

Chapter 19

Saying and Doing (Something Else?): Does EP Roll Call Voting Reflect Euromanifesto Content?

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Introduction

In modern democracies, citizens no longer meet in a central ‘agora’ (as Rousseau assumed they would) to decide on the future of the political system and its policy output directly. Instead, modern democracies are representative democracies and the link between citizens (or put more precisely: voters) and policy output is established through the institution of democratically elected representatives. Hence, for representative democracy to be successful the output of the political system must be closely connected to the will of the people.¹

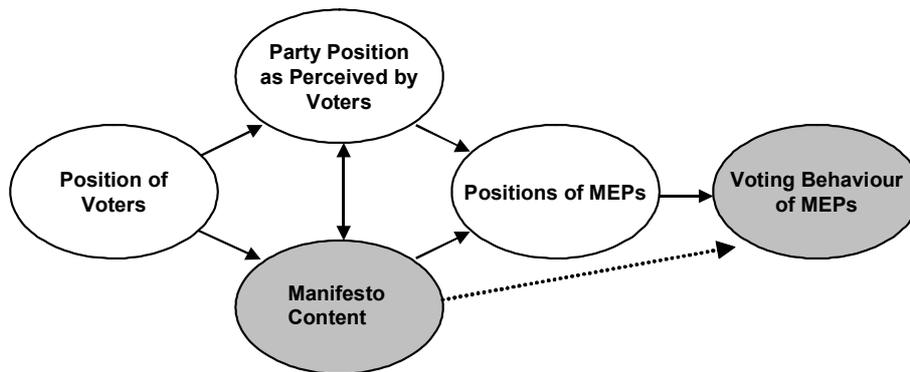
For European democracies, Aldrich's statement, according to which modern democracy is "unworkable save in terms of parties" (Aldrich 1995: 3), is even more true than it is in a presidential democracy like the USA. This fact is not only reflected at the national, but also at the European political level. Article 191 of the Treaty establishing the European Community states: "Political parties at the European level are important as a factor for integration with the Union. They contribute to forming a European awareness and to expressing the political will of the citizens of the Union."

Taking such a perspective makes us ask what the consequences for parties are. One can refer to the main conclusion of the report ‘Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System’, published by the American Political Science Association’s Committee on Political Parties in 1950. It reads: ‘The party system that is needed must be democratic, responsible and effective’ (APSA 1950). According to the report, parties and party systems are ‘responsible’, if, and only if, they offer a set of clearly distinguishable manifestos that voters can choose from on election day. ‘Effectiveness’ requires that parties (by means of their elected representatives) cohesively pursue their proposed policy goals in parliament after election day. Taken together, responsibility and effectiveness yield a party system that is democratic in the sense that voters can choose from a set of manifestos that are implemented after the election. But “[i]f electoral results do not produce any policy consequences, elections become mere devices to legitimate arbitrariness and contingency” (Schedler 1998: 195).

Research Questions

This idea of (party-based) representative democracy is the topic of our research. We build on earlier results which showed that even for the “beauty contests”, as European Parliament elections are often labelled, parties show considerable variance in issue emphasis and issue positions (Wüst/Schmitt 2006). Voters perceive programmatic differences based on parties’ positions on the Left-Right and on the pro-anti-EU dimensions, and increasingly not only take the Left-Right dimension, but also the pro-anti EU dimension into account when making a voting decision in EP elections (Wüst 2005) so there seems to be improvement at the beginning of the chain of representation (Figure 1). But what happens at the end of it? Do the parliamentary activities of the elected members of the European Parliament (MEPs) reflect the content of the manifestos their parties issued for EP elections? Or do MEPs not care what is written in their own party’s election program?

Figure 1: A Chain of Political, Party-based Representation in Europe



For parties to be effective, the parliamentary presence and cohesion in parliamentary voting of their MEPs should be linkable to issue emphasis and issue positions taken in the Euromanifesto they published for the preceding EP election. So if an issue or an issue area is more salient for one party compared to other parties, that party's MEPs should attend parliamentary votes diligently and should also vote cohesively. Similarly, attendance and cohesion are also expected to be higher if a party has a particularly strong position on an issue or in an issue area. On the other hand, if parties do not emphasize an issue or do not take a clear position on an issue in their Euromanifestos, their respective MEPs will be expected to attend these parliamentary sessions less frequently and to vote less cohesively.

Data and Research Methods

The unit of analysis is each national party represented in the EP. For the overwhelming majority (90%) of these parties, Euromanifestos (EM) have been collected for each EP election since 1979.² These EM have been coded according to a coding scheme (EMCS=Euromanifesto Coding Scheme) based on the Manifesto Research Group's (MRG) coding frame used for the coding of each argument in national election manifestos (Wüst/Volkens

2003). A sub-domain covering the institutions of the EU has been added to the existing policy domains and categories of the MRG coding frame,. Wherever possible, sub-categories have been introduced for specific EU issues to channel the coding of these into existing (MRG) categories on the one hand and on the other to enable researchers to separate these issues in later analyses if necessary. Finally, the so-called governmental frame or political level in which each argument is embedded has also been coded. This additional information is important for our analysis, since not all Euromanifesto content is clearly framed as being European. So we have an option to limit the analysis to issues parties which have explicitly put into an European frame, neglecting Euromanifesto content which is either limited to the national political level or not framed at all (see Wüst/Schmitt 2006 for details).

The attendance and voting behaviour of each party's MEPs are useful indicators of party effectiveness in the EP. As in other parliaments, the voting behaviour of MEPs is only recorded for Roll Call Votes (RCVs).³ These records and its minutes are made available by the European Parliament. They have been collected by Simon Hix, Abdul Noury and Gerard Roland (2005) and contain information on the voting of each MEP (and also implicitly on attendance) for the complete period ranging from 1979 to 2004 (886 RCVs for the first EP, 2,135 for the second, 2,733 for the third, 3,740 for the fourth and 2,124 for the fifth).⁴ The Hix data provides additional information on each RCV such as that on the author of the bill (rapporteur).

The Hix team has also grouped about 6,300 of the RCVs into policy domains. Such categorization is necessary to sort the RCV data according to information provided by the Euromanifesto data or vice versa. However, the ascription of policy areas for the RCVs was done on the basis of face validity using the long description of the subject of the RCV provided by the EP. Since policy area is a crucial variable for our research, we use an additional

data source in an attempt to improve its validity and reliability. In principle, the source of the data is identical: Again, it is obtained from the website of the EP and the minutes of the plenary sessions provided there. However, the second source of data (details of which can be found in Faas (2003a, 2003b)) uses a different approach to determine policy areas. By focusing on reports that have been discussed in committees before being subject to debate in plenary sessions, one can use the allocation of committee responsibility to determine policy areas. As yet these data are only available for the fifth European Parliament. A total of 2,582 votes on such reports – amendments as well as final votes – are used for analyses here.

Table 1: Policy Areas in the Hix Dataset and Corresponding EM Categories

policy area (Hix categories)	EMCS categories	EMCS cat. number	position availability	European level availability
agriculture	agriculture	7031, 7032	yes	yes
external/trade	internationalism	107, 109	yes	yes
	protectionism	406, 407		
social	welfare state	504, 505	yes	yes
	social justice	503		
	education	506, 507		
economy	Domain 4 (economy) (protectionism excluded)	401-416	yes	yes
environment	environmental protection	501	no	yes
inter-institutional	Sub-Domain 3.2 (EU complexity excluded)	306-317	yes	only

Tables 1 and 2 documented exactly how the data (RCV and Euromanifestos) are linked. Since the categories are not the same ones in each pair of data sources, we have tried to sum up the Euromanifesto categories to match the RCV policy area/committee categories as closely as possible. Sometimes this results in just one or two categories being used (environment, agriculture) while sometimes we use whole policy domains (like domain 4=economy). This is an important detail of data construction that should be kept in mind during the data analysis and the interpretation of the results.

We calculated a number of analytic variables. In the case of manifesto content, *issue saliency* was calculated by simply adding the share of codes falling into the respective policy areas. Issue positions were calculated by subtracting negative positions (rejections) from positive positions (support) in a policy area (theoretically ranging from -100 to +100). For our purposes, however, the clarity of a position is more important than the position itself. We therefore used the absolute number of the calculated issue position as an indicator of *position clarity* (theoretically ranging from 0 to 100). This value for position clarity is not independent of issue saliency and we argue that a clear position should be one which has sufficient room in a manifesto, and is not one which is simply mentioned along the way.

Table 2: Policy Areas in the Faas Dataset and Corresponding EM Categories

policy area (EP committees)	EMCS categories	EMCS cat. number	position availability	European level availability
citizen's freedom	freedom and human rights	201	no	yes
constitutional	constitutionalism	203, 204		
	Sub-Domain 3.2 ("complexity of EU" excluded)	306-317	yes	yes
economic affairs	Domain 4 (economy)	401-416	yes	yes
employment	creating jobs	4081		
	job programs	5041, 5051	yes	yes
regional policy	structural fund	4041, 4011	yes	only
environment	environmental protection	501	no	yes
foreign affairs	Domain 1 (external relations)	101-110	no	yes
women's rights	women	7061	no	yes

In the case of RCVs, we first calculated the *mean attendance* of MEPs for each party separately in all RCVs (theoretically ranging from 0 to 100). This was also done for all policy areas (*mean policy attendance*). In addition, the *deviation in attendance* was calculated by subtracting mean attendance from mean policy attendance to give an indicator of the relative importance of a policy area based on the parliamentary attendance of each party's MEPs. Finally, *party cohesion* in RCVs was calculated using Attina's "Index of Agreement" (Attina 1990; theoretically ranging from -33 to 100). Using Attina's index does, however, limit the respective analyses to parties with at

least 3 MEPs. The *deviation in cohesion* was calculated by subtracting mean cohesion from mean policy cohesion.

These variables are used to test whether issue saliency and position clarity in Euromanifestos is reflected in attendance and cohesion in RCVs in the EP. An alternative analytical strategy is paired comparisons of all pairs of two parties each: For a given RCV, two parties can vote in a perfectly identical way (e.g. both vote cohesively “yes”). In this case, the difference in voting would be 0. However, it could also be the case that one party votes cohesively “yes”, the other party votes cohesively “no”. If one counts “no” as -1, “abstention” as 0 and “yes” as 1, the difference in voting would be 2 in absolute terms – the maximum difference in voting. One can calculate this difference score for each RCV and finally calculate the mean over all scores. These differences have also been calculated for each policy area analyzed and we would expect the difference in voting in policy areas to follow the difference in issue positions and saliency.

Empirical Findings

When we start with the policy areas defined by Hix, Noury and Roland, the empirical results of the correlation analysis support our hypotheses only sporadically. For all legislatures since 1979 combined (table 3), issue saliency and attendance only correlate positively in the “social” and “environment” policy areas. The opposite is, however, the case in the areas of “agriculture” and “economy”. This also holds true for the relationship between position clarity and attendance, and results obtained by using differently calculated values for issue saliency and position clarity based only on content that is framed European (table 4) are differ very little. While “attendance” does, at least in most cases, correlate significantly with issue saliency and position clarity (though sometimes in an unexpected direction), “deviation in attendance” shows only a single correlation stronger than 0.1.

“Cohesion” produces a similar number of results which confirm our hypotheses as it does those opposing them, with all three significant correlations going in the wrong direction. And except for the “agriculture” policy area, the “deviation in cohesion” variable does not correlate significantly with issue saliency and position clarity. So, all in all, the results of these data analyses are inconsistent.

The inconsistencies in the empirical results could be caused by variance in included Euromanifesto categories (see data construction above) or by considering all five legislative periods since 1979 in combination. Therefore, the analysis has been carried out separately for every five-year period, but the results show only moderate improvement. Tables 5 and 6 display the results for the last EP, 1999-2004. While the majority of correlations point in the hypothesized direction, few are significant, and many others go in the opposite direction. The best results are produced with respect to “deviation in cohesion”. Except for economic and inter-institutional issues, parliamentarians of the fifth EP did indeed vote more cohesively if the issue area was more important for their parties and in cases where the parties had an explicit position on the issue area.

Table 3: Correlations (Pearson’s r) for EP1 to EP5 (1979-2004), framing neglected

	policy area (Hix categories)	mean attendance (N=299)	deviation in attendance (N=299)	cohesion (seats > 2) (N=182)	deviation in coh. (s > 2) (N=182)
issue saliency	agriculture	-,202	,001	,090	,224
	external/trade	-,037	,000	-,166	-,074
	social	,151	-,050	,108	,057
	economy	-,126	,007	-,055	-,045
	environment	,277	-,025	,095	-,062
	inter-institutional				
position explicit	agriculture	-,264	,086	,130	,153
	external/trade	,023	-,004	-,143	-,040
	social	,142	-,052	,104	,059
	economy	-,178	,007	-,016	-,115
	environment				
	inter-institutional				

Significant correlations ($p < ,05$) are shown in bold.

Table 4: Correlations (Pearson’s r) for EP1 to EP5 (1979-2004), European framing

	policy area (Hix categories)	mean attendance (N=299)	deviation in attendance (N=299)	cohesion (seats > 2) (N=182)	deviation in coh. (s > 2) (N=182)
issue saliency	agriculture	-,123	,003	,050	,229
	external/trade	,060	,029	-,268	-,176
	social	,127	-,088	,105	,126
	economy	-,071	,007	-,051	-,017
	environment	,249	-,010	,068	-,069
	inter-institutional	,028	,118	-,114	-,060
position explicitness	agriculture	-,166	,017	,059	,206
	external/trade	,145	,060	-,209	-,131
	social	,115	-,090	,106	,127
	economy	-,147	,006	-,020	-,114
	environment				
	inter-institutional	-,081	,069	0,35	-,009

Significant correlations (p<,05) are shown in bold.

Table 5: Correlations (Pearson’s r) for EP5 (1999-2004), framing neglected

	policy area (Hix categories)	mean attendance (N=102)	deviation in attendance (N=102)	cohesion (seats > 2) (N=59)	deviation in coh. (s > 2) (N=59)
issue saliency	agriculture	-,045	0,12	,242	,361
	external/trade	,269	,214	,074	,221
	social	,003	-,153	,147	,142
	economy	-,064	-,054	-,296	-,212
	environment	,167	-,167	,138	,178
	inter-institutional				
position explicitness	agriculture	-,093	,005	,057	,271
	external/trade	,251	,155	,104	,217
	social	,005	-,142	,139	,139
	economy	-,112	,018	,056	-,252
	environment				
	inter-institutional				

Significant correlations (p<,05) are shown in bold.

Table 6: Correlations (Pearson's r) for EP5 (1999-2004), European framing

	policy area (Hix categories)	mean attendance (N=102)	deviation in attendance (N=102)	cohesion (seats > 2) (N=59)	deviation in coh. (s > 2) (N=59)
issue saliency	agriculture	,014	,040	,174	,302
	external/trade	,207	,191	,025	,086
	social	-,021	-,162	,223	,314
	economy	-,020	-,011	-,260	-,216
	environment	,181	-,179	,149	,077
	inter-institutional	,159	,121	-,076	,009
position explicitly	agriculture	-,038	,062	,018	,294
	external/trade	,266	,223	,109	,046
	social	-,030	-,152	,214	,304
	economy	-,010	,046	,038	-,277
	environment				
	inter-institutional	,004	,106	,071	-,013

Significant correlations ($p < .05$) are shown in bold.

Let us switch from the Hix to the Faas database to test whether parliamentary committees are a better tool for linking RCVs and Euromanifesto content (table 7). Despite some outliers and predominantly weak correlations, these results tentatively support two of our hypotheses, if only for the fifth EP. First, in most cases parliamentary attendance increases when a policy area is salient for a party, and attendance is then higher than the attendance of the party's MEPs in general. Second, cohesion is higher in policy areas that are more salient for parties, especially when compared to the party's average cohesion in RCVs. Both hypotheses are also weakly confirmed when only relating attendance and cohesion to Euromanifesto content framed European (table 8). These correlations are however not significantly stronger than the ones neglecting the governmental frame in Euromanifesto content analysis.

Most outliers are found in the "economic affairs" and "employment" policy areas. This might be caused either by EM categories not matching the EP committees' well enough or by the possibility that, although parties are talking about these issues a lot, their MEPs do not care as much (and may care less than average) about them in parliament. While we are unable to say which of these explanations is more likely, we assume that in the area of

employment the respective categories of the EMCS might be too narrow and in that of economic affairs the categories might be too broad. It is probably no coincidence that the “economy” policy area also produced the worst results using the Hix categories. Additional outliers (3) are to be found in the mean attendance column, yet in all but one case, there is a positive correlation between issue saliency and deviation in attendance. This means saliency does not correlate with attendance at first sight, but it nevertheless does so when compared to attendance in other issue areas. This is not the case with respect to “foreign affairs” and this may again be caused by a possibly imperfect match of categories or by the ineffective behaviour of the MEPs. Combining external relations with trade issues, the combination of the EM categories and the Hix category produced better results for the fifth EP.

Table 7: Correlations (Pearson’s r) for EP5 (1999-2004), framing neglected

	policy area (EP committees)	mean attendance (N=100)	deviation in attendance (N=100)	cohesion (seats > 2) (N=58)	deviation in coh. (s > 2) (N=58)
issue saliency	citizen’s freedom	-,047	,115	,064	,091
	constitutional	,187	,210	,151	,226
	economic affairs	,007	,115	-,077	-,097
	employment	,004	,086	-,064	-,009
	regional policy				
	environment	,214	,214	,366	,347
	foreign affairs	-,146	-,160	,093	,095
	women’s rights	,072	,064	,112	,161
position explicitly	citizen’s freedom				
	constitutional				
	economic affairs	-,034	,081	-,099	-,157
	employment	,109	-,108	-,062	-,030
	regional policy				
	environment				
	foreign affairs				
women’s rights					

Significant correlations (p<,05) are shown in bold.

Based on this analytical step, we tentatively conclude that issue saliency in Euromanifestos has an influence on parliamentary attendance and cohesion, but that this influence is weaker than expected. At this point, we are more reluctant concerning the existence of a relationship between an explicit

position in Euromanifestos and both parliamentary attendance and cohesion. There are more grounds for our hypothesis to hold than not, but, considering the deviating results, the positional categories in the EMCS were too few to sustain a conclusion.

Table 8: Correlations (Pearson's r) for EP5 (1999-2004), European framing

	policy area (EP committees)	mean attendance (N=100)	deviation in attendance (N=100)	cohesion (seats > 2) (N=58)	deviation in coh. (s > 2) (N=58)
issue saliency	citizen's freedom	,010	,037	,106	,153
	constitutional	,201	,218	,164	,216
	economic affairs	,035	,102	-,127	-,161
	employment	,091	,005	,014	-,105
	regional policy	-,074	,220	,000	,130
	environment	,217	,136	,347	,359
	foreign affairs	,090	-,042	,036	,086
	women's rights	,045	,051	,153	,228
position explicitly	citizen's freedom				
	constitutional	,027	,045	,107	,041
	economic affairs	,057	,128	-,130	-,209
	employment	,130	-,095	-,072	-,152
	regional policy	-,069	,221	,030	,120
	environment				
	foreign affairs				
	women's rights				

Significant correlations ($p < ,05$) are shown in bold.

In a final analytical step, we look at each pair of parties. Table 9 displays the most extreme cases of mean difference in RCV for pairs of parties (with at least 3 MEPs). Where mean differences are small, parties showed very similar voting behaviour in the 2,852 RCV of the fifth EP. Where mean differences are large, parties showed very different voting behaviour. Looking at the 18 most extreme pairs, similarities and differences in RCV appear to be very plausible. Green parties are particularly likely to show similar voting behaviour and both and left parties differ a great deal from conservatives in RCV. At the bottom of table 9, the mean total, the mean within pairs of the same EP groups, the mean within the same party family and the mean within the same political system (Belgium and the UK are divided into two parts) are calculated. We learn that pairs of parties within

the same parliamentary groups show a considerably higher congruence in RCV than is shown in all pairs of parties or in parties within party families. Within identical groups or families, congruence is even stronger. Further, party pairs within the same political system show more differences in RCV than party pairs across systems.

Table 9: Mean Difference in RCVs By Pairs of Parties (extreme cases) for EP5

party 1	party 2	Mean Difference in all RCVs
BE-ECOLO	FR-Les Verts	,066
FI-VAS	SW-V	,070
FR-Les Verts	NI-GroenLinks	,074
DE-CDU	DE-CSU	,075
FR-PRG	FR-PS	,079
FR-Les Verts	A-GRÜNE	,079
FI-VIHR	FR-Les Verts	,079
BE-ECOLO	FI-VIHR	,082
NI-GroenLinks	A-GRÜNE	,082
FR-Les Verts	UK-Cons.	1,200
NI-GroenLinks	UK-Cons.	1,203
BE-ECOLO	UK-Cons.	1,208
FI-VAS	IT-CCD	1,223
FI-VIHR	UK-Cons.	1,224
IT-CCD	SW-V	1,225
LU-Déi Gréng	UK-Cons.	1,229
FR-LO	IT-CCD	1,232
GR-KKE	IT-CCD	1,247
MEAN	(N=4851)	,722 (.268)
within EP groups	(N=627)	,227 (.122)
within party family	(N=698)	,419 (.303)
within pol. system	(N=281)	,744 (.243)

We would expect that the difference in RCV in the policy areas defined by EP committees will be linked to issue saliency and issue positions within party manifesto content. Yet, as table 10 documents, this is only sometimes the case. Except for the constitutional and institutional issues (which more or less reflect the pro-anti-EU dimension), the differences in RCV are not systematically linked to differences in issue saliency and in issue positions. This is borne out in regression analyses (table 11) for the policy areas using

indicators for saliency and position. Belonging to the same EP group reduces differences in RCV substantially, belonging to the same political system reduces them only weakly. Yet, except in the area of constitutional issues, there is no systematic influence of Euromanifesto content on bigger or smaller differences in the RCV of parties.

Table 10: Correlations for Pairs of Parties (Pearson's r) for EP5

	policy area (EP committees)	Difference in saliency (general)	Difference in saliency (EU framing)	Difference in position (general)	Difference in position (EU framing)
difference in RCVs	citizen's freedom	,003	,015		
	constitutional	,182	,160		,213
	economic affairs	,046	-,002	,048	,018
	employment	-,060	-,058	-,036	-,049
	regional policy		,000		,006
	environment	-,010	-,008		
	foreign affairs	,014	-,025		
	women's rights	-,077	-,081		

For parties with at least 3 seats in the EP (N=4.851); Significant correlations ($p < .05$) are shown in bold.

Table 11: Linear Regressions for Differences in RCVs (Pairs of Parties) for EP5

indep. variables	policy area (EU frame)	const. (EU frame)	economy (all)	employment (all)	reg. policy (EU frame)
difference in saliency		,046	,019	-,060	–
difference in position		,138	,023	-,004	-,024
same EP group (dummy)		-,504	-,672	-,635	-,697
same pol. system (dummy)		-,022	-,017	-,002	-,025
adj. R ²		,298	,454	,406	,485

For parties with at least 3 seats in the EP (N=4.851); Significant Betas ($p < .05$) are shown in bold.

Conclusion

The empirical analyses presented in this paper were tests of the hypotheses that the roll call behaviour of members of the European Parliament reflects issue saliency and issue positions within their parties. Based on our findings,

we cannot say that this is definitely the case. Most results point in the right direction, so attendance and cohesion is very often higher when a RCV tackles an issue within a policy domain more relevant to a party. And there is also some indication that the link was stronger in the last European Parliament than in previous ones. However, we had hoped for consistent and statistically significant results which we did not get.

This could mean that party-based political representation in the European Parliament is not working. However, there is also reason to think data is insufficient. We know that roll call votes are not necessarily representative of all EP votes (Carruba/Gabel 1999; Thiem 2006), so including all votes (which are not available) might have produced better results. Further, the categorization of both RCV and of Euromanifesto content is difficult *per se*, and matching these categories does not make it easier for the researcher. A narrower research design focusing on only one or two policy areas and maybe also on fewer countries and parties could prove to be more fruitful. So we are optimistic that there will be more research on the link between Euromanifesto content and the voting of elected representatives in the European Parliament.

Notes

¹ See, e.g. Miller/Stokes (1963) or Wlezien (2004) for mechanisms how these are actually linked.

² The percentage of Euromanifestos (EM) collected ranges between 57% in 1984 and 98% in 2004: See <http://www.mzes.uni-mannheim.de/projekte/manifestos/collcodsum.pdf> for a summary of Euromanifestos collected and coded. Based on countries and elections, the respective percentages range between 14% (Italy 1984) and 100% (altogether there were 48 cases (countries) in six elections): See <http://www.mzes.uni-mannheim.de/projekte/manifestos/iprogress.html> for details on specific countries.

³ According to the EP's rules of procedure, the normal voting procedure in the European Parliament is by show of hands. However, each party group or a certain number of individual MEPs can request a roll call. In this case how each MEP voted is recorded. Official statistics

suggest that about 15% of votes are taken by roll call. The problem is that those 15% are not necessarily a representative sample of all votes. In fact, there are good reasons to believe that roll calls are called for strategic reasons, thus leaving serious doubts about their representativeness (Thiem 2006). Carrubba and Gabel have set up a model of why roll calls are taken. They argue that roll calls are taken to produce a voting behaviour that would have been different otherwise. In terms of party cohesion, they actually conclude that cohesion in roll calls votes might be inflated. Their conclusion is that findings based on roll call analysis are “conditional on a RCV being requested” (Carrubba/Gabel 1999: 5). This is probably true. However, since there is no other way to determine how MEPs have voted so far, one has to accept the shortcomings and keep them in mind when interpreting the results.

⁴ We would like to thank Simon Hix for providing a provisional data set for the fifth EP (1999-2004). See <http://personal.lse.ac.uk/hix/HixNouryRolandEPdata.HTM> for details. The number of RCVs for the fifth EP is larger, but complete data was available only for the given number of 2,124.

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