

The Impact of the European Parliament in the Portuguese MEPs

Fernanda Neutel*

Many theorists have suggested that the European Union will be an elite led process with gradual change of loyalties at the institutional level. However, there are not many empirical evidences proving the argument. In this essay, I shall argue that the Portuguese Members of the European Parliament have changed attitudes since they first joined the European Parliament. It will be shown that, whereas in 1986 they voted with the right when they disagreed with their Euro-groups, in 1994/95 a balance between right and left had almost been achieved.

1- Is there a European elite in the making?

Theories of integration have not directly tackled the issue of integration at people's level. Most theorists suggest that there will be a change at the grass-roots level, but they do not exactly explain how this is going to take place. It is a fact that social and economic integration is higher than political integration within the European Union. Public attitudes have also been changing in the direction of more support for integration and the younger generations are more integrated than the older ones.¹ Nevertheless, a theory on this issue has not yet been developed

*Universidade Lusófona de Humanidades
e Tecnologias

However, there are some studies predicting the issue at the elite level. The Federalist approach, for instance, foresaw the creation of a Constitution for Europe within an elite-led process. Functionalism talks about the development of a socio-psychological community, ties of mutual affection, identity, loyalty in a learning process where welfare institutions will command the development of the new ties and the neofunctionalist approach presupposes an elite led process with gradual changes of loyalty at the institutional level.

Some political scientists have even considered those who work in the European Parliament, the MEPs chosen by the people in elections set up especially for that purpose, the front-runners of the process. Representing the people's Europe, with a long tradition of fighting to increase the skills of the institution, used to holding power in their countries, they are supposed to be absorbed into the system becoming strong defenders of the process and carrying their convictions to the domestic scene after finishing their mandate.² In the meantime, their relationship with the national middle-level party elite would also contribute to disseminating of information about European issues.³

However, there are not many studies with evidence that elites are changing attitudes at European level. An interview survey carried out in 1967-68 among French and German parliamentarians by Henry Kerr, showed that MEPs seem to undergo 'cognitive' but not 'affective' changes. They have become more European in the sense that they have found and developed common identifications with their counterparts, but they have not become more committed to the European cause. In Kerr's opinion, this can be explained because they were not really working for the European Parliament, they were working for their national states.⁴

In this essay, I intend to contribute for the scientific debate by showing evidences of changes in voting behaviour of the Portuguese members of the European Parliament. It will be proved that whereas in 1986 they voted with the right when they disagreed with their Euro-groups, in 1994/95 a balance between right and left had almost been achieved. However, before presenting these results, I shall first attempt a brief survey on Portugal in the eighties to give an idea about what was behind the Portuguese who first went to the EP. I shall also describe party affiliation in the European Parliament to explain how the Portuguese chose their partners. A brief outline on the sessions of the EP to illustrate voting regulation will also take place as well as a brief comparison between the Portuguese Parties and the European Parties as far as the right-left dimension is concerned. Finally, the results of the voting behaviour of the Portuguese MEPs in 1986 and in 1995 will be shown.

Data supporting the results comprises 674-recorded votes: 100 in 1986/89; 100 in 1989/94; and 474 for 1994/95. The scientific source was the Journal of the European Communities. Graphics and tables will also help in showing the results. This information is part of a PhD research project.

2- Portugal in the eighties

Portugal joined the European Union in 1986 just after a cabinet crisis. The Socialists and Social Democrats, in government since 1983, had just disbanded the cabinet and elections had taken place, with victory for the Social Democrats in October 1985. In 1987, following a motion of censure in Parliament, new elections took place and the Social Democrats won a majority in Parliament, thus ensuring stability for the executive.

The new context gave momentum to the economy and created conditions for social

development. The influx of capital from the Union- 1 billion 700 million Ecus to secure accession- a programme of privatisation and economic growth based on low inflation and controlled deficit, made it possible for unemployment to fall from 10.4% in 1985 to 4.8% in 1991, with an average growth rate of 4 percent, whilst that of the EC was 3.1 percent.⁵ A structural fund programme whereby Portugal would be provided with financial help until 1999- and thereafter renegotiated- was implemented.

During this period, Portuguese attitudes towards political participation were changing. Political parties in opposition, trade unions and social organizations were reformulating their protests. The Media also became an important forum for debate and political protest. Portuguese membership of the Union was fundamental: it boosted the economy; it created jobs and it imposed aims and goals. It was a promise in 1977, it became a reality in 1986 and still is a promise.

3- Looking for a Partner in the European Parliament

Since 1952, the national delegations from every country in the European Parliament have easily organised around the traditional party families. Issues are tackled more on pragmatic grounds, but there is a clear divide between right and left, so, it is possible to talk about a Centre- Right bloc made up of Liberals, Christian-Democrats and Conservatives; a Left bloc, comprising the Radical left, the Greens and the Socialists; and a Right bloc, composed of the Extreme Right and Anti-Europeans. It is also possible to talk about a Centre Right bloc, including Liberals, Christian Democrats and Conservatives and a Pro-European bloc consisting of Socialists, Regionalists, Liberals and Christian Democrats.⁶

In 1986, the Portuguese MEPs were chosen by proportion to those sitting in the Portuguese Assembly. There were five parties: the Social Democrats (PSD), the Socialists (PS), the

Democratic Reformist Party (PRD), the Christian Democrats (CDS) and the Communists (the PCP). The first three were at the centre of the left/right spectrum, though with differences: the Socialists and the PRD more to the left and the Social Democrats to the right. The Christian Democrats were clearly positioned at the right, and the Communists at the extreme left.

In the European Parliament, two sort of Euro-party affiliations took place: one composed of those genuinely associated with their Euro party family- the Socialists (PS) and the Christian Democrats (CDS); the other, with those joining their European counterparts on pragmatic grounds- the Social Democrats (PSD) and the Renewal Democratic party (PRD). In the first category, the Socialists, part of the International Socialist since 1984, and the Confederation of European and Social Democrats and Socialists with strong links with the German Social Democratic Party, joined the PSE in the European Parliament.⁷ The CDS linked with the Federation of Conservative and Christian Democratic parties since the early eighties joined the EPP.⁸ With European attitudes similar to their European counterparts, both have presented a stable profile: the Socialists up to the present, the CDS up to 1992. In the second category, the Social-Democratic PSD was first rejected by the PSE in 1974; in 1980, it established links with the German Liberal Party, and in 1986, it joined the LDR in the European Parliament, more out of a need to fit into one of the families rather than for reasons of 'ideological-programmatic identity'⁹. More recently, this party joined the PPE. The PRD, a faction of the Socialists, contested national elections in 1985 with a similar programme but using a moralising propaganda, and in the EP, they joined the UPE/RDE, a French 'Gaullist' dominated party. Both would be the national delegation with most problems. They were to change Euro-group during the following legislatures, but the PRD was to change twice.

4- Voting in the European Parliament

Every month, for one week, in the Strasbourg session of the European Parliament legislation is discussed and voted on after being prepared by MEPs assembled in small committees. They are free to vote as they choose but there is also the need to shape opinions with the Euro-group so that resolutions can be approved, particularly since some non- compulsory resolutions became legislation after the Single European Act of 1986.

Political positions are prepared in advance by the national delegations individually and by the Euro-groups assembled to discuss the group positions. If national delegations decide to opt-out, they can. However, they should inform the Euro-group first. Individual MEPs can also vote against their national delegations. When they do so, they take positions either to the right or to the left of the political spectrum, indicating different ideological stances from their colleagues.

4.1- Dissenting with the Right in the European Parliament

4.1.1- Comparing the Portuguese parties to their European counterparts

In order to understand the position of the Portuguese national delegations in the European Parliament as far as the right-left spectrum is concerned, I compared the Portuguese parties to their European families. For that purpose, I drew up a table made up of data provided by some political scientists. For further details, see table 1.

As can be seen in, the Portuguese are rather more right wing oriented than their European counterparts are. In general, the Portuguese parties are 3.56 percent more to the right than those from the same European ideological family, with Social Democrats and Socialists displaying greater similarities, and those, in the fringes of the left/right

spectrum, the Christian Democrats and the Communists, the biggest differences. The long dictatorship may explain this behaviour. What exists in Portugal today is a fusion of values, a process where the quest for modernity is very strong but where tradition still ensures the future. No doubt, the Portuguese political tradition is embedded on right wing values. Obviously, the Portuguese elite mirror this political tradition.

Table 1 also shows that the Portuguese Social Democrats and the Portuguese Socialists are more European than the rest of their colleagues. Conversely, Communists and the CDS show an opposite profile. As to the first two, they are newcomers with strong ambitions to hold government cabinets. Therefore, they need to show credentials. They also need the European project to support their political ambitions. As to the second group, they just mirror their traditions.

4.1.2- The Portuguese in the European Parliament

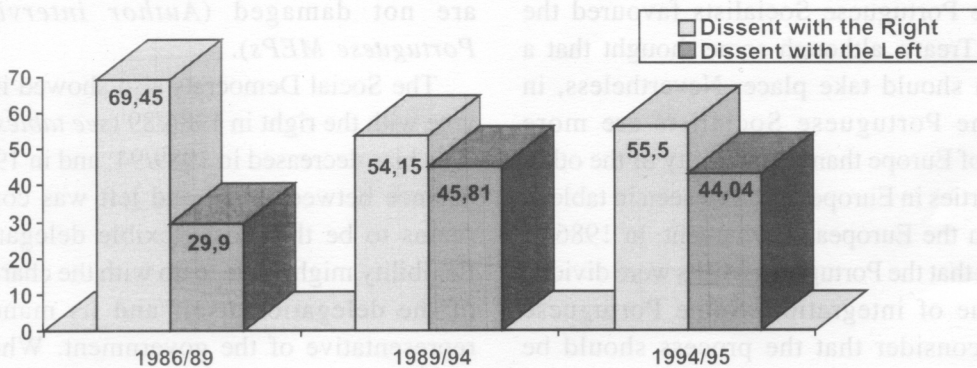
The Portuguese members of the European Parliament in 1986, following their political traditions, also show to be more right wing oriented. In an analysis of their voting dissent behaviour from 1986 to 1995,¹⁰ I also concluded that in the first three years of Portuguese participation in the European Parliament, they voted with the right when they disagreed with those belonging to their Euro-group (*see Figure 1*). This bias was significantly high during the period 1986/89 (69.45). In 1989/94, the difference between left and right was reduced (54.15); and in 1994/95, the difference between right and left was similar to the previous period (55.5 to 44.04 percent). However, although the bias to vote with the right had changed, a tendency to align with the right was still in operation.

Table 1- Comparing the Portuguese Parties to other Parties in the European Union concerning the left Right dimension and Europe

PARTIES	Portuguese Left/Right dimension %	Left/Right Mean position of the ideological related European parties %	Portuguese Parties and Europe %	European Mean position of the ideological related parties of Europe %
Centre and Democratic Party - CDS	8.38	6.71	66	73.8
Social Democratic Party - PSD	6.38	6.4	79	75.1
Socialist Party - PS	4.88	4.3	75	64.3
Communist Party-PC	3.63	2.3	31	34.4
Deviation Range	3.56 + to the right		3.4+ European	

Table organised by the author with data provided by Hix, S., and Lord, C., *Political Parties in the European Union*, (London: Macmillan press, 1997), pp. 41-52. According to the authors, data on the positions of the parties on the left-right spectrum that are used here, were taken from Hubert and Hinglehart, 'Expert Interpretations of Party Space and Party Locations in 42 societies', *Party Politics*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 72-111; and Mavgardatos, G. 'The Greek Party System: A case of Limited but Polarised Pluralism', *West European Politics*, Vol. VII, pp. 156- 69. The figures for the position of parties on Europe refer to the number of people who identify with a particular party who think the EU is a 'good thing' minus the number of people who identify with the same party who think the EU is a 'bad thing'.

Figure 1- Total Dissent Alignments from 1986 to 1995



4.2- Individual dissent

Tables 2 and 3 show how individual delegations voted. As can be seen, the delegation most inclined to vote with the right has been the Socialist. From 1986/89 to 1989/94, this tendency decreased significantly, and in 1994/95 the gap between right and left was more or less the same as in the previous period. However, there was still a bias to vote with the right. Internal domestic problems, a loose co-ordination at the beginning and no government to back-up in the European Council of Ministers, may provide some explanations. In fact, the Socialists joined the European Parliament during a period of great internal disruption. Exhausted by a long period of restraint, the national party was in a state of disarray and of reorganisation. In the European Parliament, the MEPs were left more or less free to decide what they wanted and to learn about the process (*interview with 1986 Socialist MEP*). Besides, at that time, they did not have a government to align their positions and to back up in the European Council of Ministers, and they had a traditional electorate to respond. In the European Parliament, they joined a group which is somewhat divided to how much the process of integration should develop. The European Socialists were divided throughout Europe concerning the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty. The Portuguese Socialists favoured the Maastricht Treaty, although some thought that a referendum should take place. Nevertheless, in general, the Portuguese Socialists are more supportive of Europe than the majority of the other Socialist parties in Europe as can be seen in table 1. However, in the European Parliament, in 1986, it was evident that the Portuguese MEPs were divided on the issue of integration. Some Portuguese Socialists consider that the process should be accelerated even against the will of other countries, but there were those who did not.¹¹ The European

Socialists are moderately in favour of state intervention but do not favour state interference on issues like *abortion, freedom of consciousness and freedom of sexuality*.¹² Abortion, for instance, is illegal in Portugal and it was a coalition of Socialists and Social Democrats that approved it in 1984. However, in 1990, when a resolution favouring the legalisation of abortion in the European Parliament, took place, the Portuguese Socialists favoured it.¹³ The Portuguese Socialists also showed divergences on *Conscientious objection*, on *Enlargement on Political freedom* within the Union and on the *Common Agriculture Policy*. The Union's Agriculture policy has, in fact, been highly condemned by some Socialists. In interview with the author of this article, in 1996, one Socialist MEP argued: *The most sensitive problem is Agriculture, the most unfair for the Southern countries. I also think that it is the one that has the least sense of justice in the Union. It is all about old lobbies created at the beginning of the Union, which were never overcome*. The Budget is also a source of disagreement between the Portuguese and the European Socialists. The Portuguese think that the Southern countries should get more structural funds; the European Socialists think that unemployment should be the priority; the Portuguese Socialists do not disagree provided the Social and Cohesion funds are not damaged (*Author interview with Portuguese MEPs*).

The Social Democrats also showed inclined to vote with the right in 1986/89 (*see tables 2 and 3*). This bias decreased in 1989/94; and in 1994/95 the balance between right and left was complete. It seems to be the most flexible delegation. This flexibility might have to do with the characteristics of the delegation itself and its mandate as a representative of the government. Whereas, the Socialists have easily won elections since the 70s, the Social Democrats had to fight their way to power.

This made them pragmatic, professional politicians for whom power had to be won, and secured. The national delegations also had to back up its leader in the European Council of Ministers. They had to prepare the way for the government, either by informing them about the mood of the institutions and, through the tools at their disposal, trying to rally supporters to their policies. This might explain why their results exhibit more flexibility as far as the right/left split is concerned. In the European Parliament, they joined the European Liberals, a Euro-group with the most supporters throughout Europe. The European Liberals are a heterogeneous group, voting sometimes to the right of the Christian Democrats on economic freedom, and to the left on social and political freedom.¹⁴ The Portuguese Social Democrats are also heterogeneous occupying unstable positions on the left-right spectrum. Some electorate that disagree with state intervention and others favouring the welfare state supports them. During the 1989/94 period, it was possible to see disagreements on *Agriculture* with some MEPs supporting a more European centralised policy-making; it was also possible to find complete opposition to their Euro-group on issues like *Conscientious Objection*, and a partial opposition on *Abortion*. *Enlargement* was also a controversial issue, particularly because, as then considered, it would be greatly damaging to the small countries. The MEPs interviewed by the author confirmed this left/right imbalance, stating that: *there are factions more to the right and some more to the left. The delegation is divided on Social issues- drugs, abortion, environment- where there is a faction biased to the left.*

The Portuguese Christian Democrats were linked to the European People's Party in the EP until 1994, when they were expelled for voting against the Maastricht Treaty. The European Christian Democrats are parties strongly supportive

of European integration (*see Table 2*), but the Portuguese Christian Democrats are less enthusiastic about Europe than most of their counterparts (*see table 1*). In the EP, there have not been substantial disagreements, although *Civil Rights* and *Enlargement*, in 1989/94, were a source of controversy. In 1994/95, however, the new delegation showed itself to be more right wing oriented (*see Tables 2 and 3*).

The Portuguese Communists joined the Radical left in the European Parliament. They are not keen on European integration; however, they have happily been working within the structures of the system. In the EP, they have had some misfortunes. They joined a group that split in 1989. During the 1989/94 period, the new Radical left group almost disappeared and one of the Portuguese members was expelled from the Portuguese delegation for alleged disagreements concerning European policies. Like most Communist parties, they opposed more integration and voted against the Maastricht Treaty. In the EP, the Communist delegation has been strongly involved in Social issues and the Budget, and has been very critical about the Union's policies. There are no deep splits within the delegation. However, *Employment*, *Fisheries* or *Agriculture* may give rise to some controversy.

5- Conclusion

In the analysis showed above, I concluded that, in the European Parliament, the Portuguese MEPs have mirrored their traditions. Following their political cultural practice, they were more right oriented when they first joined the Union, but in 1995 the gap between right and left diminished.

Social issues have been one of the keystones for disagreement. Divergences on economic issues, enlargement and agriculture or the budget reveal national preoccupations and different assumptions

Table 2- Delegations Dissent Alignments with the Right -1986 to 1995

Delegations/ Euro-groups	1986/89 Alignments to the Right %	1989/94 Alignments to the Right %	1994/95 Alignments to the Right %	Average Alignments to the Right %
PSD/ELDR	15.17	15.27	27.75	19.40
PS/PSE	40	34.72	19.38	31.36
CDS/PPE	-	4.16	-	4.16
CDS/PP/RDE	-	-	6.17	6.17
CDU/COM	-	-	-	
CDU/LU	-	-	-	
PCP/GUE	-	-	2.20	2.20
PRD/RDE	14.28	-	-	14.28
Total Sum	69.45	54.15	55.5	59.7

Table 3- Delegations Dissent Alignments with the Left- 1986/1995

Delegations/ Euro-groups	1986/89 Alignments to the Left %	1989/94 Alignments to the Left %	1994/95 Alignments to the Left %	Average Alignments to the Left%
PSD/ELDR	4.2	11.11	27.75	14.35
PS/PSE	20	29.16	11.45	20.20
CDS/PPE	-	4.16	-	4.16
CDS/PP/RDE	-	-	3.96	3.96
CDU/COM	-	-	-	
CDU/LU	-	1.38	-	1.38
PCP/GUE	-	-	0.88	0.88
PRD/RDE	5.7	-	-	5.7
Total Sum	29.9	45.81	44.04	39.91

as to what the national interest is. Individually, the small delegations, the Christian Democrats and the Communists, seem to have fewer disagreements. The Socialists and the Social Democrats, the core of the Portuguese party system, are the two where splits between right and left are deeper; the Socialists more than the Social Democrats.

In the beginning of this paper, I quoted the neofunctionalist theory, which hypothesizes that an elite led process will gradually change loyalties at the institutional level. I also quoted Kerr's assumption that MEPs after spending some time in the European Parliament become more European in the sense that they find and develop common identifications with their counterparts. Following the theory, the analysis showed above points out how institutions can act upon people's attitudes. It does not prove that MEPs changed loyalties or became carriers of integration but it shows that they changed the way they operate at the European level and how they conceive European decisions. We can even argue that it can help up the process of Europeanization at the national elite level and at the grass-roots level. In fact, they exert influence upon national politicians. They can also exert influence at the grass-roots level, contributing for the process of integration.

However, what these findings show of prime significance is the changing character of the Portuguese elite working in the European Parliament. This tendency to change has been confirmed by the MEPs themselves in interviews with the author. One even stated that *participation in the European project really changed me. It contributed to a great change in my political behaviour. It allowed me to understand the narrowness of strictly national policies.* Others revealed that when they return to Portugal they will never 'make politics' as they used to do in the past.

Notes

- ¹ Inglehart, Leon, *The Political Dynamics of European Integration*, (Stanford: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 6.
- ² Haas, E. *The Uniting of Europe*, (Stanford: University Press, 1968) pp. 17-19; 285-299; 439-440; and Cotta, Mauricio, 'Direct Elections of the European Parliament: A Supranational Political Elite in the making?', in Reif, K., (ed.,) *European Elections 1979/81 and 1984 Conclusions and Perspectives from Empirical Research European*, (Electoral Studies:Quorum, 1984), p. 124.
- ³ Reif, Karlheinz, Cayrol, R., and Niedermayer, 'National Political Parties' Middle Level Elites And European Integration', *European Journal of Political Research*, 8 (1980), pp. 91-112
- ⁴ Kerr, Henry, 'Changing Attitudes Through International Participation:European Parliamentarians and Integration', *International Organization*, n. 27, 1973, pp. 45-83.
- ⁵ *Eighteenth General Report on the Activities of the European Community 1984*, (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Community, 1985), no. 18, p.239; *Diário da Assembleia da República, 2ª Sessão Legislativa, III Legislatura, I Série- n 68, 12 de Abril de 1985.*
- ⁶ For more information, see Hix, S., and Lord, C., *Political Parties in the European Union*, (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1997), pp. 21-53.
- ⁷ Ferreira, H. G., and Marshall, M. L., *Portugal's Revolution: Ten Years On*, (Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 212.
- ⁸ *ibidem*, p. 214.
- ⁹ Lopes, P., S., 'PPD/PSD:a dependência do carisma', Coelho, M. B., *Portugal O Sistema Político e Constitucional 1974 1987*, (Lisboa:Instituto de Ciências Sociais, 1988), p.191. Ferreira, H.G., and Marshall M. W., *op cit.*, p. 214.
- ¹⁰ These results are part of a PhD research project in the University of Leeds, Department of Politics. The source was the *Journal of the European Communities*. The thesis is waiting publication.
- ¹¹ *Journal of the European Communities, Debates*, No C 69/149, 16.2.89.
- ¹² Hix, S., and Lord, C., *Political Parties in the European Union*, (London: Macmillan press, 1997), pp. 41-52.
- ¹³ *Official Journal of the European Communities*, No C 96/27, 12 March 1990.
- ¹⁴ Hix, S., and Lord, C., *Political Parties in the European Union*, (London: Macmillan press, 1997), pp. 32-35.

Bibliography

- Eighteenth General Report on the Activities of the European Community 1984*, (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Community, 1985), no. 18, p.239; *Diário da Assembleia da República, 2ª Sessão Legislativa, III Legislatura, I Série- n 68, 12 de Abril de 1985.*
- Ferreira, H. G., and Marshall, M. L., *Portugal's Revolution: Ten Years On*, (Cambridge University Press, 1986).
- Haas, E. *The Uniting of Europe*, (Stanford: University Press, 1968).
- Hix, S., and Lord, C., *Political Parties in the European Union*, (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1997).
- Inglehart, Leon, *The Political Dynamics of European Integration*, (Stanford: Princeton University Press, 1971).
- Journal of the European Communities, Debates*, No C 69/149, 16.2.89

- Kerr, Henry, 'Changing Attitudes Through International Participation:European Parliamentarians and Integration', *International Organization*, n. 27, 1973.
- Lopes, P., S., 'PPD/PSD:a dependência do carisma', Coelho, M. B., *Portugal O Sistema Político e Constitucional 1974 1987*, (Lisboa:Instituto de Ciências Sociais, 1988.
- Official Journal of the European Communities*, No C 96/27, 12 March 1990.
- Reif, K., (ed.,) *European Elections 1979/81 and 1984 Conclusions and Perspectives from Empirical Research European*, (Electoral Studies:Quorum, 1984).
- Reif, Karlheinz, Cayrol, R., and Niedermayer, 'National Political Parties' Middle Level Elites And European Integration', *European Journal of Political Research*, 8 (1980).