



CLOSING THE GAP

*Why a pointed relationship between EU and National parties
has become essential*

Introduction

Since the decision of the European Council in 1976, which established the direct election of the Members of European Parliament (*MEPs*) from the 1979¹, EU became an hybrid institution. European Parliament (*EP*) is still the unique supranational parliament inside an international organization² which is elected by the citizens

¹ For more information:

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2016/563515/EPRS_BRI\(2016\)563515_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2016/563515/EPRS_BRI(2016)563515_EN.pdf)

² Literature is unsure, someone call EU a regional organization, someone else an international organization, devoting the first only for the Council of Europe (CoE).

(citizens of EU countries actually). We call EU an *hybrid system* because his decision-making process came from two different kind of bodies³: supranational bodies, including: The European Commission (EC) and the European parliament (EP); and intergovernmental bodies which are the Council of the EU (or Council of Minister)⁴.

So, We can say that EU is the most democratic institution in the world, three out four decision-making bodies are elected, directly or indirectly, by the people; citizens can interact with, influence and be always informed about EU political agenda. But, at the same time, on the other hand, we can also affirm that EU suffers of a massive democratic deficit; although big efforts has been done to gives EP a centre role in decision-making (e.g.: the Treaty of Lisbon⁵), the supremacy of the “Councils” are still noticeable and strong. Paradoxically, the body we need to put *under control* by the citizens is not the one the most criticize, the EP, which has a strongly legitimacy due to the elections, but the Commission, which otherwise has the exclusive domain in proposal EU legislation. «The attitude by the Commission to have a large availability in approach and collaborating with *interest groups*⁶ is due to take advantages in the complex decision-making process against the Council, which at the same time is composed by member who take particularly care in many input by groups who represent a large electoral base» (Mascia 2015). The Commission is an “open body” to any other *International actor*⁷ able to negotiate, discuss, influence and especially able to undertake *lobbying*⁸ activities. The problem is not that the Commission is permeable to “other interests”, it happen also in EP, actually, after the introduction of co-

³ For a deepened reading: M. Mascia, (2015), “Il sistema dell’Unione europea”, University of Padua, Padova.

⁴ For a complete list of bodies and institutions in EU look at: https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/institutions-bodies_en

⁵ For a complete consultation of the Treaty : <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3Aai0033>

⁶ Almond and Powell define “interest group” as a «conscious group of individuals intertwined by particular interests, or sharing well-defined profits» (Almond and Powell 1970).

⁷ In this sentence I subsume NGOs, interests groups, transnational companies, and any other actors which could be a EU “stakeholder”.

⁸ «The amount of activities, knowledge and knowhow which give the power to represent political targets by organized interests». (Graziano 1995).

decisional-making procedure institutionalized by the Treaty of Maastricht, it became a central “point of access” for interest groups, and the lack of vote discipline in EP groups give a large freedom of movement to interest groups. The democratic deficit spawn out when different actors, operating in EU political arena, are *unaccountable* and EU community and citizens have no possibilities to check and control them and their final goals pursued with lobbying activities.

With this paper, I am not going to focus on EU possible reforms and the major aspect of the democratic deficit in EU institutions; but I am trying to deepen the *lack of representation* by the European parties starting to discuss about their role in EP, touching the issue of how they could guarantee a better *quality of democracy* inside the EU and how they could conform their framework to the base, to the citizens requests, in order to have a real accountability and responsiveness relationship with voters, supporters, and also to the party members. «In a pluralistic, advanced and democratic political system, the task allocation within interest groups and political parties is transparent; It is not the same in a system, the EU, where “European” political parties are not in a competition for a *government power*, which is tightly hold by the Council of the EU» (*Ibidem* 2015).

The European Federations Parties

This is actually the correct name for EU parties, created in the middle of '70s due to the first EP election. Before them, political arena was composed by inter-party bodies referred to their specific “*International*”. So, in 1952 *International Liberal Fed.* founded the “European Liberal Movement for United Europe”; in 1957 *International Socialist* founded the “Labour exchange of Socialist Parties”; and in 1965 *International Christian-Democracy* founded the “The Christian-Democratic European Union”. The same “*International*”, created and established the first three principal political family: the European Community Confederation of Socialist Parties, the European Community Federation of Liberal and Democratic Parties, and the European People Party. All of

these transnational actors were born and organized outside the EU political-system, and then conformed to power-structures of EU bodies⁹. If we can locate different political cultures for these three major European parties¹⁰, we could not emphasize their similitude: there are low differentiations in political contents, they do not exert others typical party functions such as political socialization, financial and technical management of election sessions, candidate recruitment for a specific role. And if we consider that, although the first attempt was made in 1953¹¹, we actually do not have a uniform electoral law for the EP elections¹² and, the most important thing, European parties do not compete to achieve the power¹³, meant as “the Government”; we can clearly see we have a paradox in which political groups in EP (not only actually) matter more than their Transnational Parties Federations in European political arena. Political Federations, which represent the party outside the institutions¹⁴, developed stable manifestos reflecting traditional dimension and cleavages¹⁵; but at the same time electoral national campaigns for EP elections are only partially connected with targets, agenda and EU parties’ manifestos. Mascia concludes that EU is not (yet) a party-government system, if we refer to Katz who defines a party-government as «a system where political power is exert by elected and responsible person through mechanism who guarantee accountability towards political parties» (Katz 1987).

Last consideration has to be done about representation issue: «Theories of representation postulate that in a democratic political system there should be a high degree of congruence between the policy preferences of voters and programmes of

⁹ For a deeper reading about exogenous party-system and endogenous party-system look at: S. Hix, C. Lord, (1997), “Political parties in the European Union”, Palgrave MAC Millan, London.

¹⁰ It’s almost impossible to value which impact European parties and federalist framework have in every national party-system like national parties. For a close examination of political culture studies look at “The Civic Culture”, Almond & Verba, 1963.

¹¹ The subcommission of political institutions of Common Assembly tried to made locate a deal for a common electoral law.

¹² In theory we have a base for an electoral common law: the Council in 2002 introduced a) incompatibility with EU and national member of parliament, and b) commitment to adopt a *proportional* representation for the EP election.

¹³ Fisichella define a party as: «political agency which compete in elections to express citizens questions and to fight for political power» D. Fisichella, (2010), “Lineamenti di Scienza politica”, Carocci, Roma.

¹⁴ European party groups *should* represent the party inside the institutions.

¹⁵ For a deeper lection on what cleavage are I suggest S. Rokkan, (1970), “Citizens, elections, parties”, ECPR press, Colchester.

parties that represent them», but «representation is also “having one’s view reflected in the final product of the legislative decision-making process, that is enacted policy”.

There should also be a high degree of congruence between programmes that parties offer their voters and the policies that they endorse in parliament» (Rose, Borz 2013).

Lack of representation in European Parliamentary groups

The European Parliament is the highest example of democracy in the entire world, EU is the only interregional organisation which guarantees the minimum principles of democracy in one of its bodies¹⁶. This indicates that (parliamentary) democracy is still the best way to represent, decide and create a common sense in a community¹⁷. It also indicates another fundamental consideration: parties are essential to assure a good quality of democracy¹⁸, not also inside a single nation. I will face to the massive problem in the EP, which is actually the *lack* of representation in European Parliamentary Groups. We can find parliamentary groups in every chamber of any parliament in the world, their role? Define the guidelines and the cohesion in voting, in order to guarantee and open accountable bodies where citizens, members, and party itself, can test their group responsiveness and party consistency. Problems could come out when groups go in contrast with the highest party frame, or when poll cohesion is low or insignificant, or, and this is the case of the EP, they do not represent the same majority that came out from the election outcome. As the European Parliament is, patently, different from a normal national parliament, we can figure out further big problems¹⁹: a) an important trend in representation more national issues, connecting

¹⁶ Actually we never forget also the EC (European Council), and the Council because, even if they are intergovernmental bodies, members are (indirectly) elected. No other regional, or continental organization have this kind of binding with citizens; nor the UN (United Nations).

¹⁷ We definitely not say “nation” in this case.

¹⁸ For a close examination of a fundamental define of “Quality of democracy”, I suggest to look on Morlino’s table of quality of democracy, or a deeper reading of L. Diamond, L. Morlino, (2005), “Assessing the quality of democracy”, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.

¹⁹ Which we have to add to the prior problems discussed in page 2,3.

with national party secretaryship, rather than European level; *b*) inclination in searching strong majority with bigger European parliamentary groups, meant as MEP's number²⁰, rather than nearest counterpart; and *c*) arrange themselves in a new cleavage, compared with classic left-right disposition²¹: pro or against EU integration.

Table n.1: European Parliamentary Groups nowadays per composition

EP Groups	% Votes ₂	Members	Parties	State most represented ₃	MS most represented ₄	MEP's joined ₅
EPP	29,43%	217	47	Slovakia (4 parties)	Germany (34MS)	-4
S&D - PES	25,43%	189	39	Poland (4 parties)	Italy (29MS)	-2
ALDE/A DLE	8,92%	68	35	France, Spain (4 parties)	Spain (8MS)	+1
ECR	9,32%	74	24	Poland, Slovakia, Germany (3 parties)	UK (21MS)	+4
GUE - NGL	6,92%	52	21	Spain (4 parties)	Spain (11MS)	0
Greens - EFA	6,66%	50	26	Spain (4 parties)	Germany (13MS)	0
EFDD	6,39%	44	7	UK, Italy, Sweden, France, Lithuania, CZ, Poland (1 party)	UK (22MS)	-4
ENF₁	/	39	7	France (3 parties)	France (20MS)	+39
NI	6,92%	18	9	Greece, Poland, Germany (2 parties)	Greece (5MS)	-34
Total	100%	751	215	Spain (17 parties)	Germany (96 MEP's)	+44 / -44

Source: *VoteWatch Europe, European Parliament (2016)*;²²

Notes: ₁ENF group (Europe of nations and freedom) did not candidate for EP 2014 election. ₂%of votes gained in EP2014 election. ₃ MS with the highest national party in a EP group. ₄ MEP's national number inside a single EP group. ₅ MEP's variance in every EP groups from 2014 outcome election, and current setting.

²⁰ And consequently political power.

²¹ Rokkan locate 4 cleavages: centre-periphery; urban-rural; church-state; owner-worker.

²² It's quite harder found real data. For example, when I tried to figure out how many national parties are inside a European parliamentary group surfing the EP website, or even when you would like to know how many MEP's per MS are inside a EP group, you can't. So, I use Vote Watch Europe database but unfortunately they were not completely correct: for instance, MR. Buonanno, an Italian MEP died in 2016, is still inside the list of ENF group. Again, If you want to know which is the correct number of MEP of a European parliamentary group, you will only found the amount of members after election outcome, which were in 2014.

Studies of *representation* in the EP focus on two different path: «many follow the *Miller and Stokes*²³ model of testing the congruence between the position of voters and their members of Congress. *Others*²⁴ have analysed recorded roll call votes to establish the extent to which MEP's from different countries vote together in a group», but unfortunately «neither approach shows whether national party programmes on which MEP's are elected are congruent with the votes that MEP's cast in the European Parliament» (Rose, Borz 2013). EP is a supranational EU body, but parties compete at national level to represent their own citizens²⁵. This means that when national parties make their programmes and agenda, they give priority to what suits their national context «without regard to the statements of the multinational federations to which their MEP's affiliate» (Sigalas and Pollak 2012). In *table n.1* I put lot of data concerning EP groups: some considerations needs to be done. First of all, what really surprised me is the amount of national parties inside the EP, 215. This means, on average, 3 members per party. This is not allowed due to EU regulation which establish also that a EP group should be composed by at least 25 members²⁶. With this new information, our average changes and, paradoxically, we could have more or less 30 groups. Fortunately, the EU regulation on EP groups composition defines also a minimum of MS, which is actually 7²⁷. We can clearly see that the two smallest EP groups are actually composed exactly by 7 different national parties²⁸, the EFDD, “Europe of freedom and Direct Democracy”²⁹ and ENF “Europe of Nation and Freedom”³⁰. If we look at “State most represented” column, we see that the EFDD is actually the only European parliamentary group in entire EP which is exactly composed by 7 national party coming from 7 different MS. There is no direct correlation between the amount

²³ W. E. Miller, D.E. Stokes, (1963), “*Constituency Influence on Congress*”, in *American Political Science Review*, 57:1, 45-56.

²⁴ S. Hix, A. Noury, G. Roland, (2007), “*Democratic Politics in the European Parliament*”, Cambridge University Press CUP, Cambridge.

²⁵ We can say National parties view supranational party group as an irrelevant actor, indeed potentially dangerous for their *vote bank*.

²⁶ For a deeper reading in EP regulation, check here: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32014R1141&from=IT>

²⁷ But, instead, EU regulation did not prevent a maximum of national party adherence in every EP group.

²⁸ I do not considered NI groups which gather non attached members, “Non-Inscrits”.

²⁹ Its site: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32014R1141&from=IT>

³⁰ Its site: <http://www.enfgroup-ep.eu/>

of national parties per EP groups and their trend of vote consistency, actually these trends could interest the major groups, which are composed by lot of national parties, but at the same time, if we look at “MS most represented” data, it seems that these two EP groups have a strong leadership and unique administration flag, and other national parties have joined the group to “be in the EP”³¹. Half members of EFDD are from UK, and the same happened in ENF, which, paradoxically, asks more direct democracy and direct relationship with electorate, but it did not take place at the EU election in 2014. «The priority of a party group is to ensure that its multinational members vote together in order for the group to exercise influence on EU policymaking. However, the absence of *co-ordination* between the position that MEP’s take nationally and decision taken by each group at the EU level creates the potential for conflict between the national commitments of MEP’s and the major position emerging from the aggregation of national programmes in multinational groups» (Rose, Borz 2013). Logically each national party should join a group whose members are close to its own programme and political agenda, only with this scenario we can say we could have a multinational party group who can be representative, because the programmes that their national parties put to their respective electorates are collectively in agreement³². This opportunistic conduct by national parties is, also, due to EP’s Rule of Procedure³³, which «do not require a party group to have a common ideology. Rule 30 simply states: “*Members may form themselves into Groups according to their political affinities*”» (Bardi *et al* 2010). National parties decided to join bigger European parliamentary group, we could call it “catchall party”³⁴, in order to favourable assignments of committees, offices and other benefits. Rose and Borz found in the *Non-Aligned (NI)* group the «paradigm example of a group constituted to secure institutional resources for instrumental rather than ideological reason» (Rose,

³¹ Maybe explained by the new funding rule approved by the EP in 2014: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32014R1141&from=IT>

³² This also imply that National parties should join its transnational ideology party group; nor the one which give them more opportunity to be represent in EP (without any political power among other things).

³³ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=URISERV:o10000&from=IT>

³⁴ For a deeper reading in the meaning of “catchall party” look at: O. Kirchheimer, (1966), “*The transformation of the Western European Party System*”, in *Political Parties and Political Development*, eds J. LaPalombara, M. Weiner, Princeton University Press, Princeton.

Borz 2013). «If parties are to be effective in representing their voters, they must have their policies enacted into law; otherwise, they provide only representation without legislation» (Cox 2007). Considering that no groups come close to having an absolute EP majority³⁵, they try to aggregate their votes. If they can't It means that «European Parliament becomes a “do nothing” parliament» (Rose, Borz 2013). For instance, the three left-wing party groups³⁶, S&D/PES, GUE-NGL, Greens/EFA, have a high degree of ideological proximity. But a possible coalitions is impossible³⁷ due to it lack of a majority³⁸. Even if we try to figure out a majority with the biggest EP group, EPP, we will face with the ideological proximity issue; in this particular case a coalition within EPP, ECR and ALDE/ADLE is yet impossible. Even if from 2009 to 2012 EPP and S&D voted together³⁹, this “black-red coalition” increased the number of MEP's who find themselves going against their national party programme and enlarging the lack of co-ordination inside EU group itself.

So, We can clearly see that there is also a national issue in the European parliamentary groups lack of representation. There's no co-ordination inside EU party, and this is reflected on the EP majority, which actually do not exist or anyway is very subtle due to EU groups opportunistic behaviour, which itself, is due to their absence of cohesion and ideological composition. We can found party group with more than 3 parties per MS⁴⁰, but without any political power; the EP groups most of times are lead by the major national party inside themselves, but again, this take the EU issues in a national logic and view. It seems that European Parliament has become a “battle of nation”⁴¹,

³⁵ This is also due to electoral system; or I should say electoral systems procedure. EU rule define only the guidelines, a proportional system, in order to the EP election. This create mismatching and over/under-representation.

³⁶ We have seen before that this cleavage, left vs right, is not present anymore in EP.

³⁷ Even if their aggregate votes could create no conflict with national party cohesion and programmes.

³⁸ In this case, if we refer to *Table n.1* this supposed coalition could have more or less 85 MEP's less than the minimum majority in EP.

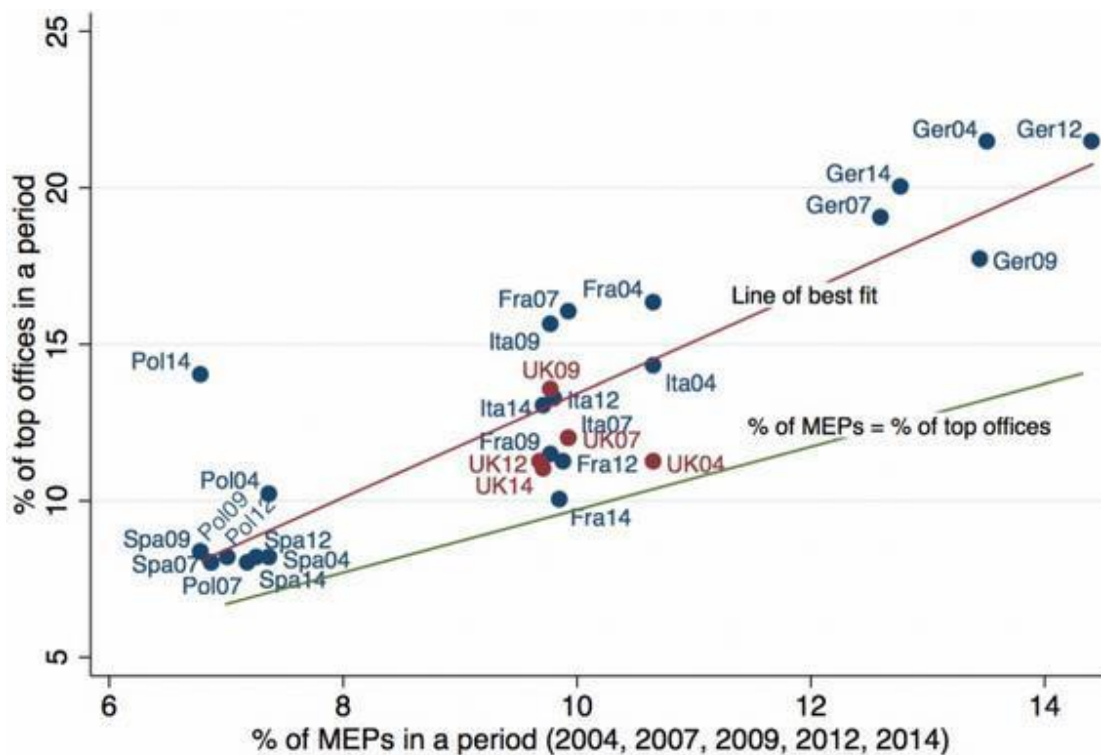
³⁹ If we look at the three major EP group, EPP, S&D and ALDE we will find out that 52% of times they voted the same measure.

⁴⁰ Inside the EPP group there are 4 parties from Slovakia, and inside S&D/PES group 4 parties from Poland.

⁴¹ Politico.eu and also Vote Watch Europe dedicate an interesting work in this concept: “*The 40 MEP's who actually matter*”, - <http://www.votewatch.eu/blog/who-holds-the-power-in-the-european-parliament-assessing-the-influence-of-individual-meps/>

something completely different from the supranational body which should be. Simon Hix and Giacomo Benedetto in a very well made article published in “The UK in a Changing Europe”, and independent research initiative funded by the Economic and Social Research Council based at King’s College London⁴², discover a correlation between MS with more MEP’s in top offices, and consequently more influential power, inside the EP. “«When a political group wins a top office, this office almost always goes to an MEP from a larger party delegation with the group which is usually a party from one the larger member states» (Hix, Benedetto 2015). In Figure n.1 green line shows how many top offices a MS should have if the top offices were allocated in a strictly proportional way between the MS. The red line shows the average proportion of top offices won by MEP’s from larger MS⁴³.

Figure n. 1: Representation of MEPs from large MS in top offices.



Source: S. Hix, G. Benedetto, (2015), “Do UK MEP’s win key position of power in the European Parliament?”, in *The UK in a Changing Europe*, King’s College London, London.

⁴² <http://ukandeu.ac.uk/about-us/>

⁴³ For further information, data and reading look at: <http://ukandeu.ac.uk/explainers/do-uk-meps-win-key-positions-of-power-in-the-european-parliament/>

In the following research, Simon Hix again⁴⁴, analysed the success and failure of MEPs in terms of how often they are on a “winning side” in votes in European Parliament⁴⁵ and, afterwards, he compares the same data in a EU groups view⁴⁶.

Figure n.2: Percentage of times a member state’s MEPs were on the winning side in votes in the European Parliament (2009-14) – Figure n.3: Percentage of times a European political group was on the winning side in votes in the European Parliament (2009-14)



Source: S. Hix, (2016), *“The Policy success (and failure) of British MEP’s”*, in *European Politics and Policy*, London of Economics and Political Science LSE, London.

The major EU groups are on average on the right side of Fig. n3, and the EPP is the EU group with the highest result. If we look at table n.1 we discover that Germany is the highest represented MS in EPP, with 34 MEP’s, and Germany is also one of the

⁴⁴ <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2016/01/12/uk-influence-in-europe-series-the-policy-successes-and-failures-of-british-meps/>

⁴⁵ Figure n.2.

⁴⁶ Figure n.3.

benchmark MS in the right side in Fig. n2. There is a correlation between the representation in EU group and percentage of times that EU group is on the “winning side”. For instance, UK his highly represented in ECR and EFDD groups, respectively 21 and 22 MEPs, which are in the opposite side of the Hix’s “winning side”. This means that national parties greatness have a highly influence on EU group, they are actually able to make the EU group agenda, which could be different from EU parties agenda. This logic is in contrast with more EU integration, and supranational political arena in general, which are ones of the EP mission: representing citizens of EU with a high confidence relationship guaranteed by the election. Mismatching within European parliamentary groups and European political parties are explained also by the two contrary logical view and action.

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