data.

Figure 5: Results for each activity

| period | group | amendments | declarations | motions | opinions | questions | reports | speeches |
|-------------------------|-------|------------|--------------|---------|----------|-----------|---------|----------|
| 1st period 2004-06 | EPP | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| | PSE | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| | ALDE | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| | all | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 2nd period 2007-09 | EPP | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| | PSE | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| | ALDE | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| | all | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| 3rd period 2009-11 | EPP | 1 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| | PSE | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| | ALDE | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| | all | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| whole period 2004-11 | EPP | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| | PSE | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| | ALDE | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| | all | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |

Speaking in terms of statistically significant differences, in the first half term (2004-2006) CEE MEPs were less often engaged in all the activities except for submitting written declarations. In the second half term (2007-2009) they engaged less in drafting reports, tabling amendments to reports, and putting parliamentary questions. CEE MEPs remained under-represented in these three activities also in the first part of the new Parliament (2009-2011). However, in the case of tabling motions for resolutions CEE MEPs were more active than their colleagues from the old member states.

The importance and relevance of these different parliamentary activities to the actual legislative decision-making varies substantially. Each of them is precisely defined in the EP Rules of Procedure (European Parliament 2011). By far the most important are committee reports. However, the importance of even these reports varies greatly. Reports under co-decision, budgetary and discharge procedures can be considered as the most important. The EP's own initiative reports might be politically relevant, but have less impact in the legislative process. In our dataset we do not distinguish between different types of reports. Drafting reports is an exclusive activity which is always assigned to particular MEPs. Each political group is, according to its size, allocated a certain number of reports which the group leadership (especially the

coordinator) distributes among the group members. The second most relevant kinds of reports to the actual legislative process in the Parliament are amendments to reports.

The T-tests we performed clearly showed that MEPs from CEE were rapporteurs statistically significantly less often than MEPs from older member states. This confirms the findings of Kaeding and Hurka (2011). However, our findings also show that this trend did not significantly change in the 7th Parliament, where CEE MEPs were also less often reporters than their peers. Also, in the case of tabling amendments to reports and putting parliamentary questions, CEE MEPs were significantly under-represented in each of the observed terms and the whole plenary as well as in the three biggest political groups separately. Also, as regards these two activities, the trend of under-representation of CEE MEPs did not change in the first part of the new Parliament. This confirms the existence of systematic under-representation in key parliamentary work and thus confirms our hypothesis.

On the other hand, we can see that in some activities CEE MEPs are represented equally in most cases, especially as regards submitting written declarations, drafting opinions and giving speeches in the plenary. In a few cases in the first part of the 7th Parliament CEE MEPs are even over-represented as regards speeches of MEPs from the PSE group, motions for resolutions in the EPP group and written declarations in both the EPP and PSE groups. However, it is necessary to note that these parliamentary activities are not essential to the actual legislative process and thus cannot compensate for the lack of CEE MEP participation in key activities such as drafting reports and tabling amendments.

We also found that MEPs from CEE were relatively less engaged in some of the parliamentary activities which are not restricted by the political group leadership and are based only on the individual MEPs' initiative, e.g. parliamentary questions. From this fact we can assume either that CEE MEPs were relatively less active and showed less initiative in parliamentary work relative to their colleagues from older member states, or that they lacked access to information which would enable them to engage in these activities. All in all, we can assume that CEE MEPs were not only victims of tendencies towards oligarchization within the political groups which allocate parliamentary jobs, but also that CEE MEPs make their exclusion easier due to the lack of their own initiative and pro-activity.

3.3. Integration into voting patterns

In order to determine whether MEPs from the new member states were integrated into voting patterns in the European Parliament, we studied the voting records of all individual MEPs in the

6th EP and in the first two years of the 7th Parliament. The overall voting pattern was that MEPs increasingly voted along political group lines and decreasingly along the national delegation line (Hix, A. G. Noury, and Roland 2007). We used data from the VoteWatch.EU website (www.votewatch.eu/cx_meps_statistics.php) labelled “voting loyalty” of the individual MEPs expressed in percentages. “Loyalty” to a political group shows how often an MEP votes with the majority of MEPs from the same political group. In other words, this measure is the percentage of times an MEP votes with the majority (i.e. Max[Yes,No,Abstain]) of his/her political group in a given period.

We processed the data using a statistical programme employing a two-sample T-test with unequal variance assumed. The T-test clearly showed that CEE MEPs in the three biggest groups (EPP, PSE and ALDE) voted more often with the majority of their groups than MEPs from older member states, and that this difference was statistically significant. This means that MEPs from new member states strengthened rather than weakened the voting cohesion of the political groups. This was found by Coman (2009) using data for only the beginning of the 6th term, and we can confirm his findings on the basis of data for the whole period and the first part of the 7th term.

Thus, we can conclude that new MEPs not only integrated into the voting patterns already existing in the EP, but actually followed the overall trend of voting behaviour more closely than the MEPs from older member states. In line with our hypothesis, they fully adapted to the existing norms in the new environment. However, this result actually shows that CEE MEPs used the possibility to vote differently from their political group, which could reflect specific interests they represent, less often than the rest of the MEPs. The question is why. The explanation is unlikely to be that they had less specific preferences (such as national, regional or other) than other MEPs. It is reasonable to assume that CEE MEPs relied on their political group voting instructions (the so called “voting lists”) more, because they had less information about potential alternatives. Therefore, this above-average voting conformity on the part of new MEPs indicates that they were less integrated into the political life of the Parliament. They were not able to formulate their own specific positions and thus depended more on official voting lists than their fellows from other member states.

Conclusions

In this article we addressed the puzzle of how EP political groups were able to maintain their voting cohesion after the enlargements of 2004 and 2007, which introduced a significant number

of new member states MEPs with potentially different preferences and modes of voting behaviour. We introduced three general theoretical assumptions of oligarchization, formalization and adaptation, which could provide an answer to this puzzle. On the basis of these theoretical assumptions, we formulated three hypotheses regarding the integration of CEE MEPs into parliamentary leadership, work and voting patterns. In order to test the hypotheses we relied on data on the composition of leadership positions in the European Parliament and the two biggest political groups. We also employed data from the VoteWatch.EU website regarding individual MEPs' parliamentary work records and voting behaviour.

Our findings can be summarised in the following way. Regarding leadership positions, we found that MEPs from CEE countries were significantly underrepresented especially among the political group presidents and committee chairs, the two most important types of positions. Moreover, we found that this trend did not change in the first half term of the 7th EP, which indicates the rather systematic under-representation of CEE MEPs. These findings are completely in line with our hypothesis that the MEPs from older member states will try to maintain their positions in parliamentary leadership at the expense of the newcomers. This oligarchical tendency should not be understood as a result of conscious intentions of the MEPs from older Member States. As the oligarchization assumptions states, it is rather a natural result of the technical and mechanical dynamics of big organizations.

We also studied the integration of CEE MEPs into parliamentary work. Our findings confirmed prior evidence that MEPs from new member states were significantly underrepresented among the rapporteurs as well as in other key parliamentary activities such as tabling amendments to reports and putting parliamentary questions. Our findings, however, show that this trend of under-representation, which is present in both terms of the 6th EP, continues also in the 7th Parliament. Again, we can conclude that this demonstrates the systematic under-representation of new MEPs, who are thus relatively excluded from the legislative work of the European Parliament.

Finally, we examined the voting patterns adopted by new member states MEPs. Interestingly we found that new MEPs not only voted in line with their political groups, but also that they actually voted with their group majority more often than their fellows from older member states. There could be several explanations for this. Nevertheless, it certainly confirms our hypothesis that new MEPs will adapt to existing voting patterns rather than defect.

All in all, our findings confirm our hypotheses, formulated on the bases of general theoretical assumptions of social science. We can conclude that, during the period under

investigation, MEPs from CEE member states integrated into key positions and activities in the European Parliament relatively poorly despite the fact that they followed the voting instructions of their political groups more often than longer-standing MEPs. The theoretical assumptions we made certainly do not provide sufficient explanation for this. Therefore, further and most probably qualitative research will be needed to explain precisely why new CEE MEPs integrated in this rather curious way to the EP. To solve the puzzle presented in this article, we can conclude that the political groups were able to maintain or even slightly increase their voting cohesion after eastern enlargement, because they managed to marginalize the influence of MEPs from the new CEE member states on the legislative process in the European Parliament.

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