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Panel 12A Diverging Views of Europe: The EU against Itself?

Opposing in the European Parliament: An Analysis of Eurosceptic MEPs

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Resistance to European integration is a relatively new field of research in European studies. Indeed, the issue of Euroscepticism emerged in the early 1990s, on the occasion of the campaign for the ratification of the treaty of Maastricht. In some countries, opposition to the integration process came to the fore even later, during the debate on the European constitution. Nevertheless, there is one place where Euroscepticism has been present ever since the late 1970s: The European Parliament (EP). In the early stage of European construction, from 1952 to 1979, national parliaments directly appointed MEPs, which meant that the representatives who were favorable to European integration were clearly over-represented, and that all forms of resistance to the European project were somewhat stifled. The principle of a Parliament elected by direct universal suffrage was a much debated and controversial topic. The advocates of such an institutional change were convinced that direct universal suffrage would turn the EP into a key actor that would boost European construction. Conversely the opponents – who were not yet called “Eurosceptics” or “Sovereignists” – feared that an elected assembly might take precedence over national parliaments and challenge their legitimacy.

During the first parliamentary election, a certain number of representatives openly declared their opposition to the integration process or its implementation. Political groups were formed to promote their views. This phenomenon was so strong that, until the late 1990s, the mode of functioning of the EP was more shaped by the divide between pro- and anti-European MEPs than by any partisan or national cleavages. The main political parties rallied to the integration process in the 1980s, but new political forces then appeared to denounce and combat it. Indeed the ratification process of the treaty of Maastricht revealed the existence and the strength of these opposition movements in all the Member States, and the 1994 elections reinforced their positions. Enlargement to Central and Eastern European states may not have caused the Eurosceptic “tsunami” that some feared, but it contributed to consolidating the ranks of the Eurosceptics and extending the range of their positions.

Though Euroscepticism is not a new phenomenon in the EP, in spite of its theoretical and practical implications, and despite the fact that the strong hostility of the Eurosceptic MEPs is becoming a major cause for concern, very few academic studies have addressed the problem. The issue of Euroscepticism has indeed been mainly analyzed by authors specialized in national parties. Researchers working on the EP have largely overlooked the question of internal opposition forces, bent as they are on the study of the role of the institution in the integration process, its contribution to the legitimization of the Union or its working methods (Hix et al., 2003; Costa and Rozenberg, 2007). They have shown that the divide over the issue of European integration – interacting with partisan, national and sectorial cleavages – has played, and still plays, a major role in European debates. Though these specialists have acknowledged the fact that a comprehensive study on the MEPs could fruitfully contribute to a better understanding of the integration issue (Katz, 1999, 62), we have to admit that very little is known today about the identity, motivations and attitudes of these Eurosceptic politicians. It thus seems interesting to focus on the resistance movements that have been engendered by European integration, not only in the national public spheres but also within the European institutions. The present study will address three questions: how is it possible to describe Eurosceptic MEPs? Beyond their political affiliations, are there any converging points of reference in their way of thinking, their rhetoric or their attitudes? From a sociological perspective, how can we define the typical role of the Eurosceptic MEPs?

Our methodological approach draws on two main sources of information. We have first conducted interviews with MEPs who define themselves as Eurosceptics, in order to better apprehend their opinions, the way they envisage their job and their role, and how they work. In addition to this qualitative study, we have carried out a quantitative analysis, through the systematic collection of data on a certain number of self-proclaimed Eurosceptic representatives. We have finally used the information provided by two studies conducted by the European Parliament Research Group (EPRG) – an enquiry based on a questionnaire proposed to all the MEPs¹, and a data base on roll-call votes².

1. A Tentative Typology of the Eurosceptic MEPs

Anthony Forster, among others, insists on the multiple meanings attached to the word “Euroscepticism” which has been used in very different contexts but rarely has the term been rigorously defined by the academic community (Forster, 2002, 1). It should first be noted that the

¹ Simon Hix and Roger Scully, “Raw data from the EPRG Survey of MEPs, of September 2000”, *EPRG Research Project*, statistical data available on <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/EPRG/data.htm>.

² Simon Hix, “Raw data from the first 6 months of roll-call votes in the 1999-2004 parliament (246 votes)”, *EPRG Research Project*, statistical data available on <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/EPRG/data.htm>.

MEPs who describe themselves as “Eurosceptic” belong to the whole spectrum of political groups, with the notable exception of the ALDE group. Their values are different and their ideological orientations range from Trotskyism to the far right. According to Paul Taggart, “the ideological position of a party does not give us enough information to deduce its position on the EU” (Taggart, 1998, 377).

A very rich literature now exist on party-based Euroscepticism, trying to explain the nature and main determinants of the phenomenon. The most common typology, distinguishing hard and soft euroscepticism, was proposed by Taggart and Szczerbiak (2000, 2003, 2008) but the soft category tends to remain vague and too inclusive. We have thus drawn more particularly on the work of Mudde and Kopecky (2002) which goes beyond an excessively globalizing vision of Euroscepticism and differentiates between the MEPs’ positions on the principle of European integration, and their vision of the Union itself. Even though the definition proposed by these authors is far from being perfect (Szczerbiak and Taggart, 2003), it offers an interesting perspective for our case study. Indeed it makes it possible to account for the diversity of “Eurosceptic” representatives, in the general sense of the word, through the analysis of their perception of the integration process – as a political project which implies some transfers of sovereignty – and of the European Union – as an institutional system and an arena for public action.

From a theoretical perspective, we could imagine that some MEPs might be both very critical of the integration project and relatively happy with its present working methods, and that, conversely, some federalists might be quite dissatisfied with the European institutions and political choices. Though the first hypothesis is purely virtual, there is some concrete evidence in support of the second one. Let us mention, among others, Paul van Buitenen in The Netherlands and Hans-Peter Martin in Austria. However these are only marginal examples and their commitment to the political integration process is uncertain. We have thus chosen to limit the scope of our study to those MEPs who are both critical of the European project and of the present mode of functioning of the EU.

The first part of our study focuses on the way MEPs perceive the integration process as a political project which implies transfers of sovereignty from the national to the supranational level. The analysis of their rhetoric, confirmed by the interviews we have conducted, shows that their positions on this question are multiple and diverging, in a continuum ranging from the enthusiastic Europhiles, who champion a federal Europe with all the powers and prerogatives of a state, to the most radical Eurosceptics, who call for the dismantlement of the EU. If we only consider the MEPs opposed to this process, there is a wide spectrum that encompasses both MEPs who show moderate opposition to the European project and radical anti-European representatives. The more moderate representatives criticize the European integration process as a

political project, and regard it as a non-desired constraint or even a necessary evil. They accept the principle of institutionalized cooperation, a more or less integrated market and the transfers of sovereignty, but they want to limit them. *“I am in favor of the common market but against any form of federation. Some decisions must be made at the European level for the sake of efficiency – environmental issues, transnational crime, the economy”*³. The most radical group rejects any potential transfer of competence to the supranational level in the name of national sovereignty. Those MEPs denounce the prospect of *“the United States of Europe”* or of a *“super European state”*⁴, and call for the dismantlement of the Union in favor of a *“profitable and realistic cooperation”* (Tiersky, 2001, 3), i.e. *“a Europe as a Europe of independent democratic nation states trading together”*⁵.

The second point of our study deals with the MEPs’ attitudes towards European institutions and politics. We may speak again of a continuum encompassing the whole range of critical opinions. On one side of the spectrum, we find MEPs who denounce the EU’s institutional architecture, but in a moderate and selective way, and who believe that the necessary adjustments can be made at little cost. They put forward various solutions to the democratic deficit, such as the appointment of the Commission by the MEPs, or the direct election of the President of the Commission. They want to fight against the EU’s bureaucracy and reform some of its political practices. They insist on the capacity of the EP to enhance the legitimacy and efficiency of the Union. *“We should maybe increase the powers of the Parliament to increase transparency and control on the Commission. The Commission should be elected and the President should have more powers”*⁶. On the other side of this continuum, some representatives have a much more critical approach to the necessary reforms. They violently criticize European institutions and politics. There are numerous references in their rhetoric to the democratic deficit in the EU, its lack of efficiency, the extent of corruption and fraud within the Community microcosm, or the opacity of European legislation. They only propose a very few – and basic – solutions, as illustrated by an MEP who declared in an interview that he *“would deconstruct the EP, the Commission and the Council”*⁷.

Four ideal-type models of Eurosceptic MEPs may thus be drawn from these two axes:

1. The “anti-EU”, who criticizes both the project of European integration and its implementation.
2. The “minimalist”, who is not fundamentally opposed to the European project, but criticizes its present evolution.

³ Interview with Ms. Hélène Goudin, MEP (IND/DEM), EP, Brussels, 21st March 2006.

⁴ Interview with Mr. Godfrey Bloom, MEP (IND/DEM), EP, Brussels, 23rd March 2006. Interview with Mr. José Gutiérrez, assistant to Ms. Hélène Goudin (IND/DEM), EP, Brussels, 21st March 2006.

⁵ Interview with Mr. Roger Helmer, MEP (non-attached), EP, Brussels, 20th March 2006.

⁶ Interview with Mr. Jaroslav Zverina, MEP (EPP-ED), EP, Brussels, 18th April 2006.

⁷ Interview with Mr. Roger Helmer, *op.cit.*

- 3. The “reformist”, who is moderate in his/her criticism of the project and the working methods of the EU, and wants to reform them.
- 4. The “resigned”, who is fundamentally opposed to the principle of European integration and champions national sovereignty. He/she has a somewhat moderate perception of the way the EU functions. This category – which seems unlikely *a priori* – is quite specific to the EP. It gathers the MEPs who have decided, for the sake of real politics or on account of socialization and institutionalization phenomena (we will study them in the following chapters), to adopt a constructive attitude in order to defend their opposition to the European project.

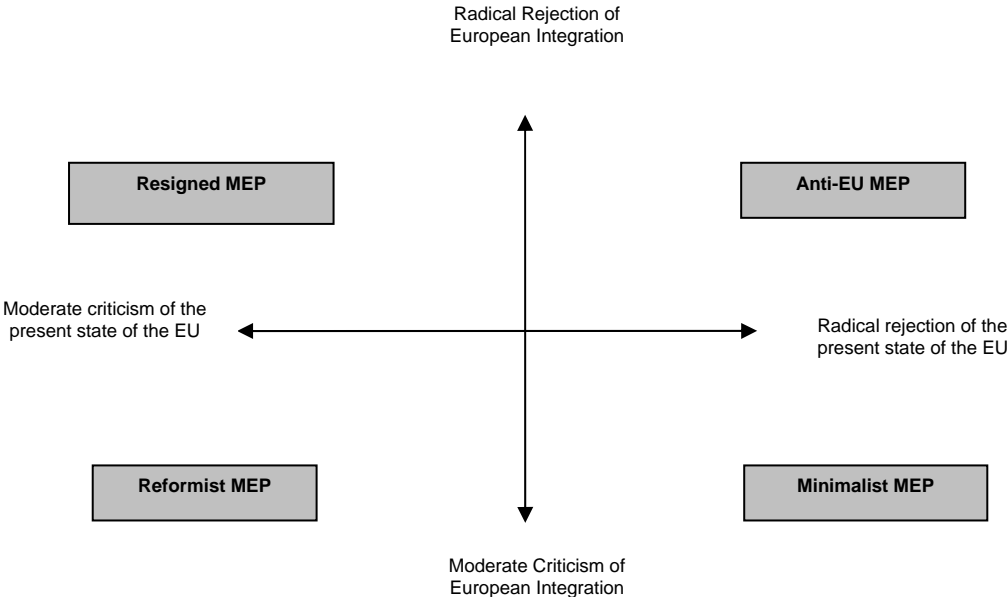


Figure 1

In the present article, we have chosen to call “Eurosceptic” all the MEPs who belong to the four aforementioned categories. Our objective is not to give an exhaustive list of all the Eurosceptic MEPs, but rather to define the contours of this multi-faceted group. For this purpose, we have used three criteria – affiliation to a Eurosceptic party or a group, answers to the EPRG questionnaire, and the MEPs’ positions on the European issue.

According to the first criteria, we may consider as “Eurosceptic” some 180 MEPs out of a total of 785: The 30 non-attached MEPs⁸, the 22 members of the IND/DEM (Independence/Democracy) group, the

⁸ In January 2007, 20 non-attached MEP’s from the extreme right (mainly French and Romanian) created the group ITS (Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty). But on the 14 November 2007, this group collapsed. Five Romanian MEPs decided to leave the group and consequently, ITS did not respect anymore the conditions of the

majority of the 44 members of the UEN (Union for Europe of the Nations) group, the 41 members of the EUL/NGL (European United Left/Nordic Green Left), and the “European Democrats” subgroup within the EPP-ED (European People’s Party - European Democrats), composed of 38 members. There are also some Eurosceptic MEPs within the groups of the PES (Party of European Socialists) and the Greens/European Free Alliance (EFA). The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) is the only group that makes no secret of its pro-European views.

We have then refined this party-based approach and defined the profile of the Eurosceptic MEPs within the main political parties, through the analysis of the answers collected in the EPRG questionnaire. Respondents were asked to assess their respective positions according to a scale ranging from category 1 – “integration has gone too far” – to 10 – “the Union should be a federal State immediately”. 8.7% of the respondents declared that integration had gone too far (answers 1 and 2), and 5.2% had rather negative opinions (answers 3 and 4), for a total of 13.9% of Eurosceptic MEPs, i.e. approximately a little more than a hundred. The methodological approach based on party or group affiliation thus seems too global to be really efficient.

The Eurosceptic group’s distinctive features are also to be found on such topics as the role of the Member States or the advantages of the integration process. While 93% of the MEPs answered that adhesion to the Union had been profitable for their countries, it was the case for only 53% of the respondents whose answers were in categories 1 and 2. 88% of them and 53% of those in categories 3 and 4 thought that the Member States should remain the central pillars of the Union, against 32% for all the MEPs.⁹

These MEPs have converging opinions which clearly differ from the mainstream opinions of the other representatives on various aspects of the EU’s functioning and on the integration process. It therefore makes sense to speak of a “Eurosceptic” group, even if we should not overlook the heterogeneity of this group and the multiplicity of its motivations and attitudes.

We will not delve into the motivations of the MEPs who adopt a Eurosceptic rhetoric, even if we are perfectly conscious of the importance of defining the reasons for it and the influence of national politics on their discourse. Euroscepticism often stems from a form of electoral opportunism or populism which is not related to the issue of European integration *per se*. However this question goes beyond the scope of our analysis.

Rules of Procedure for the formation of a group. The existence of the group was too short to measure its impact on Eurosceptics’ behaviour in the EP.

⁹ Simon Hix, Roger Scully, *op. cit.*

2. Roles in the EP: In-between free determination and constraints

Given the diversity of the forms of Euroscepticism in the EP, it is unlikely that Eurosceptic MEPs should constitute a homogeneous group. However their converging critical approach to the integration process and/or to the functioning of the EU engenders a type of attitude that is clearly distinct from the rest of the MEPs. Our objective is thus to determine if there are any typical roles that would be specific to this group.

In the present study, the term “role” refers to various systems of norms, attitudes and self-representation that politicians may choose in their parliamentary activities. They “choose” a specific role not only in function of the constraints they have to adapt to – written and unwritten rules in the working methods of the assembly and the groups – but also according to the opportunities they might have, depending on their competences or centres of interest. Such a definition makes it possible to go beyond the purely neo-functionalist vision, that emphasizes the weight of institutional constraints), or the rational choice approach – which implies that representatives only act because they want to make a career or be re-elected (Costa and Kerrouche, 2007, 23-26).

As shown by Katz and Wessels (Katz and Wessels, 1997; Katz, 1997), the question of the role chosen by representatives is essential to understand the way parliaments function. Contrary to many national parliaments, in which the MPs’ roles are rather stabilized and visible (Searing, 1995), the situation is much more complex in the EP. This may first be accounted for by the “flexibility” of the assembly. Its competences and geography are in constant evolution while the power game within the European institutions has not yet stabilized. One of its main characteristics is the rapid development of its powers and practices (Costa, 2001). The internal organization of the EP is characterized by the same form of “flexibility”. It is pragmatic, freed from any rigid historical constraints or formal questions of protocol, and develops according to evolving political situations and constraints. MEPs thus enjoy considerable freedom in exercising their functions, connected to several favorable factors: A somewhat relaxed legal definition of the nature of the European mandate, relative independence in relation to national and European parties, limited media coverage of their activities, negligible influence from their electorate (Costa and Navarro, 2003). Such freedom of action has a significant influence on this supranational assembly which harbours multiple parliamentary traditions and conceptions of the common good.

MEPs are thus quite free to set their own priorities. They can decide to work, or not, in one or several parliamentary committees and inter-parliamentary delegations. They can also use their mandate to enjoy national and European media coverage. More particularly, the EP Rules of Procedure grant them powers they may exert in total freedom, which range from the right to put up written or oral questions to the Commission and the Council, to the right to propose resolutions. These powers may seem trivial

or insufficient in the eyes of some MEPs from the larger political parties, but they are important resources, at least symbolically, for the more marginal MEPs, including the Eurosceptics. As explained by Jacobs, Corbett and Shackleton, “*the rules thus give considerable scope for dissident members within a political group or coalitions of individual members across groups, to trigger different procedures*” (2005, 56).

However this statement needs to be tempered on account of the specific constraints attached to the functioning of the assembly and to the activities of individual MEPs.

Debates are conducted in 23 languages, which mean less lively and passionate confrontations than in national assemblies. The constraints attached to the necessities of interpretation do not favor deliberation in plenary sessions. The EP has also to cope with various problems – an excessively important number of MEPs (785 in 2007), very heterogeneous representation with nearly 180 national political parties, two meeting places, highly technical texts and increasing competences and activities. In order to address these problems and remain efficient, the EP has progressively rationalized its working methods, adopted very detailed Rules of Procedure and reinforced its hierarchical bodies and the role of the groups and committees. The MEPs’ individual powers have also been reduced, with a view to furthering majority votes and restricting their filibustering capacities. Even if national parties are not very committed to the functioning of the EP and although political groups cannot impose the same type of party discipline as in most national assemblies, they do limit the MEPs’ freedom of action. Indeed national parties appoint their candidates and can thus strictly determine their political careers at the national level. Political groups of the EP control the resources of the assembly (posts, speaking time, responsibilities, sanctions, exclusion) (Hix et al., 1999, 9).

MEPs work in an institutional context which is both free and constraining. Though they often complain they are merely “cogs” in an assembly entirely focused on inter-institutional relations, they are quite free to define their role and mandate (Costa, 2001). This point is particularly important. The written and unwritten rules of deliberation may be constraining for the MEPs, but they also represent significant resources for them.

These constraints and resources are not the same for all the representatives. They depend on multiple factors such as their professional competences and experience, their political “capital”, their commitment as members of the EP, their linguistic skills or their affiliation to a specific group. In that respect, group affiliation is essential as the Rules of Procedure have, since the mid 1980s, considerably marginalized the non-attached MEPs who cannot expect to play any active role in the normative activities of the EP. This is notably the case of the far-right members who have been deliberately ostracized by the other MEPs since the EP was first elected by direct universal suffrage. Unlike the members of the main groups, who have to conform to a very strict code of conduct, most Eurosceptic

MEPs are freer to act the way they want, some of them taking great pride in the sanctions they may incur because of their attitude in plenary sessions or committee meetings.

3. What are the roles of the Eurosceptic MEPs?

From the specific set of constraints that the Eurosceptic MEPs have to conform to, we might infer that they have developed some specific roles in their parliamentary activities. In order to determine the precise contours of these roles and see if they correspond to the ideal-type models of Eurosceptic MEPs already defined, we have analyzed the interviews conducted with a view to apprehending MEP's subjective perception of their role. We have also built some quantitative indicators relative to their activities and their votes. This two-fold approach reveals four ideal-type roles for the Eurosceptic MEPs.

The Public Orator

Public Orators are MEPs who give priority to their public addresses and to spreading information, but do not take an active part in parliamentary debates. Their objective is to publicize and defend their positions by all means. *"The main thing I do is speaking and arguing against European integration"*¹⁰. The Orators also exploit any piece of information that could support their positions, especially concerning the failings of European integration – corruption, fraud, scandals... *"We are showing them [citizens] the fraud, the wrong things happening here"*¹¹. This is a declaratory rather than a deliberative logic. These MEPs are not cut off from the institution, though. Familiarity with the intricacies of the written and unwritten Rules of Procedure is essential in that respect: *"I went one step further because we got Barroso to come in the Parliament and we had a debate. None of us, Eurosceptic, were allowed speaking time in the debate, but I found an obscure parliamentary rule, the 141, to ask a question and have a forty seconds speech."*¹²

The role of the Orators as opposition speakers means that they do not take part in the other activities of the EP from which they are excluded *de facto*. They hold no position within the assembly, are in charge of no report, and sometimes do not sit in any committee. Orators often resort to such activities as calling to order, asking for the details of the vote or putting forward motions of censure. They only use the possibility to propose a resolution or an amendment as a protest filibustering move. Orators typically oppose – almost systematically – most of the texts or refuse to take part in the votes.

¹⁰ Interview with Mr. Roger Helmer, *op. cit.*

¹¹ Telephone interview with Mr. John Whittaker, MEP (IND/DEM), EP, Brussels, 15th April 2006.

¹² Interview with Mr. Roger Helmer, *op. cit.*

“Generally speaking, we vote against the whole thing. Because the whole thing is ridiculous”¹³. Such an attitude does not make for good relations with the other MEPs. However, Orators are generally indifferent to this, as their main motive is not to negotiate or explain. “Everybody hates us here, but we don’t care”¹⁴.

The second fundamental aspect of the Orators’ role concerns the national arena. They think their duty is to inform the local population of the decisions made by the EU and of their negative consequences. They very often have a personal website, enjoy privileged relations with the press and are available to answer questions from the electors. “The reason why we are here is to bring back information to Britain, tell them what’s going on”¹⁵.

It is not possible within the scope of the present study to detail the quantitative data collected in order to complement the interviews. The analysis of the Eurosceptic MEPs’ activities – interventions in plenary sessions, questions, reports, draft resolutions, attendance – and responsibilities within the assembly shows that Orators make up a relatively coherent group.

Is it then possible to establish a link between this role in EP and any of the ideal-type models proposed before? Interviews show that the majority of the “anti-EU” MEPs tend to favor their role as Orators, which they regard as the best means of promoting their views. In their radical opposition to the European integration process, they refuse to take part in the activities of the EP where they only resort to some form of violent protest rhetoric or decide not to attend meetings. The link between the “anti-EU” type and the Orator’s role is also evidenced by the fact that all the MEPs concerned belong to the IND/DEM group or are non-attached. They cannot aspire to play an important role in the activities of the EP, but have much leeway to denounce the integration process and try to obstruct deliberation.

The Absentee MEP

Research has so far focused mainly on one specific category of MEPs – those who are the most present and active in the EP. But it is also essential to study absentee representatives as they evidence another type of representation in EP. Absenteeism is one of the typical features of the Eurosceptic MEPs. However the main difficulty for researchers, who cannot make a comprehensive tour of EU, is to collect reliable data among representatives who are in all logic not present and have no activity in the EP.

¹³ Interview with Mr. Godfrey Bloom, *op. cit.*

¹⁴ Interview with Mr. Graham Booth, MEP (IND/DEM), EP, Brussels, 21st March 2006.

¹⁵ *Loc. cit.*

Three main categories of absentee MEPs may be distinguished. The first type is the “activist-absentee” whose main objective is to protest against the integration process, the working methods and the political choices of the EU by refusing to take part in any parliamentary activity. It can be seen as an “exit option”. A second category is that of “opportunist-absentee”: those MEPs have no real interest in European politics but are rather motivated by the statute and the benefits attached to the position – immunity, income, access to the media, social prestige. They sometimes attend sessions or meetings in order to avoid the financial sanctions designed to fight against absenteeism. But when they do, they just put in a token appearance. In addition, they almost never attend the meetings of the committees, delegations or – in the case of the affiliated MEPs – political groups. The third sub-group is composed of “utilitarian-absentees”. Their participation in the European elections is essentially motivated by national political considerations and by their desire to take advantage of a voting system and a type of electoral campaign that are more favorable to the small, marginalized parties. It is mainly the case of the countries with “first-past-the-post” voting systems. Reif and Schmitt (1980) have shown that European elections were “second rate elections”, largely focused on national themes and favorable to the emergence of alternative political movements and protest vote. The typical feature of the “utilitarian-absentee” MEPs – who are often party leaders or officials (J.M. Le Pen, V. Zelevny, U. Bossi, M. Sumberg...) – is thus their very low involvement and attendance.

Can we establish a link between this type of role and any of the ideal-type models proposed? “Absentee” MEPs show the same lack of interest for European issues as the “Minimalist” group, or express a form of radical opposition which is quite similar to the “anti-EU” group. They may either be favorable to some form of limited transfer of sovereignty or totally reject this idea. But in both cases they think that it is impossible to go against the tide – at least in institutional matters – and thus useless to commit themselves in one way or another. In all logic they belong in their vast majority to the IND/DEM group or are non-attached.

The Pragmatic MEP

The “pragmatic” MEPs share some common characteristics with the Orator-type MEPs because their objectives are the same: To get as much public attention as possible and make no compromise on their Eurosceptic views. But they differ in the means used. The pragmatic MEPs do not aim to perturb the way the EP functions or undermine the European political system. Their objective is rather to strike a balance between the promotion of their views and the pursuit of concrete results.

For this purpose, the pragmatic MEPs favor a “limitative” strategy. Much like the Orators, they are aware that no Eurosceptic resolution or amendment is ever likely to be adopted. But instead of

protesting loudly in the EP against the Union and its institutions, they use their powers to control and amend the initiatives put forward by their fellow MEPs, the Commission or the Council. This implies more consistent activism within the various bodies of the EP, and exchanges with the other representatives. And this is the second priority of the pragmatic MEPs. They often play an active part in plenary sessions, in committee or group meetings, notably to put forward amendments or ask questions. As they abide by the rules of the assembly and adopt a relatively constructive attitude, they have good relations with the other MEPs. They may thus aspire to be in charge of a technical report or hold some responsibilities thanks to the principle of proportional distribution of functions, mandates and tasks between the various groups.

Pragmatic representatives are also particularly active in national politics. They deem it necessary to explain their activities and debate with their fellow citizens. They attach great importance to the national arena which is, in their eyes, the legitimate locus for political action. *“I ask the two other institutions many questions, mainly on sensitive issues. Afterwards, I can write articles in the Swedish press to fuel the debate. I also compare European and national information, and what national governments may say. For me, it is more important to work in Sweden than here”*¹⁶. Their presence in the EP is only driven by this motivation and they adopt a purely instrumentalist approach. Their pragmatic conception of their mandate is also shared by some MEPs who use the EP as an arena to defend their views and interests, which they cannot do in their respective national parliaments. This is particularly the case of regionalists and of MEPs who defend specific causes such as animal protection.

One of the main characteristics of the pragmatic MEPs is that they often take part and ask questions in plenary sessions. But, unlike the Orators, they abide by the rules and the code of conduct of the assembly. They may also be in charge of a report and assume responsibilities. They seldom put forward resolutions – which are unlikely to be adopted – but vote very often¹⁷.

Two of the afore-mentioned categories of MEPs may adopt this pragmatic attitude. It is first the case of the “resigned” MEPs (see *infra*). Their main objective is thus to be active in the EP with a view to changing, as much as possible the working methods and political choices of the EU. They want to defend the interests of their State or region of origin and make sure that the subsidiarity principle is respected. *“All we need is a common market and solutions to some trans-border problems. (...) I vote against everything if I think this should not be decided at the European level. (...) And I put forward many amendments to bring back competences to the national level”*¹⁸. This role may also be chosen by

¹⁶ Interview with Ms. H  l  ne Goudin, MEP (IND/DEM), EP, Brussels, 21st March 2006.

¹⁷ Simon Hix, *op. cit.*

¹⁸ Interview with Ms. H  l  ne Goudin, *op. cit.*

the “minimalist” MEPs (see *infra*) who do not much believe in the possibility of reforming the Union, but actively denounce the failings of the EU to the European and national general public.

This somewhat moderate attitude may account for the fact that these MEPs belong to the Green/EFA, EUL/NGL groups or to the UEN, which all take part in the activities of the EP, through questions, reports, amendments.

The Socialized MEP

The theme of the socialization of the MEPs, and more generally speaking of political and economic actors in the European microcosm, has been the subject of much research work. In the early 1960s, Ernest Haas put forward the hypothesis according to which the national elites’ support of the integration process would influence their political choices (Haas, 1964). Many authors have described such “a conversion to Europe” among German environmentalists, French Gaullists or British socialists after their election to the EP. Some specialists have used sophisticated empirical tools to measure – with varying results – the changing trends in the MEPs’ “attitudes” on European issues, after their first political experience within the EP (Kerr, 1973; Bardi, 1989; Scully, 1998; Franklin and Scarrow, 1999; Scully, 2006). Scully’s research is particularly interesting as it clearly shows that representatives do not necessarily become more pro-European when they become MEPs. A majority of them may have a more favorable perception of the Union than their voters, but this is due, in the eyes of this author, to reasons existing prior to their election.

Considering that these analyses have somewhat failed to prove the influence of the MEPs’ socialization process on their attitude towards the integration process, it is highly unlikely that the views of the most radically Eurosceptic of them might significantly be changed thanks to their experience as MEPs. We have thus to turn to the other definitions of the socializing process. Many researchers do not give any precise definition of socialization, oscillating between some form of basic learning of the institutional norms, some assimilation process of the “*esprit de corps*” or real conversion of the Eurosceptics to the virtues of European integration (“going native”). Socialization, conceived of as a learning process of the internal logic of the EP and of its Rules of Procedure and working methods, undoubtedly has some influence on the attitudes of the MEPs, whatever their political views may be. It is all the more pronounced as the pre-existing knowledge that MEPs may have about the EP and the Union is rather scant. Socialization may thus be understood as “*a process by which individuals are transformed from organizational outsiders to participating effective members*” (Scully, 2006, 79).

If we abide by this definition, we may identify one specific type of socialized MEPs. Contrary to the Orators and the pragmatic MEPs, the socialized MEPs not only apprehend the intricacies of the functioning of the EP to make good use of it, but they also adjust their own practices to it. They play the game of political deliberation or pretend to do so. In both cases, that implies that they accept the need to compromise and even relinquish some of their convictions to conform to the rules of the institution or get some benefits. Whereas the Orators declare that they “*don’t want to get involved in this*”¹⁹, the socialized MEPs have a more constructive attitude. They want to be regarded as ordinary parliamentarians, in order to defend their views more efficiently even if this means temporarily abandoning or hiding their positions²⁰.

The socialized MEPs adjust to the EP’s mode of operating. Consequently they generally belong to the main political groups in order to take advantage of their resources so as to be more efficient. This move has been facilitated by the two largest groups – EPP and PES – which have decided to integrate the parties and representatives from the new Member States, without asking them to adhere to their historical vision of Europe. For instance, the EPP has decided to form an alliance with some openly eurosceptic MEPs – notably the British conservatives – within the “European People’s Party and European Democrats” group (EPP-ED)²¹. The choice of belonging to the EPP-ED or the PES is therefore not purely opportunistic. It furthers good relations and guarantees some party discipline in the name of reciprocity. “*Success comes from the collective, the number*”²².

Because of their constructive attitude, socialized MEPs may be asked to write reports, which must be drafted in such a way as to be accepted by the other group members. A member of the ALDE group, for instance, describes the draft report for the Budget Committee completed by Tom Harris, a member of the European Democrats Group and a well-known Eurosceptic, as “*not distinguishable from any other report made by other Members*”, because of Mr. Harris’s desire to play the game²³.

Briefly, there are very few differences between the socialized Eurosceptics and the pro-EU MEPs. If we study data such as the questions asked, the addresses in plenary sessions, the proposals for

¹⁹ Telephone interview with Mr. John Whittaker, *op. cit.*

²⁰ Interview with Mr. Jaroslav Zverina, *op. cit.*

²¹ This alliance was made possible by the modification of Article 5 of the Rules of Procedure of the Group which now stipulates that “Members of the EP may become allied members of the Group if they subscribe to the basic policies of the Group of the European People’s Party and European Democrats and if they accept the Rules of Procedure (European Democrats)” and that “the Members under this Article have the right to promote and develop their distinct views on constitutional and institutional issues in relation to the future of Europe”. The Group is now composed of a non negligible group of openly Eurosceptic members. The Democrats give the following definition of their values: “The ED is expressly committed to democracy, individual liberty, the rule of law, national sovereignty, free enterprise, minimal regulation, low taxation, private ownership, respect and security for every individual and a strong transatlantic alliance” (underlined by the authors). <<http://www.epp-ed.eu/europeandemocrats>>

²² Interview with Mr. Jaroslav Zverina, *op. cit.*

²³ Telephone interview with Mr. Gérard Deprez, MEP (ALDE), 7th April 2006.

resolutions, the importance of the functions held in the EP, the respect of the groups' party discipline in the votes, the rate of attendance, the typical profile of the socialized MEPs is not significantly different from the other MEPs' on average. The only difference is that they make no secret about their reservations about European integration or the way the EU functions, and adopt a systematically critical, though moderate and constructive, attitude in their parliamentary activities.

If we now turn to the link that may exist between this category and the ideal-type models, we may say that the socialized MEPs are typically reformist. As we have seen, they tend to adopt a moderate but critical approach to the integration process and its concrete implementation.

They do not want their countries of origin to leave the Union, and think that the European institutions function quite satisfactorily. In that respect, they are often the butt of criticism from the more radical anti-EU MEPs. *"They know the institutions are incompetent but they think they can change it. It's like a wife with a drunken alcoholic husband; they still think they can improve it. The guy was an alcoholic before they got married but she got married because she thought she can change it. But she can't! It's the same with the conservatives"*²⁴.

This role is most likely to be favoured by MEPs who adopt a "strategic" Eurosceptic rhetoric, as explained by J. Rovny. *"Predominantly strategically driven Eurosceptic parties use Euroscepticism as a pragmatic addition to their original program. Through this they attempt to attract new voters sensitized to these issues, and effectively extend their coverage of electorate. Strategic Eurosceptics are, however, willing to amend or extend their programs by (hard or soft) Eurosceptic positions and discourses in the hope of gaining new voters and thus greater political influence, even at the cost of abandoning some original ideas or habitual voters (as long as this cost is perceived to be lower than the benefits)"* (Rovny, 2004, 37).

²⁴ Interview with Mr. Godfrey Bloom, *op. cit.*

As a tentative conclusion to our study, we may establish the following relation between the four ideal-type models of Eurosceptic MEPs explained in the first part and the four ideal-type models of MEPs' roles.

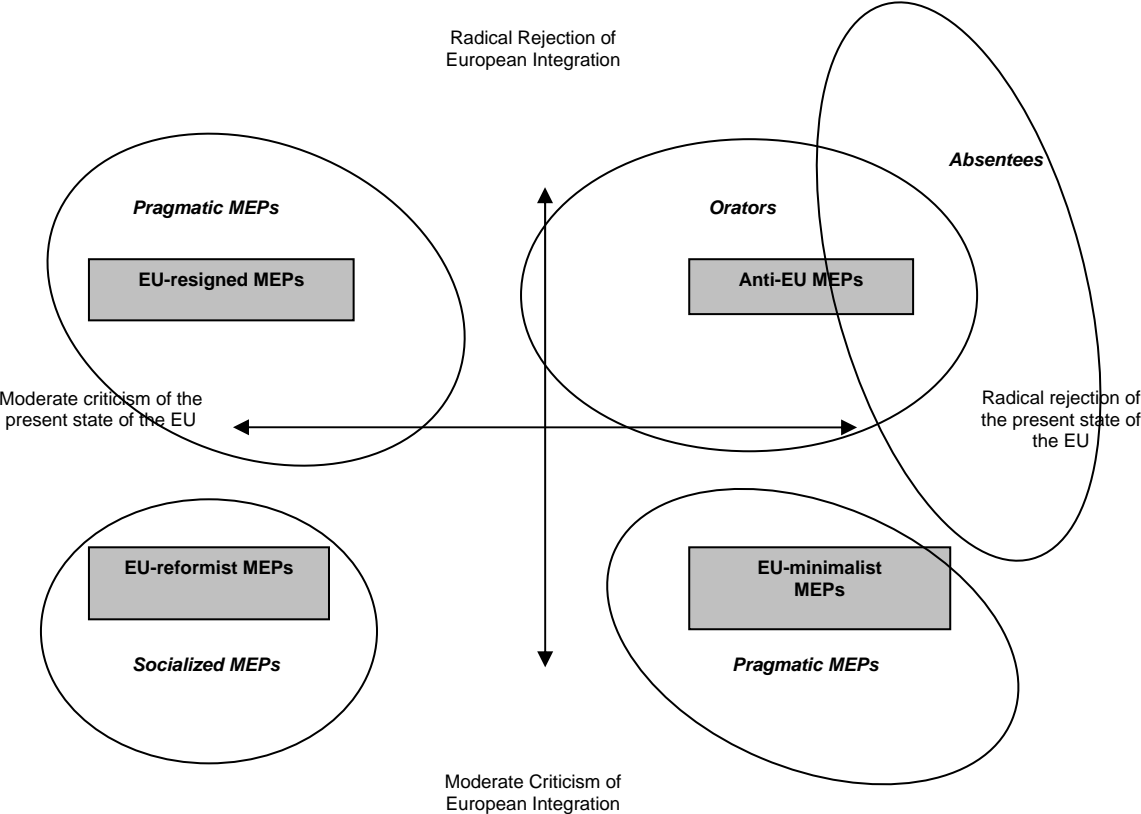


Figure 2

Conclusion

Everything indicates that Euroscepticism has now become an integral part of European politics, at the national and supranational levels. Over the last thirty years, Eurosceptic MEPs have been active in the defence and promotion of their own views. How then is it possible for the EP to adapt to and put up with such an internal opposition movement which tends to become more and more consistent?

A partial answer may be found in the modes of deliberation adopted by the EP, which are quite respectful of the requirement of “reflexivity” as theorized by Aristotle²⁵. The EP does not only deliberate on texts and proposals but also on how deliberation is conducted. As the procedures are not

²⁵ Aristotle considers that the capacity of defining the necessary conditions for the good functioning of deliberation by the people who take part in it is one of the conditions for its virtuous dimension. Aristotle, 1959, VI.

imposed from the outside but freely determined by the MEPs themselves, they cannot legitimately oppose the principle of deliberation if they refuse to take part in it. The most radical Eurosceptics are thus given the choice between two equally unsatisfactory solutions: Either they play the role of pragmatic or socialized actors in order to exert some influence on parliamentary activities, thus somewhat legitimizing deliberation, or they are absent, refuse to get involved and thus lose any capacity to influence debates or attracting any public attention to their positions. The Orators try to go beyond this aporia. They oppose the institution from the inside through their refusal to abide by its code of conduct and assume the responsibility of taking part in the debates. Indeed they do not hesitate to make public addresses in spite of the Rules of Procedure and of the instructions of the Chairperson, and challenge on principle the legitimacy of all the assembly's decisions. Even if such shows of bad temper have always been accepted within the EP, the attitude of systematic opposition adopted by some Eurosceptic parliamentarians has led the EP to modify its Rules of Procedure. Now, Articles 146 and 147 grant the EP President and the committee and delegation chairpersons a wide array of measures (interruption or expulsion of speakers) and sanctions (reprimand, suspension of allowances). The Orators' capacity for disturbing the EP's work has thus been much reduced.

In the present state of things, the very existence of an opposition movement inside the EP is not likely to radically challenge the legitimacy of the EP, because the Eurosceptics have no other ways of expressing their views than through the institutionalized mechanisms. If they massively decided to refuse to take part in the debates or, even more, to participate in the European elections, the legitimacy of the action of the EP would be thus more significantly challenged. A large-scale boycott of European elections in one or several Member States would inevitably have a strong impact on relations with the Union.

However multiple factors induce political parties to take part in political competition in general, and in European elections in particular, and make any call for boycott prohibitive. The working methods and modes of operating of the EP, the effects of socialization, the ego of the parliamentarians and the constraints attached to their political careers are also powerful incentives for politicians to play an active part in the EP. According to the recent history of European integration, it is very likely that Eurosceptics will be present in the EP for some time to come. The persistence of the constraints and resources for MEPs, the capacity of the EP to adapt to the presence of a strong Eurosceptic opposition movement and the effects of mimesis will undoubtedly lead to the roles of Orator, Absentee, Pragmatic and Socialized MEP becoming institutionalized.

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