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**New kids on the Brussels block: committee assignments
in the European Parliament before and after enlargement**

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New kids on the Brussels block: committee assignments in the European Parliament before and after enlargement

The recent enlargement of the European Union means that its institutions have had to adapt to an influx of new members from the ten recent entrants to the club. This is particularly pronounced in the European Parliament (EP) which, at the beginning of its sixth term, took in well over 380 new members, or roughly 53% of its current membership, 161 of whom (or 22% of MEPs) are from the new member states. This paper looks at one aspect of how the EP has dealt with this expansion and the sizable new membership finding its feet in Brussels and Strasbourg.¹ Specifically the paper analyses committee assignments in the EP before and after the recent enlargement and asks to what extent these are driven by informational, partisan and distributive concerns.

The arrival of so many new members in 2004, combined with the need to assign offices in proportion to party group strength and to national party size within each group places restrictions on the freedom to allocate positions to those with relevant experience or particular preferences. Given these constraints, does the EP make the most efficient use of the experience of its members in the EU's legislative process and of MEPs' policy-relevant occupations and backgrounds? Furthermore, do national parties in the EP deny positions in the more influential committees to preference outliers? Or do committee assignments primarily reflect MEPs' constituency interests? How are these issues affected by the influx of new members with little EU-specific experience and about whose preferences less may be known by party leaders? To answer these questions, the paper assesses committee assignments in the second half of the fifth term (1999-2004) and at the beginning of the sixth term (2004-9) in order to enable comparisons between the pre- and post-enlargement EP.

Theories of legislative organisation provide a range of predictions about the composition of committees. Informational theories predict that committees will be composed of heterogeneous members whose preferences reflect the range of views held in the chamber as a whole. Distributional approaches suggest that committees

¹ For a much fuller discussion of the effects of enlargement on the EP's organisation, see Benedetto (2005b).

will be homogenous, consisting of those with outlying preferences in favour of high levels of provision of goods in the committee's jurisdiction, e.g. members of an agriculture committee will consistently favour high levels of subsidies to farmers. Party-centred theories posit that parties can further their electoral and policy goals by ensuring committees are representative of the full range of views held within a party and are not biased towards one faction or another (Cox and McCubbins 1993; Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991). This paper builds on previous work on committee assignment in the EP (Bowler and Farrell 1995) by employing data on MEPs' preferences derived from roll-call votes, in combination with information on members' occupational background and interest group affiliation to assess these different approaches in the context of the EP.

Research on committees in the EP

As the legislative powers of the EP have grown, so has the scholarly interest in the parliament's committees, where the bulk of detailed legislative work is carried out (see, e.g. Benedetto 2005; Hausemer 2005a,b; Hoyland 2005, 2006; Kaeding 2004; Kreppel 2002; Mamadouh and Raunio 2003; McElroy 2006; Varela n.d.; Whitaker 2001, 2005). Of particular relevance to this paper is the existing research on the composition of committees. Bowler and Farrell (1995) show how the balance of preferences, as measured by interest group affiliation, varies depending on committee jurisdictions. Those such as Environment and Agriculture tend towards homogeneity of interests among their membership, while the Economics committee is composed of a more heterogeneous group. Kaeding's (2004) examination of rapporteurships, rather than committee assignments, shows that the Environment committee is not representative of the EP as a whole. Among the committee's rapporteurs, those with links to Greenpeace are over-represented while those affiliated to COPA are under-represented. Varela (n.d.) demonstrates that the membership of and the distribution of rapporteurships within the Fisheries committee reflects a system of constrained self-selection based on national interests. McElroy (2006) shows that specialisation characterises committee assignments as the latter reflect members' professional experience and links to relevant interest groups.

Hausemer (2005b) assesses rapporteurships in terms of their salience to national parties and finds that MEPs with outlying preferences are less likely to be assigned

salient committee reports, reflecting parties' concern with protecting their reputation. In his analysis of committee assignments (2005a) he also finds that MEPs with preferences that differ from their party group's median are more likely to achieve committee assignments salient to their national party's interests. McElroy (2001) provides further evidence of the influence of parties on the committee assignment process. She shows that party leaders use the committee system to reward loyal members and that MEPs with low levels of loyalty and participation are much more likely to be demoted than are others.

Further analyses have used roll-call voting data to assess the representativeness of committees. Whitaker (2005) demonstrates that national parties' committee contingents are more representative on legislatively active committees than on others. McElroy's (2006) analysis suggests that for the most part, committees are ideologically representative of the chamber as a whole. Hoyland (2005) shows how the differences between the preferences of rapporteurs and those of the median voter in the EP have declined as the EP has become more powerful, and that this process is marked in those committees that have become the most closely involved in the legislative process.

Much of this work points to the importance of national parties as a unit of analysis. This paper therefore attempts to model the process of committee assignment within the largest two party groups in the EP and to examine how this plays out in the context of enlargement. First, we consider the second half of the EP's fifth term, i.e. before enlargement. At this point, information is available to party leaders about the preferences, experience and skills of MEPs who were present in the first half of the term. We would expect that if the informational perspective is borne out, national party leaders will have used their discretion to appoint the most qualified MEPs, or 'low cost specialists' in Krehbiel's (1991) terminology, to relevant committees and will tend to assign members with greater EP and EU experience to positions on the more legislatively active committees. If parties are concerned about their collective reputation and the need to prevent indirect electoral damage or frustration of their policy goals resulting from EU legislation, we would expect them to deny positions on influential committees to members with outlying preferences. If the organisation of the EP is primarily driven by distributional concerns, then we would expect

committee assignments to reflect constituency interests, at least on those committees with a narrow jurisdiction aimed at particular constituencies (Hall and Grofman 1990: 1152).

Enlargement may alter this scenario. In particular, the lack of EU-specific experience of the MEPs from the new member states combined with the system of distributing committee posts in proportion to party group and national party delegation strength, may dilute the ability of party leaders to assign specialists to relevant committees in the sixth term. If this is the case, we would not expect committees to differ from the rest of the EP with regard to their members' occupational experience. Alternatively, party leaders may, within these restrictions, give fewer places to legislators from the new member states on those committees that are the most legislatively active. This may be for two reasons: (1) the lack of EU-specific experience among new MEPs; (2) national party leaders may have less information about the preferences of new MEPs who entered the EP in 2004.

The following section sets out the theoretical framework used and sets out the hypotheses to be tested along with the data used to test them.

Hypotheses and data

The committee assignment process is analysed for the two largest party groups in the EP given that in these two groups (European People's Party-European Democrats (EPP-ED) and the Party of European Socialists (PES)), there is a greater degree of choice for leaders deciding on who should be appointed to which committee. In smaller parties it is necessary to provide coverage of as many positions as possible (Whitaker 2001, p.x) and party leaders are less likely to have the luxury of appointing those with relevant experience. In addition, modelling assignments within the two largest party groups allows us to concentrate on decisions made by national party delegations within the party groups. National parties are vulnerable to electoral damage if unpopular decisions are taken by the EP. Witness, for example, the extent to which the British media made a fuss about Labour MEPs voting to scrap the British opt-out from the Working Time Directive, in contrast to the UK government's policy. Furthermore, decisions made by the EP may also restrict policy choices for national parties thus making their policy goals more difficult to achieve and possibly causing

indirect damage to electoral prospects in long-run (Whitaker 2005, p.9). Hence, national parties have incentives to choose their committee members carefully, particularly on committees that are likely to have an impact on EU legislation.

The paper draws on the three major theories of legislative organisation: informational, distributive, and party-centred. These theories are operationalised using measures of preferences, constituency characteristics, interest group affiliation and occupational experience, both jurisdictionally-specific and of the EU's legislative process. All three approaches make predictions about the preferences of committee members. In the informational approach, committee preferences should represent both sides of the policy spectrum such that the median committee member is close to that of the median member of the chamber as a whole (Krehbiel 1991: 96). Distributive theories predict that committees whose jurisdictions are narrow and have a clear link to particular constituencies, will be composed of preference outliers (Weingast and Marshall 1988; Hall and Grofman 1990). Finally, in the partisan approach, parties' committee contingents should be representative of the party as a whole on those committees that have uniform externalities (Cox and McCubbins 1993). Hix et al.'s nominate data²(Hix 2001) are used as a measure of MEPs' preferences on both the left-right and pro-anti EU integration dimensions. These data are not jurisdiction-specific but at present, they are the only roll-call based data available that tap into MEPs' preferences on different dimensions of conflict. For committee assignments in the second half of the fifth term, the variables included measure each MEP's absolute distance from their national party's median on the left-right and pro v. anti EU integration dimensions in the first half of the term. Both the party-based and informational approaches lead to the same hypothesis regarding preferences, while the distributive approach leads to an alternative.

H1: MEPs with outlying preferences are less likely to be assigned positions on legislatively active committees (negative coefficients for the variables measuring distance from the national party median).

² These data are available at <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/EPRG/Default.htm>.

H2: MEPs with outlying preferences are more likely to be assigned positions on committees with narrow jurisdictions (positive coefficients for the variables measuring distance from the national party median).

This paper does not model effect of preferences measured by roll-call votes on committee assignments in the sixth term as the nominate data for the second-half of the EP's fifth term have not yet become available. Even if these data were available, they would only apply to members who had served in the fifth term, either as observers or full members. But links to interest groups can be used as a further measure of MEPs' preferences. For example, MEPs with links to environmental pressure groups may be expected to prefer a higher degree of environmental regulation than others. If the distributional perspective is correct, we would expect to see one-sided membership of committees in terms of links to interest groups. For instance, the Industry committee will be dominated by those with industrial links rather than reflecting a balance of those with affiliations to industry, trade unions and environmental groups. Alternatively, committees in which both sides of the jurisdictional debate are present will be closer to the predictions of the informational approach (Bowler and Farrell, 1995: 227).

H3 Committees with narrow jurisdictions are composed of those with links to interest groups representing only one side of the relevant debate.

H4 Committees are composed of those with links to interest groups representing both sides of the relevant debate.

Information on affiliations to interest groups is taken from the EP's website, which provides a curriculum vitae for each MEP.

Measures of legislators' constituency characteristics can be used to assess distributional theories. In this approach, it is assumed that legislators aim to be re-elected and will therefore choose committees that allow them to generate benefits concentrated on their constituents. From this assumption it follows that a legislator representing an area, for example, that generates much of its income from fishing, will aim to join a fisheries committee (Varela n.d.). Only a small proportion of the EU's

policies are redistributive as the EU is largely concerned with regulation. Hence only in the areas of agriculture, fisheries and regional policy do EU policies provide much scope for gaining constituency-specific benefits. Given that the electoral connection is weak in the EP, the potential re-election gains from bringing home the ‘pork’ are likely to be limited. If we are to see any evidence of this, it will occur in the case of these redistributive committees with homogenous jurisdictions (Hall and Grofman 1990: 1151).

H5 Committee assignments to jurisdictionally homogeneous committees will be distributed disproportionately to those with relevant constituency characteristics.

Data on constituency characteristics have been drawn from *The OECD in Figures*³, which gives information on the member states’ economies. The percentage of each member state’s workforce employed in agriculture and in industry is used to test H5.⁴ These indicators are measured at the national level given that most of the electoral systems used for EP elections employ a national list.⁵

The occupational background of members can be used to operationalise informational theories. Here, Krehbiel’s distinction between intense interest outliers, the preferences of whom may not necessarily differ from those of the chamber as a whole, and preference outliers, is important (Krehbiel 1990, 1991; see also Hall and Grofman 1990). Members who have experience in an area of relevance to a particular committee may be especially interested in that committee’s work and will be able to specialise at a lower cost than those without relevant experience who will have to spend more time finding their feet. In his re-interpretation of Shepsle’s (1978) findings, Krehbiel suggests that such occupational experience should not be viewed as a measure of preferences but as evidence of an ability to specialise at low cost (1991: 136). Viewed in this light, Shepsle’s results regarding the US Congress and Bowler and Farrell’s finding that occupational experience is one of the ‘only consistently significant determinants driving committee membership’ in the EP (1995: 234), both provide support for informational theories. Hence a distinction is drawn here between

³ This publication is available online at <http://www.oecd.org>.

⁴ OECD data are not available for Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta and Slovenia.

⁵ See Farrell and Scully (2002) for details of electoral systems used for EP elections.

legislators' occupational experience and their links to particular interest groups. The latter can be used to measure preferences, while the former indicates a legislator's ability to specialise at low cost. Kaeding (2004) makes such a distinction in his analysis of rapporteurships in the EP's Environment committee, where he uses links to environmental and farming groups to test the distributive perspective, and measures levels of political experience to evaluate the informational approach. Following this, we can hypothesise:

H6 Committees will be composed of those with relevant occupational experience.

Information on MEPs' occupational backgrounds has been taken from the EP's website which provides a curriculum vitae for each MEP. Variables are included that measure the year of each members' first election to the EP, previous membership of the committee on which each MEP is currently serving,⁶ experience in another EU institution and other occupational experience of relevance to the committee.

Given that committee positions within party groups are assigned in proportion to the size of each national party, a control variable has been included that measures the size of each national party delegation.

The research design employed in this paper allows us to compare the committee assignment process half-way through a term, when new MEPs have had an opportunity to learn about how the EU legislative process works and when party leaders have information about preferences derived from roll-call voting, with the same process at the beginning of a new term with more MEPs overall, a large turnover of membership and a considerable group of MEPs drawn from new member states. Note the assignment process for positions in committees and other offices in the EP takes place every two and-a-half years, i.e. at the beginning of and half way through each five year term. As suggested earlier, the enlargement of the EU combined with the allocation of committee posts in proportion to member state and national party delegation strength may reduce the information about members' preferences and the ability of party leaders to assign members with EU-specific

⁶ Data on committee membership are taken from the EP's List of Members.

experience to the most legislatively active committees. To be sure, MEPs from the new member states are comparatively highly experienced in national politics. About 54% have experience as members of their national parliament compared to about 30% of other MEPs. Just under a quarter, compared with about 11% of other members, has national executive experience, including four former prime ministers.⁷ Furthermore, about a quarter had been observers in the EP during 2003-4. But if the proportionality of the assignment process restricts party leaders' ability to take account of relevant backgrounds among members, we would expect occupational experience measured by EU and EP-specific variables to be less likely to explain committee assignments in the sixth term. If, on the other hand, the committee assignment process provides party leaders with some room for manoeuvre, then we would expect EU-specific experience to be of greater purchase in explaining assignments to the most legislatively active committees. In this scenario, when national delegation size is controlled for, MEPs from new member states will be less likely to be assigned positions on the most legislatively active committees, given their lower levels of EU-specific experience. To measure the effects specific to those from new member states, a dummy variable is included in the models of assignment in the sixth term, coded 1 for those from new member states, and zero for others. The following section discusses the analysis of committee assignments in the second half of the fifth term and beginning of the sixth term.

Method and results

The dependent variables used in the following analysis are coded 1 for assignment to each committee, and zero otherwise. The data are therefore composed of committee assignments rather than individual MEPs. In many cases these are the same thing, but a proportion of MEPs are members of more than one committee. So in these cases, each assignment is included as a separate case. Because the dependent variable is dichotomous, logistic regression is used to estimate the models. Given that the resultant coefficients are difficult to interpret substantively, the results are discussed not only with regard to the signs and significance of the coefficients, but also in terms of predicted probabilities of assignments to particular committees for MEPs with specific characteristics.

⁷ The former prime ministers are Jerzy Buzek (Poland), Eugenijus Gentvilas (Lithuania), Guntars Krasts (Latvia) and Alojz Peterle (Slovenia).

The analysis covers assignments to six of the EP's committees: Environment, Foreign Affairs, Agriculture, Legal Affairs, Industry and Development. These have been chosen to provide examples of a mixture of committee types including:

- the most legislatively active (Environment, Legal Affairs and Industry),
- those with far less legislative involvement (Development),
- those with narrow jurisdictions (Agriculture), and
- those that are often over-subscribed (Judge and Earnshaw 2003: 185-6) such that party leaders are in a stronger position to choose MEPs with relevant experience and/or those with preferences closest to the national party delegation's median (Foreign Affairs and Environment).

Table 1 present the results for these six committees in January 2002, half-way through the EP's fifth term. Note that the chi-squared test for the model predicting assignments to the Development committee does not reach significance at even the .1 level meaning that we cannot reliably draw inferences from the coefficients estimated in this case. The results provide mixed support for the hypotheses. The results for Environment support H1. MEPs with outlying preferences on left-right scale are less likely to be assigned positions on Environment, the most legislatively active of the EP's committees. Preferences on the pro versus anti- EU integration scale do not have a significant effect on committee assignments. The result for Industry is contrary to H1. Members with outlying preferences on the left-right scale are slightly more likely to be assigned to this committee than others. This result requires further investigation.

[Table 1 about here]

H3 is supported by the results for Agriculture. The probability of obtaining a position on this committee for the average MEP⁸ is .01 but this increases to .22 for MEPs who have links to farming. Links to environmental groups do not similarly affect the probability of membership of this committee, suggesting that in terms of interest group affiliation, only one side of the policy debate is represented here, in line with

⁸ When referring to the 'average member' for committee assignments in January 2002, all independent variables are set at their mean values except for dummy variables which are set at their modes.

the distributional approach. The Industry committee has a broader jurisdiction but its membership over-represents only those with industrial links, who are 15% more likely to obtain an assignment to this committee than is the average member. Trade union links do not increase the probability of membership of this committee and none of those with attachments to environmental groups were present on Industry, hence this variable is not included in the equation. Interest group links do not explain membership of the Environment or Development committees at the halfway point of the fifth term. A variable measuring links to human rights groups was excluded from the equation for Development as none of the committee's members had this attribute.

The models provide no support for H5 as the coefficients for variables measuring constituency characteristics are not significant in either of the two models in which they are included (Agriculture and Industry). This may be a result of these measures being insufficiently specific to tap into particular constituency characteristics, but more likely this may suggest that owing to the weak an electoral connection in the EP, constituency-based factors are of little importance in MEPs' choice of committee assignments.

In line with Bowler and Farrell's (1995) findings, occupational experience (other than in its EU-specific form) is fairly consistently successful in explaining committee assignments, thus providing support for H6. For instance, experience as a scientist increases the probability of assignment to Environment by about 29% compared to the average member. Members who are medical professionals, have a 27% higher chance of a position on this committee. Being a legal professional increases the otherwise average member's chance of a place on Legal Affairs by around 16%. National executive experience in the relevant department also explains committee assignments in most of the six cases studied here. For instance, members who have served as industry or energy ministers in their national governments, are about 12% more likely to obtain places on Industry than is the average MEP.

Results for EU-specific experience are more mixed. While the probability of membership of the Foreign Affairs committee is increased by around 61% for those with experience in an EU institution compared to the average member, this variable

fails to explain membership of Environment, Legal Affairs or Industry.⁹ Those with a longer experience of EP membership are more likely to be assigned a position on Foreign Affairs. These results support the view of this committee as one of the more prestigious and over-subscribed in the EP. By contrast, more recently elected MEPs are more likely to obtain positions on Environment. This finding is puzzling given the involvement of Environment in a great deal of legislation covered by the EU's co-decision procedure. In none of the equations in Table 1 does previous experience in the relevant committee affect the chances of committee membership. This finding probably reflects the high turnover of EP committee membership, even at the half-term point.

Taken together these results suggest that committee assignments halfway through the EP's fifth term were guided by a combination of factors. On the most legislatively active committee, national parties within the EPP-ED and PES tend to deny positions to those with outlying preferences, as measured by roll-call votes, in an effort to ensure that committee decisions reflect those of the median national party member as much as possible. This reflects a concern with making sure that EP decisions do not conflict with national party positions in a way that might damage a party's reputation and frustrate their policy goals. Nevertheless, this concern seems to be limited to the Environment committee. Elsewhere, EP committees appear to be one-sided in terms of the representation of relevant interest groups. The committee assignment process is also characterised fairly consistently by the importance of relevant occupational experience. Party leaders aim to benefit from their members' ability to specialise at low cost as a result of their professional experience outside of the EP. This reflects the need to increase the amount of information available to the parliament in the EU's legislative process.

How do these results compare with the situation after enlargement and the 2004 elections? Table 2 presents logistic regression models of committee assignments in July 2004. Note that nominate data are not available for the second-half of the 1999-2004 term and so they are not included in these models. This obviously creates problems of comparison with the analysis of 2002 and so any conclusions must be

⁹ This variable is excluded from the models for Environment, Legal Affairs or Industry as no members of these committees had this attribute.

qualified by noting the lack of roll-call based preference measures in the 2004 models. Note also that in order to control for problems of collinearity between the variables measuring year elected to the EP and whether MEPs are from the new member states, two separate models have been estimated for each committee. Model 1 in each case includes the year elected variable and model 2 includes a dummy variable coded as 1 for those from new member states, and zero otherwise.

[Table 2 about here]

Overall the results suggest that EU and/or EP-specific experience is more important for explaining assignments to some of the committees studied, when compared with 2002. As with the fifth term, occupational factors help explain committee assignments. The Environment committee stands out in line with the suggestion that MEPs from the new member states are less likely to obtain places on the most legislatively active committees. A further notable difference from the 2002 analysis is that the chi-squared statistics for the Industry committee models fail to attain significance in Table 2 suggesting that the independent variables specified do not provide a reliable account of the variation in membership of this committee. This result may be due to the change in the committee's jurisdiction since July 2004 such that the external trade portfolio has been shifted to a separate International Trade committee. However, it seems more likely that this reflects the limitations on party leaders' ability to assign places on the committee to those with relevant experience following the influx of new members and under the restrictions of proportional representation of party groups and national delegations, as posited earlier.

More specifically, in the context of a large new membership, experience on the Environment committee increases the chance of assignment to this committee in July 2004. In model 1, for those elected in 1999 and with otherwise average attributes¹⁰, previous membership of Environment increases chances of membership in July 2004 by around 6%¹¹. Fewer of the occupational experience variables are significant here;

¹⁰ For the 2004 models, average attributes are defined as the mean value for all variables except (1) year elected, which is set at 2004 for model 1 in each committee case, and (2) dummies, which are set at their modes.

¹¹ Experience in an EU institution is not included in the Environment models for 2004 as none of the committee's members had such experience.

only the variable measuring medical professional background achieves significance. Members with such a background are about 9% more likely to obtain a place on Environment than the average MEP. As with the 2002 model, experience in an EU institution increases the chances of assignment to Foreign Affairs, at least in model 1, and longer experience in the EP also has a positive effect on the probability of membership. Furthermore, in contrast to the 2002 results, having a military or diplomatic background and experience as a foreign or defence minister increases the chance of assignment to this committee. In the case of Agriculture, previous membership of the committee appears to have taken over from national executive experience in this jurisdiction, as an explanation of assignment to the committee. However, rather oddly, there is a positive significant coefficient for the year elected variable here. Evidently many members of the Agriculture committee were elected comparatively recently but previous experience still has a positive effect on probability of assignment. Experience as a legal professional, again increases an MEP's chances of assignment to Legal Affairs, this time by around 6%. The increased importance of EU and EP-specific experience suggests that, at least for half of the committees in the analysis, party leaders have shown a concern with the need for relevant experience amidst the arrival of many new members, and have had sufficient discretion to make committee assignments accordingly.

In contrast to the 2002 results, H3 is supported for the Environment committee. Affiliation to environmental groups increases the average members' chances of assignment to Environment by 63%. This result needs to be interpreted with caution. Given the importance of preferences on the left-right dimension in the 2002 model, it may be that the effect of this interest group variable would be wiped out by the inclusion of nominate data but obviously, we can only speculate about this. The result for 2004 is in line with Kaeding's (2004) and Bowler and Farrell's (1995) findings about the biased composition of Environment in terms of its members' links to environmental pressure groups. The results for Agriculture again support H3. MEPs with links to farming are 35% more likely to obtain places on the committee than is the average member.

As with the 2002 models, constituency characteristics fail to reach statistical significance. However, among the control variables, there is a one particularly

interesting result. Regarding the earlier suggestion that MEPs from new member states would be less likely to be assigned positions on the most legislatively active committees, model 2 for the Environment committee provides support for this hypothesis. Even for those members who have links to environmental groups and who are otherwise average, the probability of assignment to Environment is around 20% lower for MEPs from new member states than for others. Thus the major legislative involvement of this committee means that party leaders are more likely to assign positions to those with experience of the committee and to those from the EU15. The latter finding does not extend to other committees analysed here although the coefficient for the new member variable is in the expected direction for the Foreign Affairs committee, but it fails to reach statistical significance.

Conclusions

This rather rough sketching of committee assignments in the EP before and after enlargement suggests that the process is a complex one. As with other studies of committee composition (e.g. Kaeding 2004; Bowler and Farrell 1995), all three of the major theories of legislative organisation help to explain the assignment process in the European Parliament. For some committees, parties take care to deny assignments to those with outlying preferences as measured by roll-call votes. But in many cases, the interest group affiliations of members suggest that only one side of the relevant argument is represented in many EP committees. Fairly consistently, committee assignments reflect relevant occupational experience, suggesting that informational concerns influence the committee assignment process. Constituency characteristics, by contrast, do not appear to explain it.

The results presented here suggest that the EP's most legislatively active committee, Environment, stands out from others in two respects. First, in the fifth term, and in line with the party-centred model, those with outlying preferences on the left-right dimension were less likely to be assigned positions on the committee. Second, following enlargement, and in line with informational concerns, those with experience on this committee were more likely while those from new member states were less likely to be assigned places on Environment. Clearly, the EP has responded to enlargement by giving its more experienced members a better chance of assignment to this legislatively significant committee. Membership changes at future half-term

points need to be monitored to assess whether this remains the case, or whether those from new member states can gradually increase their chances of a slot on Environment, as their EP experience grows.

Comparisons of the 2002 and 2004 results suggest that EU and EP-specific experience were more important for membership of Environment and Agriculture following enlargement. Furthermore, other occupational experience continues to be among the most consistent of the factors explaining committee assignments. Therefore, while informational concerns have influenced assignments in both time periods, experience in the EU and EP has become more important at least for two of the six committees analysed, since enlargement. However, party leaders' discretion to appoint more experienced members within the restrictions of proportional representation, does not appear to have extended to all of the committees analysed here. In particular, the failure of any of the theorised independent variables to explain assignments to the Industry committee in July 2004 suggests that the arrival of many new members combined with the use of PR has to some extent diluted party leaders' ability to make assignments in terms of occupational experience and preferences.

Finally, the findings raise questions about the problems of measuring preferences in the EP. In order to provide a more accurate model of committee assignments than that presented here, better, i.e. more jurisdictionally-specific measures of MEPs' preferences are required. Furthermore, the extent to which links to particular interest groups can be used as a proxy for preferences needs to be examined in more detail.

Table 1 Committee assignments in the EP January 2002, logistic regression results (standard errors in brackets)

	Environment	Foreign Affairs	Agriculture	Legal Affairs	Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy	Development
EU and EP-specific experience:						
Experience in an EU institution		3.34*** (1.21)				
Year elected to EP	0.08* (0.04)	-0.05* (0.03)	0.01 (0.05)	-0.03 (0.04)	-0.05 (0.03)	0.02 (0.05)
Previously a member of the committee	0.54 (0.54)	-0.41 (0.40)	1.72 (1.13)	-0.38 (0.51)	0.81 (0.61)	-0.16 (0.61)
Other occupational experience:						
Scientist	2.50*** (0.84)				2.14*** (0.78)	
Medical professional	2.34** (1.01)					
Environmental or health minister	3.03*** (0.84)					
Legal professional				1.67*** (0.45)		
Military or diplomatic background		0.97 (1.24)				
Foreign or defence minister		2.03 (1.63)				
Links to the UN		0.60 (1.76)				2.80** (1.33)
Agriculture minister			3.03 (1.39)**			
Industry or energy minister					2.07** (0.95)	
Preferences:						
Absolute distance between national party median and MEP on left-right scale	-1.93*** (0.62)	-0.00 (0.46)	-0.96 (0.82)	0.04 (0.58)	0.93* (0.48)	-0.32 (0.68)
Absolute distance between national party median and MEP on pro-anti EU scale	0.45 (0.54)	0.42 (0.46)	1.19 (0.75)	-0.29 (0.71)	0.33 (0.54)	-1.04 (0.84)
Links to environmental groups	2.37 (1.57)		1.73 (2.28)			
Links to farming	0.42 (0.69)		4.03*** (0.63)			
Links to industry					2.09*** (0.57)	
Links to trade unions					1.08 (0.70)	
Constituency characteristics:						
Percentage of workforce employed in agri.			0.05 (0.09)			
Percentage of workforce employed in industry					-0.01 (0.05)	
Size of national party delegation	0.00 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.39)	-0.00 (0.02)	0.01 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.02)
Constant	-169.04** (85.61)	102.35* (57.69)	-17.27 (101.73)	56.98 (79.22)	95.98 (65.92)	-44.43 (102.86)
	$\chi^2=40.54$ ***	$\chi^2=18.92$ **	$\chi^2=62.27$ ***	$\chi^2=14.31$ **	$\chi^2=29.28$ **	$\chi^2=6.37$

*** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p < .1

Table 2 Committee assignments in the EP, July 2004, logistic regression results (standard errors in brackets)

	Environment (model 1)	Environment (model 2)	Foreign Affairs (model 1)	Foreign Affairs (model 2)	Agriculture (model 1)	Agriculture (model 2)
EU and EP-specific experience:						
Experience in an EU institution			1.41* (0.83)	1.34 (0.82)		
Year elected to EP	-0.03 (0.04)		-0.06* (0.03)		0.25*** (0.11)	
Previously a member of the committee	0.89** (0.44)	0.95** (0.39)	0.10 (0.38)	0.46 (0.35)	1.87*** (0.81)	0.44 (0.55)
Other occupational experience:						
Scientist	0.55 (1.10)	0.83 (1.13)				
Medical professional	1.25* (0.69)	1.44** (0.70)				
Environmental or health minister	-0.44 (1.44)	-0.18 (1.35)				
Military or diplomatic background			1.60** (0.66)	1.48** (0.66)		
Foreign or defence minister			2.74*** (0.66)	2.66*** (0.67)		
Agriculture minister					0.66 (1.09)	0.64 (1.07)
Preferences:						
Links to environmental groups	4.16*** (1.40)	4.40*** (1.42)				
Links to farming	-0.44 (0.87)	-0.53 (0.88)			3.29*** (0.55)	2.90*** (0.50)
Links to industry	-0.39 (1.05)	-0.58 (1.05)				
Constituency characteristics:						
Percentage of workforce employed in agriculture					0.00 (0.06)	0.05 (0.05)
Controls:						
From new member state		-1.18* (0.72)		-0.03 (0.46)		0.07 (0.70)
Size of national party delegation	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)	0.02 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)
Constant	59.91 (70.30)	-2.88*** (0.42)	112.00* (61.24)	-2.67*** (0.37)	-505.64** (277.44)	-4.39*** (0.73)
	$\chi^2=18.53^{**}$	$\chi^2=21.72^{***}$	$\chi^2=30.46^{***}$	$\chi^2=27.99^{***}$	$\chi^2=47.35^{***}$	$\chi^2=38.70^{***}$

(continued on next page)

Table 2 (continued)

	Legal Affairs (model 1)	Legal Affairs (model 2)	Industry, Research and Energy (model 1)	Industry, Research and Energy (model 2)	Development (model 1)	Development (model 2)
EU and EP-specific experience:						
Experience in an EU institution			0.70 (1.13)	0.63 (1.12)		
Year elected to EP	0.01 (0.05)		0.01 (0.04)		0.01 (0.05)	
Previously a member of the committee	-0.07 (0.60)	-0.02 (0.54)	-0.35 (0.49)	-0.34 (0.43)	-0.15 (0.56)	-0.01 (0.47)
Other occupational experience:						
Scientist			0.67 (1.17)	0.71 (1.16)		
Legal professional	1.15*** (0.35)	1.20*** (0.35)				
Preferences:						
Links to industry			0.89 (0.66)	0.86 (0.65)		
Constituency characteristics:						
Percentage of workforce employed in industry			0.03 (0.04)	0.03 (0.05)		
Controls:						
From a new member state		0.59 (0.62)		0.10 (0.58)		0.27 (0.54)
Size of national delegation	0.01 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)	-0.00 (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)
Constant	-32.01 (108.30)	-4.11*** (0.60)	-22.66 (87.72)	-3.57*** (1.27)	-19.47 (98.85)	-3.12*** (0.47)
	$\chi^2=9.82^{**}$	$\chi^2=10.75^{**}$	$\chi^2=4.23$	$\chi^2=3.9$	$\chi^2=0.21$	$\chi^2=0.26$

*** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p < .1

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