

Who calls the shots in the committees of the new European Parliament?

Sonia Piedrafita

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Abstract

This CEPS Special Report analyses the composition of the 20 committees in the new European Parliament and how representative they are of the 28 member states, identifying which policy areas or committees are of particular interest to MEPs from certain countries. It also examines the allocation of committee chairs and party coordinator positions to assess whether the country of origin matters and if so, why. The study reveals that in general the countries' share of representatives in the committees is very similar in most of the cases to their representation in Parliament. Still, some policy areas have a special relevance for some countries and attract their MEPs in larger numbers. Due to the procedure used in the allocation of the committee chairs, which favours the largest political groups and the largest national parties within them, MEPs from larger member states tend to hold most of these coveted positions. The internal process followed by the political groups in appointing their coordinators in the respective committees is predisposed towards MEPs with seniority, experience and good connections. All in all, the strategic relevance that national parties attach to these positions makes a difference.

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Introduction

Contrary to popular perception, nationality is not a dominant issue in the European Parliament (EP), as it is in the European Council and the Council. It is the EU citizens – and not the member states – that are represented in the EP, whose dynamics and politics are mainly shaped by ideological cleavages. Political groups (seven at the moment) are formed along the left-right axis – not geographical lines – and they serve as the engine of decision-making in the EP. Their members sit and most of the time vote together, regardless of their country of origin. The composition of the committees reflects the weight of the political groups in Parliament, and key positions are also allocated accordingly.

Nevertheless, given the central role that committees play in amending and adopting EU legislation, which has a powerful impact at the national level, member states and their citizens naturally have a strong stake in the membership and leadership of these bodies. It is therefore of great consequence to them in which committees their representatives sit and whether they hold influential positions.

On the basis of a proposal by the Conference of Presidents – the governing body of the European Parliament responsible *inter alia* for the organisation of Parliament's business and legislative planning – MEPs agree on the composition of the committees in the first session of Parliament.¹ The larger member states often have representation in almost every EP committee, but this is not the case for smaller states, which send fewer MEPs to Brussels. Moreover, when a particular policy area is of special importance to an EU country, the concerned committee might attract a large number of that country's MEPs. And this may come at the cost of its representation in other committees, especially in the case of smaller member states.

In addition to the rapporteurs, who are chosen on a case-by-case basis for each legislative proposal, the committee chairs play a key role in the work of the EP committees. They normally lead the legislative negotiations and are members of the Conference of Committee

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¹ The constituent session of the 8th European Parliament took place in Strasbourg, 1-4 July 2014. On that same occasion, the MEPs also elected the President of the Parliament, the Vice-Presidents and the Quaestors, who are the members of the Bureau, which decides on the EP's administrative, personnel and organisational matters.

Chairs, which is responsible for coordinating the work of the committees and ensuring cooperation between them.² The coordinators appointed by the political groups to each committee have also become relevant players, as shown recently by the confirmation hearings with the Commissioners-designate. In the allocation of these positions, differences across EU countries are significant. Generally, MEPs from large and old member states tend to hold these positions more often. These differences are to a large extent due to the procedure used in the distribution of the posts but are also often related to the fact that MEPs from some member states attach more importance to holding these positions and have stronger incentives to advance their career in the EP.

This paper examines and compares the composition of the EP committees and the assignment of their leadership positions on the basis of the MEPs' country of origin. Firstly, it analyses the composition of the committees and how representative they are of the 28 member states, identifying which policy areas or committees are of particular interest to MEPs from certain countries. Secondly, it investigates the allocation of committee chairs and party coordinator positions to assess the extent to which the country of origin matters and if so, why.

The composition of the EP committees according to MEPs' country of origin

At the moment, there are 20 permanent committees in the European Parliament, and two sub-committees.³ Table 1 lists the committees according to their level of activity in passing EU legislation. The ranking reflects each committee's involvement in both ordinary legislative procedures (OLP) and special legislative procedures (SLP), namely assent and consultation, on the basis of a special index devised for this purpose. The index assigns double weight to the OLPs, given that the EP exercises co-legislative power in these cases with the Council and therefore has an equal capacity to shape and adopt proposals from the European Commission.⁴

The number of members in each committee varies from 25 to 71 MEPs and is agreed by the political groups at the start of each legislature, taking into account the committee's competences and workload and, especially, the level of interest on the part of MEPs to be a member. Therefore, with the exception of the Foreign Affairs Committee, the largest committees also tend to be the most active in passing legislation. The Legal Affairs Committee is relatively small but active in passing legislation mainly in the area of intellectual property and company law.

² The chairs of the committees were elected in the constituent committee sessions on 7 July 2014.

³ The Human Rights (DROI) and Security and Defence (SEDE) are both Subcommittees of the Foreign Affairs Committee.

⁴ Despite being grouped together for analytical purposes, the EP's leverage is greater in the assent procedure than in the consultation procedure. As the recent ratification process of international agreements has shown, the EP might make its approval contingent on a number of conditions and can thus influence the final agreement.

Table 1. EP committees ordered by volume of legislative activity (2009-2014 legislature)

		Members in the committee	Total OLPs	Total SLPs	Indexed legislative activity [*]
Environment, Public Health and Food Safety	ENVI	69	59	4	61
Economic and Monetary Affairs	ECON	61	48	18	57
Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs	LIBE	60	51	5	53.5
International Trade	INTA	41	43	0	43
Internal Market and Consumer Protection	IMCO	40	34	17	42.5
Industry, Research and Energy	ITRE	67	35	2	36
Legal Affairs	JURI	25	35	2	36
Transport and Tourism	TRAN	49	28	3	29.5
Agriculture and Rural Development	AGRI	45	27	1	27.5
Fisheries	PECH	25	21	2	22
Employment and Social Affairs	EMPL	55	19	3	20.5
Regional Development	REGI	43	14	4	16
Culture and Education	CULT	31	5	10	10
Budgets	BUDG	41	7	5	9.5
Constitutional Affairs	AFCO	25	1	13	7.5
Foreign Affairs	AFET	71	7	0	7
Women's rights and gender equality	FEMM	35	4	2	5
Development	DEVE	28	3	0	3
Budgetary Control	CONT	30	2	0	2
Petitions	PETI	35	0	0	0

* The *indexed legislative activity* is calculated as the number of ordinary legislative procedures plus half the number of special legislative procedures.

Source: Author's own elaboration based on data from the Legislative Observatory.⁵

Following the elections to the EP, the political groups and the non-attached Members nominate candidates for the various committees and submit their names to the Conference of Presidents, which prepares a proposal on the composition of the committees, which must reflect the overall composition of the Parliament.⁶ Despite the fact that the allocation of seats in each committee is made according to the representation of the political groups in the EP, the resulting composition is also fairly representative of the relative weight of member states in Parliament.

Table 2 shows the difference between the actual share of representatives from each country in a committee and the share that one would expect by multiplying the size of that committee by the percentage of MEPs in Parliament coming from that country.⁷ Overall, the difference between the actual and the expected representation in most committees is not remarkable. Broadly speaking, the committees tend to reflect the composition of the overall Parliament as regards not only the weight of the political groups but also the member states. Discrepancies to this general trend are exceptional and not particularly significant. The committees that are the most active in passing EU legislation do not seem to attract more MEPs from certain member states. The importance attached to a particular policy area by a particular country appears to be more important in explaining why there are proportionally more MEPs from a

⁵ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/search/search.do?searchTab=y>

⁶ According to rule 199 of the rules of procedure, at least 40 MEPs may table amendments to the Conference of Presidents' proposal, which will then be voted on by Parliament by secret ballot.

⁷ Values are absolute and therefore do not take into account the relative size of the country.

country in any one committee. In the case of smaller member states, this might come at the cost of having no representation in other committees, as the findings summarised below illustrate.

- MEPs from Croatia, Hungary and Italy have shown a special interest in the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Committee (ENVI) this legislature. For a large member state, such as Italy, this is not problematic and Italian MEPs are still evenly spread over the other committees. But for smaller countries such as Croatia (with 11 MEPs) and Hungary (with 21), this affects their representation in other committees. There are three MEPs from Croatia and four from Hungary in ENVI, but these countries have no representation at all in 11 and five other committees, respectively. In contrast, the share of Greece's representatives in ENVI is slightly lower than the overall representation of this country in Parliament.
- The Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee (ECON) seems to attract German, Greek and especially Belgian MEPs in the new Parliament. There are five Belgian and four Greek MEPs in this committee but no MEPs from these countries in other committees. Belgium and Greece have each 21 representatives in Parliament. Overall, MEPs from the euro area seem to be more attracted to the ECON and Budgets (BUDG) Committees than those from non-euro countries, with perhaps the exception of France.
- The Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Committee (LIBE) seems particularly appealing to Slovakian and especially Swedish MEPs. There are three MEPs from Slovakia and five from Sweden in LIBE, but there are no MEPs from these countries in nine and five other committees respectively.
- In the International Trade Committee (INTA), France and Italy account for a particularly large share of the members.
- The Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee (IMCO) attracts MEPs especially from the Czech Republic and France. Conversely, the share of Germany's representatives in this committee is slightly low.
- In the Industry, Research and Energy Committee (ITRE), Dutch, French and British MEPs are slightly underrepresented, as opposed to MEPs from Austria and Lithuania. There are four Austrian and three Lithuanian MEPs in this committee but there are no Austrian MEPs in six committees and no Lithuanian representatives in nine committees.
- Irish MEPs have shown a special interest in Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI), Portuguese in Fisheries (PECH) and Danish in Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL).
- In the Culture and Education Committee (CULT), the particularly high share of Bulgarian and Greek MEPs contrasts with the low share of French MEPs, compared to their respective total shares in Parliament.
- The Budgetary Control (CON) Committee appears to hold more appeal for MEPs from non-euro countries.
- Membership of the Foreign Affairs Committee (AFET) seems particularly attractive to Latvian, Croatian and Greek MEPs. Broadly speaking, AFET tends to appeal to MEPs from the new member states.
- Spanish MEPs are drawn to the Constitutional Affairs (AFCO), Development (DEVE) and especially Women's Right and Gender Equality (FEMM) Committees in this legislature.

Table 2. Difference between the share of MEPs from each country in each committee and the country's representation in Parliament

	MEPs in EP	ENVI	ECON	LIBE	INTA	IMCO	ITRE	JURI	TRAN	AGRI	PECH	EMPL	REGI	CULT	BUDG	AFCO	AFET	FEMM	DEVE	CONT	PETI
Austria	2.4%	-0.7	-0.5	1.6	1.0	-1.0	2.4	0.4	0.8	-0.1	-0.6	-1.3	0.0	-0.7	1.0	-0.6	0.3	1.2	-0.7	0.3	0.2
Belgium	2.8%	0.1	3.3	0.3	-0.1	-0.1	0.1	-0.7	-1.4	-0.3	-0.7	-0.5	-0.2	-0.9	-0.1	0.3	0.0	0.0	-0.8	0.2	-1.0
Bulgaria	2.3%	-1.6	-1.4	1.6	-0.9	0.1	1.5	0.4	-1.1	-1.0	-0.6	-0.2	1.0	2.3	0.1	-0.6	0.4	-0.8	-0.6	1.3	-0.8
Croatia	1.5%	2.0	0.1	-0.9	-0.6	-0.6	-1.0	-0.4	-0.7	0.3	0.6	-0.8	1.4	-0.5	-0.6	-0.4	2.0	0.5	0.6	-0.4	-0.5
Cyprus	0.8%	-0.6	0.5	-0.5	-0.3	-0.3	0.5	-0.2	-0.4	-0.4	-0.2	-0.4	-0.3	-0.2	0.7	-0.2	1.4	-0.3	-0.2	-0.2	1.7
Czech Republic	2.8%	0.1	0.3	-0.7	-0.1	2.9	1.1	1.3	-0.4	-1.3	-0.7	0.5	-0.2	0.1	-1.1	0.3	-1.0	0.0	-0.8	1.2	-1.0
Denmark	1.7%	0.8	-1.1	-1.0	-0.7	0.3	1.8	-0.4	-0.8	0.2	-0.4	2.0	-0.7	0.5	-0.7	0.6	-1.2	-0.6	-0.5	1.5	1.4
Estonia	0.8%	-0.6	-0.5	0.5	-0.3	-0.3	0.5	-0.2	-0.4	-0.4	-0.2	0.6	-0.3	0.8	1.7	-0.2	0.4	-0.3	-0.2	-0.2	0.7
Finland	1.7%	0.8	0.9	0.0	0.3	0.3	0.8	-0.4	0.2	-0.8	-0.4	-1.0	-0.7	-0.5	1.3	-0.4	-1.2	-0.6	1.5	0.5	-0.6
France	9.9%	0.2	-2.0	0.1	2.0	2.1	-2.6	1.5	1.2	0.6	0.5	1.6	-0.2	-2.1	0.0	0.5	-2.0	-3.4	-0.8	-1.0	-1.4
Germany	12.8%	0.2	2.2	-0.7	1.8	-2.1	-1.6	-0.2	-0.3	-0.8	-1.2	0.0	-0.5	0.0	0.8	-0.2	-0.1	-0.5	0.4	1.2	-2.3
Greece	2.8%	-1.9	2.3	-1.7	-1.1	-1.1	-0.9	0.3	1.6	-1.3	-0.7	0.5	0.8	2.1	-0.1	0.3	2.0	0.0	0.2	-0.8	2.0
Hungary	2.8%	2.1	-1.7	0.3	-1.1	-0.1	1.1	0.3	0.6	-0.3	-0.7	-0.5	-0.2	0.1	-1.1	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.2	-1.0
Ireland	1.5%	1.0	0.1	-0.9	-0.6	0.4	0.0	-0.4	0.3	2.3	0.6	0.2	-0.6	-0.5	0.4	-0.4	-1.0	-0.5	-0.4	-0.4	-0.5
Italy	9.7%	2.3	-0.9	1.2	2.0	-0.9	0.5	-0.4	0.2	0.6	0.6	-0.3	0.8	2.0	0.0	0.6	-1.9	-0.4	-0.7	-0.9	-0.3
Latvia	1.1%	-0.7	-0.6	-0.6	0.6	-0.4	0.3	-0.3	0.5	-0.5	-0.3	0.4	-0.5	-0.3	0.6	-0.3	2.2	-0.4	-0.3	-0.3	0.6
Lithuania	1.5%	0.0	-0.9	0.1	0.4	0.4	2.0	-0.4	-0.7	0.3	-0.4	0.2	0.4	-0.5	-0.6	-0.4	0.0	0.5	-0.4	0.6	-0.5
Luxembourg	0.8%	-0.6	-0.5	0.5	0.7	-0.3	0.5	0.8	0.6	-0.4	-0.2	-0.4	-0.3	-0.2	-0.3	-0.2	-0.6	-0.3	0.8	-0.2	-0.3
Malta	0.8%	0.4	0.5	0.5	-0.3	0.7	-0.5	0.8	-0.4	-0.4	-0.2	0.6	-0.3	-0.2	-0.3	-0.2	-0.6	-0.3	-0.2	-0.2	1.7
Netherlands	3.5%	0.6	0.9	0.9	0.6	-0.4	-2.3	-0.9	0.3	0.4	0.1	0.1	1.5	-1.1	-0.4	-0.9	1.5	-0.2	0.0	0.0	-1.2
Poland	6.8%	-0.7	-0.1	-2.1	-0.8	-0.7	0.5	1.3	0.7	1.9	-0.7	0.3	-0.9	0.9	0.2	1.3	-0.8	-0.4	0.1	0.0	0.7
Portugal	2.8%	-0.9	1.3	-0.7	-1.1	-0.1	-0.9	0.3	-0.4	-0.3	2.3	1.5	0.8	-0.9	0.9	1.3	-1.0	1.0	0.2	-0.8	-1.0
Romania	4.3%	0.1	-0.6	0.4	0.3	0.3	-0.9	-1.1	-0.1	1.1	0.9	-0.3	-0.8	0.7	0.3	-0.1	1.0	-0.5	0.8	0.7	0.6
Slovakia	1.7%	-0.2	-1.1	2.0	-0.7	1.3	-0.2	-0.4	-0.8	-0.8	-0.4	0.0	0.3	-0.5	0.3	-0.4	0.8	1.4	0.5	-0.5	0.4
Slovenia	1.1%	-0.7	-0.6	0.4	-0.4	0.6	-0.7	-0.3	-0.5	-0.5	-0.3	0.4	0.5	0.7	0.6	-0.3	1.2	-0.4	-0.3	0.7	-0.4
Spain	7.2%	0.0	-0.4	-2.3	-0.9	-0.9	1.2	-0.8	0.5	0.8	1.2	-1.0	-0.1	-1.2	-0.9	2.2	-0.1	3.5	2.0	-0.2	1.6
Sweden	2.7%	-0.8	0.4	3.4	-0.1	-0.1	0.2	0.3	0.7	-0.2	0.3	-0.5	-0.1	-0.8	-1.1	-0.7	-0.9	2.1	-0.7	-0.8	1.1
United Kingdom	9.7%	-0.7	0.1	-1.8	1.0	0.1	-3.5	-0.4	0.2	0.6	1.6	-1.3	-0.2	1.0	-1.0	-1.4	-0.9	-0.4	0.3	-0.9	-0.3

Source: Author's own elaboration.

The relevance of the country of origin in the allocation of committee chairs

Committee chairs play a key role in the work of the committees and the Parliament as a whole. The chair presides over the meetings of the committee, speaks on its behalf when sensitive votes are held in plenary and has an important function in the legislative process. The chair may propose the committee the approval of a Commission proposal without amendments or pursuant to a number of amendments following the simplified procedure.⁸ In the ordinary procedure, the chair usually leads the Parliament's delegation in the trilogue negotiations with the Council and the Commission. Chairs also represent their respective committees in the Conference of Committee Chairs, which makes recommendations to the Conference of Presidents about the work of committees and the drafting of the agenda of plenary sessions.⁹ The Conference of Committee Chairs also discusses horizontal issues and common problems, deals with conflicts of competence between committees and prepares the EP's contribution to the Commission's annual Work Programme, meeting once a year with the College of Commissioners. The Conference of Committee Chairs meets several times a year with the Council Presidency to prepare and discuss the priorities of Presidencies and to take stock of the work in progress.

At the beginning of each legislature, the vice-presidencies of the Parliament and the committee chairmanships are allocated between the different political groups using the d'Hondt formula.¹⁰ Non-attached Members do not take part in the allocation. Table 3 shows a hypothetical example of how 34 positions would be allocated among seven parties using this formula. In practice, the system allows for flexibility and, by common agreement, the main political parties may introduce changes to the resulting mathematical allocation. Given that positions are allocated from the higher to the lower quotients, the final distribution might also vary as a result of a group's special interest in a specific chair. It is, therefore, a flexible and informal procedure that ultimately depends on the agreement between the groups, and in the subsequent confirmation votes taking place either in the plenary (EP vice-presidencies) or the respective committees (chairs).

Table 3. Illustration of the d'Hondt formula for allocating 34 hypothetical positions among seven parties

	Seats	Quotients - Seats divided by:											
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Party A	221	221	110.5	73.7	55.3	44.2	36.8	31.6	27.6	24.6	22.1	20.1	18.4
Party B	191	191	95.5	63.7	47.8	38.2	31.8	27.3	23.9	21.2	19.1	17.4	15.9
Party C	70	70	35	23.3	17.5	14.0	11.7	10.0	8.8	7.8	7.0	6.4	5.8
Party D	67	67	33.5	22.3	16.8	13.4	11.2	9.6	8.4	7.4	6.7	6.1	5.6
Party E	52	52	26	17.3	13.0	10.4	8.7	7.4	6.5	5.8	5.2	4.7	4.3
Party F	50	50	25	16.7	12.5	10.0	8.3	7.1	6.3	5.6	5.0	4.5	4.2
Party G	48	48	24	16.0	12.0	9.6	8.0	6.9	6.0	5.3	4.8	4.4	4.0

Note: The number of seats that each party gets is divided successively by the numbers (1, 2, 3, 4, 5...), and positions are assigned in the order of the resulting quotients up to 34.

Source: Author's own elaboration.

As a result of these inter-group negotiations, this year, the Eurosceptic group Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD) failed to secure any committee chair (or vice-presidency) and the European Conservatives and Reformists group (ECR) obtained only one

⁸ Rule 50, Rules of Procedures of the European Parliament.

⁹ The chairs of the subcommittees are also members of the Conference.

¹⁰ Named after the Belgian mathematician, Victor d'Hondt, this approach employs a highest averages method for allocating seats in [party-list proportional representation](#).

vice-presidency of the Parliament, one committee chair and one sub-committee chair, despite being the third-largest group. With fewer seats in Parliament, but benefitting from its participation in the 'grand coalition', ALDE got two vice-presidencies and three committee chairs. The EPP group got six vice-presidencies and eight committee chairs and the S&D received the Presidency of the Parliament, three vice-presidencies and six committee chairs. The Greens and GUE/NGL got one vice-presidency and one committee chair each.

In a second stage, each political group divides the committee chairmanships and EP vice-presidencies among their respective national delegations, again using the d'Hondt method. The chairs are usually elected at the first meeting of each committee with not much contestation. Given the procedure in place, an MEP's chance to become a committee chair is higher if s/he belongs to a large political party affiliated with one of the biggest political groups in Parliament. With many of their MEPs affiliated with Eurosceptic parties, this explains in part why some old large member states such as France, the UK and Italy have lost ground compared to the previous legislature.¹¹ Other factors, however, such as the experience and expertise of the candidates and the inter-group negotiations also matter and might affect the outcome.

Table 4 compares the representation of member states in Parliament and the number of committee chairs they have filled, confirming these expectations. No less than 17 of the 20 committee chairs are held by MEPs from the six largest member states. The differences between them can be explained by looking into the internal composition of the political groups. German MEPs constitute the largest national group within the EPP and the second-largest within the S&D. The German Greens are also the most numerous in their group, and Die Linke is the largest political party in GUE/NGL. The Spanish Left, despite being the largest in size, includes very diverse parties such as Izquierda Unida, Podemos and several other small regional parties, and most of them are newcomers. The Spanish conservative party opted for a vice-presidency of the Parliament and not a committee chair, which, altogether, has left this country slightly underrepresented in leadership positions as compared to its overall representation in Parliament.¹² The Polish conservatives are the second largest group in the EPP, which has granted them three chairmanships.¹³

The other three committee chairs are held by MEPs from medium-sized countries that do not have a vice-presidency or other group leadership positions. Both the socialist and the conservative Romanian parties, as well as the Hungarian conservative FIDESZ/KDNP, preferred to have a vice-presidency of the Parliament. With the same representation in Parliament, Portugal and Greece did not get any committee chairs because the highest number of MEPs from these countries are affiliated to the S&D and GUE/NGL respectively, which did not have any more chairmanships to distribute.

A Bulgarian MEP got a committee chair, despite Bulgaria's smaller representation in Parliament. With four MEPs, the Bulgarian liberal party is the second biggest in ALDE. In the case of Belgium and the Netherlands, most of their MEPs are affiliated with ALDE but belong, in both cases, to two different political parties. Moreover, ALDE's chair is Belgian, and one of its vice-chairs is Dutch.

¹¹ Doru Frantescu, "Who holds the power in the EP committees and the bureau?", VoteWatch Europe Special Policy Brief, September 2014.

¹² The Spanish Socialists also received the chair of the Sub-committee on Human Rights.

¹³ Law & Justice (ECR) also has a Vice-president in the Bureau, as well as the Italian and the French Socialists.

Table 4. Number of committee chairs by country and political group

	MEPs	Chairs	EPP		S&D		ALDE		ECR		GUE/NGL		GREENS/EFA	
			MEPs	Chairs	MEPs	Chairs	MEPs	Chairs	MEPs	Chairs	MEPs	Chairs	MEPs	Chairs
Germany	96	5	34	2	27	1	4		8		8	1	13	1
France	74	2	20	1	13		7	1	0		4		6	
Italy	73	3	17	1	31	2	0		0		3		0	
United Kingdom	73	3	0		20	2	1		20	1	1		6	
Spain	54	1	17		14	1	8		0		11		4	
Poland	51	3	23	3	5		0		19		0		0	
Romania	32		15		16		1		0		0		0	
Netherlands	26		5		3		7		2		3		2	
Belgium	21		4		4		6		4		0		2	
Czech Republic	21	1	7	1	4		4		2		3		0	
Greece	21		5		4		0		1		6		0	
Hungary	21		12		4		0		0		0		2	
Portugal	21		7		8		2		0		4		0	
Sweden	20	1	4		6		3	1	0		1		4	
Austria	18		5		5		1		0		0		3	
Bulgaria	17	1	7		4		4	1	2		0		0	
Denmark	13		1		3		3		4		1		1	
Finland	13		3		2		4		2		1		1	
Slovakia	13		6		4		1		2		0		0	
Croatia	11		5		2		2		1		0		1	
Ireland	11		4		1		1		1		4		0	
Lithuania	11		2		2		3		1		0		1	
Latvia	8		4		1		0		1		0		1	
Slovenia	8		5		1		1		0		0		1	
Cyprus	6		2		2		0		0		2		0	
Estonia	6		1		1		3		0		0		1	
Luxembourg	6		3		1		1		0		0		1	
Malta	6		3		3		0		0		0		0	

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Similarly, the eight Spanish Liberal MEPs come from four different parties. UPyD has four MEPs but the party has just joined the European political group and all its members are newcomers.¹⁴ All this, together with the previous experience of the candidate, contributes to explaining why ALDE's third chair was given to a Swedish MEP.

In general, expertise and previous experience matter and determine to a great extent who is proposed by the different parties. This could also help to explain why the new member states received four chairmanships in this legislature, as compared to only one in the previous one. Table 5, which shows the full list of Committee chairs, confirms this point. Elmar Brok has been the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee since 1999. Danuta Hübner was a committee chair in the previous legislature and has a profound knowledge of EU institutional and constitutional affairs. In the past, Jerzy Buzek was a member of the committee that now chairs (ITRE), and a former President of the EP and Prime Minister in Poland. In the case of four committees (EMPL, LIBE, INTA and CONT), their current chair had been a member of the committee and its party coordinator in previous years. Another six committee chairs had previously been active members of the committees they now chair. Four of them were members of other committees but were also rapporteurs on many occasions. The only three newcomers held ministerial positions in their respective countries.

In summary, there is a bias in favour of larger political groups and their larger national delegations in the method used in the allocation of committee chairs, which favours large member states. Nevertheless, the system allows for flexibility and the outcome ultimately depends on negotiations between the political groups. In any case, the chairmanships are generally given to MEPs with a strong parliamentary track record.

Table 5. Committee chairs in the 8th European Parliament

ENVI	Giovanni LA VIA	EPP	Italy Nuovo Centrodestra - Unione di Centro
ECON	Roberto GUALTIERI	S&D	Italy Partito Democratico
LIBE	Claude MORAES	S&D	United Kingdom Labour Party
INTA	Bernd LANGE	S&D	Germany Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
IMCO	Vicky FORD	ECR	United Kingdom Conservative Party
ITRE	Jerzy BUZEK	EPP	Poland Platforma Obywatelska
JURI	Pavel SVOBODA	EPP	Czech Republic Krestanská a demokratická unie
TRAN	Michael CRAMER	Greens/EFA	Germany Bündnis 90/Die Grünen
AGRI	Czeslaw Adam SIEKIERSKI	EPP	Poland Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe
PECH	Alain CADEC	EPP	France Union pour un Mouvement Populaire
EMPL	Thomas HÄNDEL	GUE/NGL	Germany DIE LINKE
REGI	Iskra MIHAYLOVA	ALDE	Bulgaria Movement for Rights and Freedoms
CULT	Silvia COSTA	S&D	Italy Partito Democratico
BUDG	Jean ARTHUIS	ALDE	France Union des Démocrates et Indépendants
AFCO	Danuta Maria HÜBNER	EPP	Poland Platforma Obywatelska
AFET	Elmar BROK	EPP	Germany Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands
FEMM	Iratxe GARCÍA PÉREZ	S&D	Spain Partido Socialista Obrero Español
DEVE	Linda McAVAN	S&D	United Kingdom Labour Party
CONT	Ingeborg GRÄSSLE	EPP	Germany Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands
PETI	Cecilia WIKSTRÖM	ALDE	Sweden Folkpartiet liberalerna

Source: Author's own elaboration.

¹⁴ The only experienced one, Francisco Sosa Wagner, resigned recently due to political differences with the party in Spain.

Seniority makes a difference in the appointment of party coordinators

Other relevant players in the EP committees are the party coordinators, who together with the committee chairs are entitled to take some decisions related to the work of the committee work and exercise important agenda-setting powers. They decide, among others, how many ‘points’ to assign to each legislative report and propose Rapporteurs from their groups. Committee coordinators also prepare together with the committee chair the hearings of the Commissioners-designate and meet afterwards to evaluate the nominees. In general, the committee chair can convene the committee coordinators to prepare any decision to be taken by the committee and they constitute a focal point for all the MEPs of that group in the committee.

The political groups usually choose a coordinator from among their members for each committee. In this case, an MEP’s previous experience in the Parliament and his/her personal and party connections are more relevant than the size of the political party s/he belongs to. This contributes to explaining why MEPs from the old member states still seem to be more successful in obtaining these positions than those from new member states.

MEPs from certain member states are more likely to be re-elected for successive terms and therefore have a stronger incentive to develop a political career in the European Parliament. These MEPs are aware of the importance and influence of party coordinators and push harder to get these positions. Conversely, in some member states, a party’s internal politics might prevail when the lists are composed; renowned MEPs might be sent back home and newcomers arrive in larger numbers. The turnover in MEPs indeed varies a lot across member states. Only 31% of all German MEPs are serving a first term, whereas 50% of French MEPs, 57% of Spanish and Polish MEPs, and 75% of Italian MEPs are newcomers in this legislature.

Table 6 shows the country of origin of the MEPs holding party coordinator positions at the moment and confirms a much weaker correlation with the size of the country than is the case for the committee chairs. The German MEPs represent 15% of all EPP MEPs but they hold 35% of the party coordinator positions (7). There are two Dutch EPP coordinators, and another 10 from EU countries of various sizes (including Malta). There is only one EPP coordinator from France, Spain and Poland, and none from Italy, despite the size of these national delegations in the group.

In the S&D group, Germany holds 40% of the party coordinator positions (8) despite representing only 14% of the group. Also in the S&D, there is not a single French coordinator and only two Italian.¹⁵ Despite its smaller size, the Spanish Socialist delegation received three positions as party coordinators, but the larger Romanian and British delegations only got two each.

In the ECR, the third-largest political group in the European Parliament, most of the coordinator positions are held by British MEPs, despite the fact that the UK’s weight in the group has diminished substantially after the elections. With 20 MEPs in the Group, the British Conservatives account for 12 party coordinators, whereas the 19 MEPs of the Polish Law & Justice Party only hold four. The main difference is that the British Conservative Party is deeply entrenched in the EP whereas their Polish partners’ previous experience is much more limited.

¹⁵ The S&D Chair is also Italian.

Table 6. Party coordinators in each of the committees, by member state

	EPP			S&D			ECR			ALDE			GREENS/EFA			GUE/NGL		
	MEPs	Coordinators	% Coordin.	MEPs	Coordinators	% Coordin.	MEPs	Coordinators	% Coordin.	MEPs	Coordinators	% Coordin.	MEPs	Coordinators	% Coordin.	MEPs	Coordinators	% Coordin.
Austria	2.3%			2.6%	1	5%				1.5%			6.0%	1	5%			
Belgium	1.8%	1	5%	2.1%	1	5%	5.7%			9.0%	2	10%	4.0%	1	5%			
Bulgaria	3.2%			2.1%			2.9%			6.0%								
Croatia	2.3%	1	5%	1.0%			1.4%			3.0%	1	5%	2.0%					
Cyprus	0.9%			1.0%														
Czech Republic	3.2%			2.1%			2.9%	2	10%	6.0%	1	5%				3.8%	1	5%
Denmark	0.5%			1.6%			5.7%	1	5%	4.5%	1	5%	2.0%	1	5%	1.9%	1	5%
Estonia	0.5%			0.5%						4.5%	1	5%	2.0%	1	5%			
Finland	1.4%	1	5%	1.0%			2.9%			6.0%			2.0%	2	10%	1.9%	1	5%
France	9.0%	1	5%	6.8%						10.4%	2	10%	12.0%	4	20%	7.7%	1	5%
Germany	15.4%	7	35%	14.1%	8	40%	11.4%			6.0%	2	10%	26.0%	5	25%	15.4%	3	16%
Greece	2.3%			2.1%			1.4%									11.5%	2	11%
Hungary	5.4%	1	5%	2.1%									4.0%					
Ireland	1.8%			0.5%			1.4%			1.5%	1	5%				7.7%	1	5%
Italy	7.7%			16.2%	2	10%										5.8%	1	5%
Latvia	1.8%	1	5%	0.5%			1.4%	1	5%				2.0%					
Lithuania	0.9%			1.0%			1.4%			4.5%			2.0%					
Luxembourg	1.4%			0.5%						1.5%	1	5%	2.0%	1	5%			
Malta	1.4%	1	5%	1.6%														
Netherlands	2.3%	2	10%	1.6%			2.9%			10.4%	2	10%	4.0%	2	10%	5.8%	2	11%
Poland	10.4%	1	5%	2.6%			27.1%	4	20%									
Portugal	3.2%	1	5%	4.2%	1	5%				3.0%	1	5%				7.7%	3	16%
Romania	6.8%	1	5%	8.4%	2	10%				1.5%								
Slovakia	2.7%			2.1%			2.9%			1.5%								
Slovenia	2.3%			0.5%						1.5%			2.0%					
Spain	7.7%	1	5%	7.3%	3	15%				11.9%	2	10%	8.0%			21.2%	2	11%
Sweden	1.8%			3.1%						4.5%	2	10%	8.0%	1	5%	1.9%		
United Kingdom				10.5%	2	10%	28.6%	12	60%	1.5%	1	5%	12.0%	1	5%	1.9%		

Source: Author's own elaboration.

In the case of ALDE, the party coordinator positions are distributed quite evenly among the different nationalities and the size of the delegation does not seem to be a prevailing factor either. There are two coordinators each from France, Spain and Belgium, but also two from Sweden and Germany despite the smaller size of their delegations. Conversely, the four Bulgarian and the four Finnish MEPs do not hold any of ALDE's coordinator positions.

In the Greens/EFA, there are four party coordinators among the six French MEPs but only one among the six British MEPs, perhaps because the latter belong to three different parties. Similarly, among the four Spanish MEPs in this group, there is only one party coordinator, probably because they also belong to four different national parties. Conversely, the only Finnish member of the Greens/EFA (highly reputed and experienced) is a party coordinator in two different committees.

In the case of GUE/NGL, there are only two party coordinators among the 11 Spanish MEPs, but two coordinators and one joint coordinator among the four Portuguese MEPs that belong to this group. The fact is that the four Spanish members of Izquierda Unida and the five MEPs of the recently created Podemos are all newcomers. One of the three Dutch MEPs is a party coordinator in two different committees. He happens to be highly regarded and experienced.

Conclusions

The cross-country examination of the composition of the EP committees reveals which policy areas hold a special interest for MEPs from specific member states, although in general the representation of member states in most committees largely reflects their representation at large in the Parliament. In particular, Environment, Public Health and Food Safety seems to attract more Croatian, Hungarian and Italian MEPs. In the current legislature, Economic and Monetary Affairs appears to be especially attractive for Belgium, German and Greek MEPs – and more generally for MEPs from the euro area. Swedish MEPs show a special interest in Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, and Austrian MEPs in Industry, Research and Energy. International Trade seems especially appealing for Italian and French MEPs, and Foreign Affairs for MEPs from Greece and in general from the new member states. Irish MEPs show a special interest in Agriculture and Portuguese MEPs in Fisheries. In the case of smaller member states, the slight overrepresentation in a committee might result in a poor or lack of representation in the other committees.

In the allocation of chair positions in the EP committees, there is a significant bias in favour of larger member states, as demonstrated in the fact that 17 of the 20 committee chairmanships are held by MEPs from the six largest member states. The formula used in the allocation of these positions tends to benefit the biggest political groups and the biggest parties within them. Similar positions in national parliaments are also divided among the political parties according to the size of their overall representation in parliament. Nevertheless, the fact that the European political groups consist of many national parties adds complexity and a 'country-of-origin' bias in the European Parliament. The appointment process, however, is flexible and the allocation ultimately depends on the agreement among the political groups. All in all, these coveted positions are reserved for MEPs who have established a strong reputations based on extensive experience.

Similarly influential are the party coordinators who are appointed for each committee by the political groups. In this case, the MEP's previous experience in the Parliament and his/her personal and party connections are more relevant than the size of the political party s/he belongs to. MEPs from some member states are tuned into the influence and importance these positions bestow on the incumbent and accordingly push harder to secure them. The turnover

of MEPs in office contributes to explaining some of the differences across EU countries. Political parties (and ultimately member states) with larger shares of new MEPs hold fewer of these positions, which require experience, expertise and the right connections.

In sum, certain national parties and MEPs seem to be more mindful of the important role that the EP and in particular its committees play in the EU legislative process. The privileged position of the committee chairs and party coordinators does not go unnoticed by them. Others are still just learning the ropes.



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