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From notables to specialists : European Parliamentarians and the Construction of New Political Roles¹.

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The characteristics of the European political space, the uncertainty concerning its construction, its innovative nature and its openness give signs of its unstable and fragmented space. At first glance, the MEPs appear in this context as constituting a very broken up group, whether it is due to the variety of their profiles and the political uses of the European mandate, the plurality of nationalities and national political cultures, or also the resonance of national logics in the constitution of lists and in the election itself (« second order elections »²). Several observers have actually been pushed to underline the absence of a genuine European political class³, socialising process⁴ and question the existence itself of a unified definition of the function⁵.

However, no matter what their nationality, political group or parliamentary commission are, many MEPs durably remain in the European Parliament⁶. In this way, the EP's agents (MEPs, assistants or civil servants) always mention in interviews "representative" personalities, that stand out not only for their degree of involvement in the Parliament, their knowledge of the European issues and the functioning of the EU but also the position they hold within this very space. These MEPs recognized on the European scene are however not the most famous at the national level. For instance, French Jean-Louis Bourlanges, who has been a MEP since 1989, and who used to be the president and vice-president of a parliamentary commission and delegation, only has a second order role in the French political life. He never managed to be elected in the French Parliament and his sole mandates before he joined the EP are local peripheral mandates (regional and town councillor) he quickly left after he was elected. In the same manner, German Klaus Hansch has been a MEP since 1979. Though he never held national elective mandates before and during his election in the EP, he was elected President of the Parliament from 1994 to 1997. José-Maria Gil Roblès-Gil Delgado (Spain, PPE), Nicole Fontaine (France, PPE), Martin Schultz (Germany, PSE), Pervenche Bérès (France, PSE), David Martin (Great-Britain, PSE) and others are all good examples of these processes.

¹ This article is a rework version of a paper presented at the General Conference of the *3rd European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR)*, Budapest, September 10, 2005.

² REIF K., SCHMIDT H., "Nine second order elections", *European Journal of Political Research*, n° 8, 1981, p.3-44.

³ ABELES M., *La vie quotidienne au Parlement européen*, Paris, Hachette, 1992.

⁴ SCULLY R., "Going Native? Institutional and Partisan Loyability in the European Parliament", in STEUNENBERG B., THOMASSEN J. (ed.), *The European Parliament. Moving towards Democracy in the EU*, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Boston, 2002, p.113-136.

⁵ ANDOLFATTO D., « Les Eurodéputés en question », *Revue Politique et Parlementaire*, n°970, 1994, p. 26-33 ; COSTA O., NAVARRO J., « La représentation au Parlement européen : qui représentent les parlementaires européens ? », in SAURUGGER S. (dir.), *Les modes de représentation dans l'Union européenne*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2003, p.123-151.

⁶ WESTLAKE M., *Britain's Emerging Euro-Elite? The British in the Directly-Elected Parliament, 1979-1992*, Dartmouth, Aldershot, 1994 ; SCARROW S. E., "Political Career Paths and the European Parliament", *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 22, 1997, p.253-262; MARREL G., PAYRE R., « Longévité », in DELOYE Y. (dir.), *Dictionnaire des élections européennes*, Paris, Economica, 2005, p.439-441.

The object of our contribution is to show that, far from isolated, such examples testify the emergence of a relatively unified group of political agents who can be considered as professionals of Europe. Beyond the European elected representatives' great heterogeneity, the rationalization of the European parliamentary life⁷ and the construction of a supra national party system⁸ is indeed accompanied with the formation of a restricted group of agents (a kernel) united around common beliefs on "the importance of a political Europe", knowledge and particular resources, europeanised **careers**, and rivalling to acquire trophies specific to the space in which they interact. In this space, a fundamental rule is the agents' adherence to the European political game: against all the oppositions to the political Europe, they are all convinced that "the game is worth the candle" and that it deserves to be played. In this way, it is possible to identify socialising process inside the institution as a consequence of interiorisation of new political roles. By « political role », we mean : « des manières d'agir et des façons de faire qui sont dominantes dans l'espace institutionnel et qui apparaissent pour cette raison comme les plus appropriées et les plus pertinentes⁹ ». In this context, new MEPs have to realise various institutional training. They have to "learn" these roles, to bring their practices and **discourses** in conformity with **institutional** expectations. By « **institutional** training », we mean : « le processus par lequel des acteurs, engagés dans une institution intériorisent tout un ensemble de connaissances générales et ordinaires relatives aux comportements qu'il doivent adopter en public et aux actes qu'ils sont tenus d'engager s'ils veulent conserver ou renforcer leur position au sein de l'institution, l'apprentissage est un processus par lequel les acteurs qui veulent participer aux échanges dans l'institution tendent naturellement à adopter (consciemment ou inconsciemment) des conduites appropriées (*appropriate behavior*) aux combinaisons de normes, de valeurs, de procédures et de savoirs les plus généralement admises par l'ensemble de leur partenaires institutionnels¹⁰ ». In this way, we are able to contest the "going native thesis" studies that denied such processes in focused analysis on ideological socialisation (for or against federal **construction** of Europe)¹¹.

We will first see that a study of the MEPs' properties since 1979 enables to be informed about the social conditions of the involvement in the game. For an increasing number of the European political personnel, Europe is a path towards political professionalization. Without enough central political resources to reach durably high positions at the national level, the institutional transformations of the 1980s and the 1990s however provide the opportunity for these new MPs to build and win within the EP a set of positions they contribute to place in the middle of the space (power positions). We will secondly see that a space of practices corresponds to this space of position, and that European political activity appears like a genuine job that organizes itself around specific stakes and rules, know-how and specific resources one must master to move and be recognized in the institution. It is through the institutionalisation of political resources that, beyond the fragmentation of the European spaces, a relatively unified definition of the European parliamentary function is structured.

⁷ COSTA O., *Le Parlement européen, assemblée délibérante*, Bruxelles, Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2001.

⁸ RAUNIO T., *The European Perspective : Transnational Party Groups in the 1989-1984 European Parliament*, Aldershot Ashgate, 1997 ; HIX S., LORD C., *Political Parties in the European Union*, London, Macmillan, 1997; KREPPEL A., *The European Parliament and Supranational Party System*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

⁹ NAY O., « L'institutionnalisation de la région comme apprentissage des rôles. Le cas des conseillers régionaux », *Politix*, n°38, 1997, p.18-46, p.42.

¹⁰ NAY O., « L'institutionnalisation de la région... », art. cit. p.42.

¹¹ SCULLY R., "Going Native? Institutional and Partisan Loyability in the European Parliament", art. cit.

The emergence of “professionals of Europe”

The analysis of the MEPs' recruitment methods since 1979 shows the increasing access to the EP of a younger personnel, with a greater number of women, whose majority stems from the upper classes' cultural fractions, and that less often held the most prestigious political positions (Minister or MP). They are the agents for whom Europe is a political professionalization path. By seating in the EP, they progressively hold the main power positions. The analysis of the holders of leadership positions thus testifies the reversal of the modes of internal hierarchical organization. Further to exogenous criteria (balance of nationalities, volume of symbolic capital), a particularly structuring endogenous dimension (parliamentary experience) of the parliamentary space has been adding since the 1990s.

Social and political backgrounds of the european parliamenters

The changes in the MEPs' political characteristics invite us to question several appreciations that are often formulated about the European mandate: mandate to end a political career, elected representatives' turnover, the inexistence of European political careers, dependence regarding the national contexts and low institutionalization of the European parliamentary scene. In the 1980s, the elected representatives are characterized by a national political experience. On the contrary, in the 1990s, many of them thought that accessing to the EP corresponded to a political professionalization mode. More neatly specialized in European questions, they hold less and less simultaneously the position of elected representatives and MEPs, and remain longer in the EP. 45% of the 1979 elected representatives, 35% of the 1984 ones and only 28% in 1999 have already been MPs in their country, respectively 17%, 13% and 10% Ministers¹². 31% during the first term of office (1979-1984) have two mandates (national and European parliaments) against less than 7% during the fifth one (1999-2004). The mandate tends to stabilize: during the fifth term of office, almost one MEP out of two is re-elected¹³ and less than 15% resign during their mandate (24% during the first one). From the third term of office (1989-1994), MEPs join the EP for longer periods. However, the huge gaps between national delegations testify the weight of national contexts in this selection. From 1979 to 1994, 58% of the British and 43% of the German remained at least 7.5 years in the EP against 25% of the French and 28% of the Italian¹⁴. In the 2004 elections, more than one German MEP out of three and almost four British out of five were re-elected. From 1979, the British indeed appear as a personnel more specialized in Europe than the average¹⁵. If only 31% of the French MEPs were re-elected in 1999, they were 45% in 2004. For Italy, such rate, which is even lower, also increases: 22% were re-elected in 1999 and 41% in 2004.

The socio-demographic variables (gender, age and professions) are also modified. Term after term, the population pyramid has been tightening. If in 1979 very old personalities represented a great part of the political personnel, at the end of the 1990s, most of the MEPs (73%) were between 40 and 60 years old, only 13% were more than 60 years old (14% less

¹² SCARROW, S. E., “Political Career Paths and the European Parliament”, art. cit.; CORBETT R., JACOBS F., SHACKLETON M., *The European Parliament*, Fourth Edition, John Harper Publishing, 2000.

¹³ BRYDER T., “Party Groups in the European Parliament and the Changing Recruitment Patterns of MEPs”, in BELL D., LORD C. (ed.), *Transnational Parties in the European Union*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 1998 ; CORBETT R., JACOBS F., SHACKLETON M., *The European Parliament*, op. cit.

¹⁴ SCARROW, S. E., “Political Career Paths and the European Parliament”, art. cit.

¹⁵ WESTLAKE M., *Britain's Emerging Euro-Elite ? The British in the Directly-Elected Parliament, 1979-1992*, op. cit.

than 40)¹⁶. The professional backgrounds are relatively similar to those of the national political personnel, with a predominance of jurists (12% of all the Parliament in 1996) and mainly teachers (22%)¹⁷. For instance, about 75% of the French of the fifth term of office stem from the upper classes of the social space, 25% of them being secondary school or higher education teachers, 15% high-ranking civil servants, 13% exercising liberal professions (medics, lawyers, etc.) and 9% being executive managers. Finally, the proportion of women, greater than at most of the national parliaments' level, doubles between the first term of office and the last two: 16% in 1979 and 30% in 1999 and 2004. In the same way for the MPs with no previous political experience or the "euro-region" MPs¹⁸, the important part played by women tends to confirm this parliament as a political space of professionalization for agents with a socio-political profile rather unfavourable to winning over national posts¹⁹.

These studies show that, for an increasing number of MEPs, Europe constitutes an alternative to live "for" and "on" politics. These recruitment transformations are then not without consequences on the involvement patterns in Europe. The Parliament, an institution dominated in the European system, constitutes nonetheless an opportunity for agents politically professionalizing to acquire a set of political, financial and symbolic resources. While for former MPs or ministers, the European mandate sends back to a sort of political drop in status that guarantees it at best the possibility to maintain their political capital, it constitutes on the contrary for other agents (particularly the young) a political promotion. They are going to take advantage of the Parliament to durably professionalize in politics, to carve out a place for themselves and be noticed. It is that way that an increasing part of European elected representatives that is going to mobilize itself for the control of the parliamentary space and the access to the trophies available in the parliament.

Specialization of MEPs to leadership positions

The study of the Parliament's leadership positions (chairperson, vice-chairperson and quaestors, presidencies of political groups and parliamentary commissions, posts filled every two years and a half at the beginning and the middle of each term of office) allows to observe the conditions of access to power positions in the EP: the national "notables" that held these posts are gradually replaced, in the course of the 1990s, by agents who are clearly more specialized in European issues, at the very moment when, the parliament becoming more complex, these posts become all the more strategic and not only honorary any longer. In this sense, the changes in the conditions of access to power positions in the European parliament **reflects the progressive structuring of a political space**, that is to say a space structured by stakes and a specific capital – the European experience – whose acquisition authorizes the access to central positions that do not only appear honorary anymore²⁰.

¹⁶ HIX S., LORD C., *Political Parties in the European Union*, op. cit.

¹⁷ WESTLAKE M., *Britain's Emerging Euro-Elite ? The British in the Directly-Elected Parliament, 1979-1992*, op. cit. ; FRANKLIN M., NORRIS P., "Social Representation", *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 32, n°32, 1997, p. 185-210; HIX S., LORD C., *Political Parties in the European Union*, op. cit.

¹⁸ KAUPPI N., "European Union and French Political Careers", *Scandinavian Political Studies*, Vol.19, n°1, 1995, p.1-24.

¹⁹ FRANKLIN M., NORRIS P., "Social Representation", art. cit.; HIX S., LORD C., *Political Parties in the European Union*, op. cit., KAUPPI N., "Power or Subjection, French Women Politicians in the European Parliament", *The European Journal of Women Studies*, vol. 6, 1999, p.329-340 ; BEAUVALLET W., MICHON S., « « Les femmes élues au Parlement européen (1979-2004) : modes de recrutement et stratégies d'investissement à l'Europe », *Regards Sociologiques*, n°27-28, 2004, p.70-84.

²⁰ BEAUVALLET W., "Un institutionnalisation du Parlement européen. La distribution des positions de pouvoirs, l'émergence d'un capital spécifique et l'autonomisation de l'espace politique européen", in GRAVIER

According to the biographies published by the Parliament of 229 MPs holding leadership positions between 1979 and 1999, nearly half of them **have** a national political career, three quarters stem from upper categories of the social space and 28% are teachers (higher education and secondary school). However, the proportion of national elected representatives decreases appreciably as terms of office go by, going from 82% during the first term to 46% during the fourth. At the same time, the number of teachers in higher education goes from 13% in 1981 to 27% in 1998. These professions indeed give resources that fit with the European political work often presented as complex and technical.

At the beginning of the 1980s, the europeanization of political profiles was perceived in a set of symbolic (references to European history and to World War II) or institutional (participation in the former parliament, member of the European parliamentary assemblies) elements. It however remained dependent on the holding of national political positions. From the 1990s, the European political game has become more and more complex and the Parliament tends to set up a full assembly. The parliamentary involvement enables to access to prestigious positions and to make a career there. In 1998, 75% had spent at least ten years in the EP, during which they had held intermediary posts within the commissions, groups or delegations (coordinators, commission or group's vice-chairpersons). For several terms, a political experience strictly European is a condition of leadership exercise: 55% of them can pride themselves on that in 1981 against 75% in 1998. This is all the more true that the agents appointed to a leadership position little after their membership of the Parliament pride themselves on directly European experiences. For instance, Catherine Lalumière, president of the group of the Radical European Alliance (ARE) between 1994 and 1999, held the post of Secretary General of the Council of Europe until 1989.

The limited group of eleven chairpersons of the EP between 1979 and 2004 illustrates with a magnifying effect this Europeanization of careers. The first five chairpersons (between 1979 and 1992) had quite a characteristic profile: presence in the Parliament following a national political career and relation more or less symbolical to the universe of sense that Europe represents. Simone Veil (France, chairperson from 1979 to 1982) was the former health Minister of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (President of the French Republic from 1974 to 1981). Pieter Dankert (the Netherlands, 1982-1984) spent fourteen years in the Dutch Parliament (Lower Chamber) where he was president of the Foreign affairs commission. Pierre Pflimlin (France, 1984-1987) is a former French MP several times Minister during the 1950s and the 1960s. Enrique Barón Crespo (Spain, 1989-1992), member of the EP for only two years when he was elected, was a MP in the Cortés (Spanish Parliament) for 9 years and Minister of the Spanish socialist government from 1982 to 1985. These figures can therefore be compared to "notables" for whom the EP presidency can be considered as an honorary position. The first chairpersons have therefore marked not only their countries' history but also Europe's. The biographical sheet of Lord Plumb (United Kingdom, 1987-1989) is in this sense a list of positions held in professional agricultural organizations, particularly at the Community level, then in the EP (president of the Agriculture Commission from 1981 to 1982 and president of the European Democrats group from 1982 to 1984). P. Dankert is a former member of the pan-European parliaments: Western European Union (WEU), Council of Europe, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Former president of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, P. Pflimlin is an historical figure of the European federalist movements and, until 1983, mayor of Strasbourg "European capital". S. Veil, finally, is at the

heart of the historical and symbolic European universe by opening her parliamentary biography on the account of her concentration camp experience.

Without the division being necessarily linear, the characteristics of the six next chairpersons (1992-2004) confirm the reinforcing of the EP experience to the detriment of a national political experience. In this context, Egon Klepsch (Germany, 1992-1994) represents a type of transition. Member of the Bundestag for fifteen years (from 1965 to 1980) then member of the EP, he held several mandates there whose key post is the one of president of the European Popular Party (EEP), one of the greatest groups. Klaus Hänsch (Germany, 1994-1997), José-Maria Gil-Robles Gil-Delgado (Spain, 1997-1999) and Nicole Fontaine (France, 1999-2002) on the other hand had no national political experience. Their election to the presidency of the Parliament is mostly linked to their political experience of Europe: K. Hänsch has been a member of the EP since 1979, J-M. Gil-Roblès Gil-Delgado since 1989, N. Fontaine since 1984, P. Cox (Ireland, 2002-2004) since 1989. Each one of them knew how to acquire a specific credit within the Parliament, after a permanent and continuous involvement within the groups and commissions. The determining weight of this experience is particularly explicit in the case of N. Fontaine who was successively vice-chairperson and then first vice-chairperson between 1989 and 1999.

The last twenty years testify thus the affirmation of a personnel more strongly professionalized on Europe and the tightening of the parliamentary activity around more specific stakes, such as leadership posts. Obtaining them relies on an endogenous experience and a practical mastery of the inside game in the parliament: presidency and vice- presidency of the assemblies, presidencies of the commissions and the political groups – in the decision-making process, other positions also appear strategic: the group's coordinators within the commissions, the rapporteurs in charge of managing a file for their commissions and political groups, finally the shadow rapporteurs designated by the rival groups to follow up the file. The agents' involvement in the parliamentary work and their ability to be in conformity with the institutional roles thus enables to obtain posts within the Parliament. Obtaining this type of political resources, whose value is specific to this assembly, influences the internal political struggles.

The profile of the holders of hierarchical positions within the Parliament illustrates the redefinition of legitimate personalities of the MEP around those who “make a career at the European level”, those who live “on” Europe and ended up living “for” Europe, finally dedicating almost all of their political time to it. This professionalization of European agents can be seen at various levels: a group of agents likely to instance competences adapted to stakes specific to the European parliamentary space; a socialization specific to Europe and the European parliamentary roles that is particularly based on the long term; a process of recognition by peers who control the access to the EP's power positions, specially those enabling to talk on behalf of the institution – for the case of french MEPs²¹.

It is now about seeing that a specialization of the European political practices corresponds to European agents' professionalization. More and more, the European parliamentary activity tends to have certain similarities to specialists' activity and, therefore, to turn in on itself.

A new political profession

²¹ BEAUVALLET W., « Institutionnalisation et professionnalisation de l'Europe politique. Le cas des eurodéputés français », *Politique Européenne*, n°9, 2003, p. 92-122.

Being a MEP amounts to involve oneself in a game area which is relatively autonomous and structured around a set of specific trophies. The 1990s' institutional transformations and the EP's redefinition in the European political system represented an openness of political possibilities and opportunities for MEPs to obtain a political recognition. It is the autonomization of the European political game that favoured the increase of importance of MEPs socially and politically interested in gaining a peripheral political space due to the compensation of their relatively low political resources by their ability to mobilize intellectual, academic and expertise resources. Thus, if the involvement patterns of parliamentary function remain multiple and mainly depend on the MEPs' backgrounds, paths and ambitions, the MEPs' practices, beliefs and competences tend to homogenize. The new MEPs are then obliged to be in conformity with specific roles from which they cannot totally escape for fear of being disqualified. The parliamentary space's institutionalisation can be seen in the types of role learning²². We can from then on talk of the European parliamentary activity as a « profession » to name the set of practices, expertise, manners, beliefs and competences specific to the exercise of a particular activity by political agents actually full-time exercising this activity²³.

Institutional transformations and specialization of the European political game

The end of the 1980s is characterized by an acceleration of the integration process that is going to deeply affect the political labour division within the community system. Through these successive transformations, the European political space takes the shape of a new space of governance characterized by very specific operating processes. The institutional changes introduced by the successive treaties from the middle of the 1980s thus contribute, in parallel to other evolutions of the political situation that makes them possible (Jacques Delors' arrival at the head of the Commission, France and Germany moving closer behind Helmut Kohl and François Mitterrand, the voting of the Spinelli project, etc.), to the development of a very peculiar form of policy-making. The European policy-making system is first characterized by the absence of a strong vertical axis, the forms of decisions being fluid and little organized into a hierarchy, marked by the openness, uncertainty and opaqueness. The notion of public action networks allows in this sense to account for the association of plural and multiple agents (European civil-servants, national civil-servants, experts committee, interest groups' representatives, etc.) to the formulation of decisions and regulations. A new space of interest representation thus develops at the European level²⁴. This association of multiple agents, the absence of a very stable institutional hierarchical organization and the lack of legitimacy that constantly jeopardizes the European institutions then feed a continuous negotiation necessary to the construction of a compromise itself characteristic of political exchanges at the European level. Finally, the preparation by the Commission of community regulations relies upon the formulation of an expertise whose production partly relies on an association of European civil-servants with social agents that do not belong to the Community's administration itself²⁵.

²² NAY O., « L'institutionnalisation de la région... », art. cit.

²³ GARRAUD P., *Profession homme politique : la carrière politique des maires urbains*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1989 ; LAGROYE J., « Etre du métier », *Politix*, n°28, 1994, p.5-15 ; OFFERLE M. (dir.), *La profession politique, XIX-XXème siècle*, Paris, Belin, 1999.

²⁴ MENY Y., MULLER P., QUERMONE J.-L. (dir.), *Politiques publiques en Europe*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1995.

²⁵ LEQUESNE C., « Comment penser l'Union Européenne ? », in SMOUTS M.-C. (dir.), *Les Nouvelles relations internationales, pratiques et théories*, Paris, Presses de Science Po, 1995, p. 103-134.

From that point of view, resorting to expertise by Brussels' civil-servants is a resource of action and a legitimating of their activism to the various agents²⁶.

The European Parliament is of the main one to benefit by treaties that followed on another from the 1980s. The European Single Act (1986), the Treaty on European Union (1991) then the Amsterdam Treaty (1997) indeed extend their fields of action and create new procedures – particularly the co-decision – that institute a negotiation space more complex between the European Parliament, the Commission and the Council of Ministers. It is the Treaty on European Union in 1991 that introduces the most important changes in the formal distribution of power. A genuine status of co-legislator is then attributed to the EP for a certain number of community sectors. Even if this procedure remains therefore exceptional by only concerning fields by definition situated on the fringe of the specific political game – the files concerned are indeed perceived as “technical” rather than “political” –, it is going to impose itself as the common law procedure within the first pillar (community pillar) ; the fields submitted to co-decision are indeed extended by the Amsterdam and Nice Treaties. And soon as it was implemented, the institutional changes increase the EP's influence possibilities on the community political system²⁷.

Therefore, from the end of the 1980s, MEPs must implement complex procedures, face a considerable increase of texts submitted to their examination, understand the very technical dimension of the internal market harmonisation legislations and manage a more and more important heterogeneity, whether it is from a national (nine delegations in 1979 against twenty-five in 2004), political (more than one hundred and twenty nationals represented during the 1999-2004 term) and linguistic (twenty official languages) point of view. A parliamentary rationalisation results from the increase of MEPs' activities²⁸, illustrated by the reinforcing of the commissions and groups' and by the redefinition of collective strategies, stakes specific to the institution and, hence, competences that can be developed at a certain moment. Several commissions have, for instance, become more important: Legal Affairs and internal market – to which the main harmonisation directives are attributed – Environment, public health and consumer policy or industry, external trade, research and energy – because they are part of the co-decision procedures.

At the same time, we can observe the development of a supra national party system²⁹. The political life and divided lines in the assembly become more autonomous. Since the nineties the three main groups reinforced themselves. A lot of national delegations led small groups for the biggest, because the national delegations of a small group can't really influence legislative issues. Even if they can have a more important political and symbolic role and are sometimes able to influence Parliament decision especially on international issues (for Green and radical left for instance), they have a marginal influence on the legislative process. This evolution has been confirmed by the last election (June 2004). In other words, even if the Parliament become, *a priori*, more and more heterogeneous (a lot of nationalities and national political parties are represented in the last Parliament, there were for example more than 130 national parties represented, so a very large political spectrum), the political system remain in

²⁶ ROBERT C., « L'expertise comme mode d'administration communautaire : entre logiques technocratiques et stratégies d'alliance », *Politique européenne*, n°11, 2003, p.57-78.

²⁷ SHACKLETON M., « The Politics of Codecision », *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 38, n°2, 2000, p.325-342.

²⁸ COSTA O., *Le Parlement européen, assemblée délibérante*, op. cit.

²⁹ RAUNIO T., *The European Perspective : Transnational Party Groups in the 1989-1994 European Parliament*, Aldershot Ashgate, 1997; HIX S., LORD C., *Political Parties in the European Union*, op. cit. ; KREPPPEL A., *The European Parliament and Supranational Party System*, op. cit.

fact stable and relatively homogeneous with seven- eight groups (if we want to count non attached members). The three main Groups themselves represent 76 % of the whole assembly. The other four groups represent together 20 % of the whole assembly.

As Simon Hix and Christopher Lord have noted nearly ten years ago, the European Parliament party system can be considered since the nineties closed to an *endogenous* party system in opposition with the *exogenous* party system it used to be in the early eighties. (The second case predicts that each parties are “defined outside the institutions they serve and without reference to the rules for exercising power there”. In contrary, an endogenous party system predicts that “that the composition of the party groups is partially adjusted to the power structures of the European Union itself and its Parliament”.) Various criteria show that the European Parliament’s party system turn itself on endogenous development : “Before the single act and Maastricht treaties, it was only some of the smaller party groups that came under pressure to adapt their composition to the specific institutional contexts of the Union and the internal rules of the EP itself. Simultaneous extension in the competence of the Union and the powers of its Parliament has compelled national parties to reconsider whether their MEPs really are well-positioned to exercise significant influence in the EP. In the next institutional setting, the price of getting this wrong is less of influence over a significant stage in the making of policies and laws that affect domestic environment. This explains why the British conservatives for instance joined the EPP³⁰”. This evolution is for instance illustrated by the fact that the British conservatives, French Gaullists or Italian supporters of Berlusconi (Forza Europa) finally joined the EPP.

The group also became bigger and stronger over times and legislative periods. The two main groups, EPP and PES can be considered as proper Parliament (With more than 200 deputies). But, at the same time, various studies note that they have a relatively high degree of vote cohesion and that this cohesion become stronger with time³¹. All this also mean that the political groups become very important structures whom direction and management suppose special political competences and specific know-how in international bargainings. This explains the fact that the deputies in charge of the management of these groups are more professionalised over times. Being elected in the head of a group supposes to have what sociologist called a specific European political capital (or specific European political resources).

The political labour division, the costs and the bonuses of the European involvement have increased. The whole parliamentary game has become more complex. For instance, the very peculiar and complex procedures that co-decision and cooperation constitute, by needing important majority thresholds (absolute majority, two-thirds majority), impose, in a very heterogeneous group characterized by the absence of vertical axes of hierarchical organization, subtle negotiation and political alliances’ construction games that remain moving. Thus, new political expertises are imposed that the MPs must acquire on the job through their contact with the institution and its various categories of personnel. Even if the modes of involvement remain differentiated, maintaining one’s position requires the internalisation of more and more specific roles to this space.

³⁰ HIX S., LORD C., *Political Parties in the European Union*, *op. cit.*, p.94-95.

³¹ ATTINA F., “The voting behaviour of European Parliament Members and the Problem of Europarties”, *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 18, 1989, p.557-579 ; HIX S., LORD C., *Political Parties in the European Union*, *op. cit.*; WAELE J.-M. de, « La structuration partisane interne au Parlement européen », in DELWIT P., WAELE J.-M. de, MAGNETTE P. (dir.), *A quoi sert le Parlement européen ?*, Edition Complexe, Bruxelles, 1999, p.131-145 ; KREPPEL A., *The European Parliament and Supranational Party System*, *op. cit.*

Differentiated modes of involvement

Involvement in the EP is different among the MEPs who are most specialized in European questions (Jean-Louis Bourlanges in France, David Martin in Great Britain and Martin Schulz in German for example) and those who hold several mandates concurrently – with, for the extreme cases, those who associate the European mandate with a national parliamentary mandate. The MEPs' recruitment methods being much related to the national political contexts (Reif, Schmidt, 1981), the conception of the European mandate, its position in the political career or the relation to parliamentary activities vary according to the delegations. For instance, the German and British MPs, who are known to be more present and active than the French, hardly hold several mandates at the same time and are often re-elected³². On the contrary, the French were long selected according to national criteria that tended to undermine the most involved in the EP³³. But, no matter what the nationality is, the recruitment of agents for whom the EP is similar to a political professionalization opportunity increases the specialization of profiles³⁴.

The patterns of the European political profession are then reflected in the distribution within the standing committees. The choice of the committees, joint committees, and files followed up by the MEPs is then often linked to their political path, thus to their own interests and competences, and their position in the objective hierarchy of the political field. The most famous MPs and the ones that have the most political resources – in the EP for several terms previously national MPs or even Ministers –, who are also the ones to have most of the socially legitimate properties (senior civil servants, university teachers, graduated from the most prestigious higher education institutes and universities), rather seat in the commissions that deal with the most legitimate themes: Foreign Affairs, human rights, common security and defence policy, budget, economy and monetary and also constitutional affairs. During the fifth term of office, it is for instance the case of Alain Lamassoure and Enrique Barón Crespo in foreign affairs. Those with high professional specializations – farmers or scholars for example – often join commissions in relation with their field of competence (Joseph Daul for agriculture or Richard Corbett for the institutional commission). Other MPs can be found in commissions that, although less prestigious, can be at the centre of the decision-making process and provide high symbolic bonuses within the parliament (Environment, public health and consumers' policy or liberties, citizens' rights, justice and internal affairs). Finally, the agents concerned with maintaining and developing a local foothold often show a great interest in the Commission of Regional Policy, Transport and Tourism. It is the case of a great number of French MEPs. Often local elected representatives, these MEPs perceive for example the structural funds policy for regional funds as an opportunity to build up exchanges between political towns and the European Union, to impose themselves as the mediators of these exchanges and, in so doing, locally favour the obtaining of a political capital³⁵.

However, the MEPs' work is not restricted to the work in commission. The legislative work offers a set of opportunities to defend political interests: amendment tabling, report writing,

³² WESTLAKE M., *Britain's Emerging Euro-Elite ? The British in the Directly-Elected Parliament, 1979-1992*, *op. cit.*; BRYDER T., "Party Groups in the European Parliament and the Changing Recruitment Patterns of MEPs", *art. cit.*; SCARROW, S. E., "Political Career Paths and the European Parliament", *art. cit.*

³³ ANDOLFATTO D., « Les Eurodéputés en question », *art. cit.*

³⁴ BEAUVALLET W., « Institutionnalisation et professionnalisation de l'Europe politique... », *art. cit.*

³⁵ BEAUVALLET W., MICHON S., « « Les femmes élues au Parlement européen (1979-2004) : modes de recrutement et stratégies d'investissement à l'Europe », *art. cit.*

participation in joint committees, and also mobilization of the national delegation and political group. The MEPs not only work on files they know because they have already broached them in political or professional functions, but also on issues from which they can gain great political benefits in the European, national, local or party field: environment for instance for Green MEPs, certain international issues for left and extreme-left MEPs, etc. From this point of view, one could not neglect the representative dimension of the political work in Europe, though it is generally hidden.

On of the most important facet of the profession of elected representative thus consists in “catching” the files and stakes that are likely to be dealt with from a European position, from a European point of view and by a European, that is to say thanks to specifically European competences, expertises and contacts that the MEPs are able to mobilize and exclusively possess. These practices have two advantages: they limit the uncertainties of the MEP mandate in relation to political representation (who and what do they represent?). On the other hand, they allow to “make moves” likely to position them at the centre of political current situation or debates tearing their party apart, and even make socio-political networks denser, and acquire a political capital. These strategies that are at the same time strategies to become visible are indispensable to the acquisition of a multiple capital, itself indispensable to the construction of a political career: local symbolic capital (be respected by the citizens), party capital (be someone in the party), local as much as national media capital (be known by the journalists).

Beyond the various ways of involvement in the parliament, the European political activity tends to structure itself from a whole of stands and expertises specific to this internationalised and relatively homogeneous space, with which agents are, at a certain point, forced to be in conformity otherwise they might be kept in the background.

Specificities of European practices

The integration in the parliamentary world implies learning expertises indispensable to the mastery of the deliberation process. The first structuring element is the absence of the political system’s integration. Unlike what happens in a great number of national political systems like in France or Great Britain, MEPs are strictly independent from the executive, that is to say from the Council and Commission’s members. The voting of texts according to their authors is from then on meaningless. The parliamentary production also takes place after negotiations between the institutions in *ad hoc* structures (for instance conciliation committees gathering the EP and Council’s members). Deliberation organizes itself upon the construction of a compromise that structures very deeply parliamentary practices. Considering the cleavages characteristic of a segmented European society (North/South, West/East, founding countries/new members, big countries/small countries, etc.), the institutional rules aim at preventing a bipolarisation of parliamentary scene. The provisions of the European regulation firstly aim at guaranteeing each group a representation proportional to its numerical weight within the parliament’s leadership (d’Hondt method). The voting modes imposed by the treaties require then great majorities (absolute majority of the members and even the two-thirds majority). In this context the alliance of the two main political groups – the European Popular Party and the European Socialist Party that are the only ones to gather elected representatives stemming from almost all the member states – answers as much to an institutional constraint as to a form of political routine allowing to stabilize the parliamentary activity. The majorities’ construction peculiarly stands out clearly against certain cultural

national political cultures. For the main groups, and the national delegations they are composed of, compromise allows every one to benefit from the elaboration of the decisions³⁶.

The ability to negotiate is a crucial dimension of the MEP function. To be influential, MEPs must maintain regular contacts and relations with those who are important both inside and outside the institution: rapporteurs, *shadow* rapporteurs, coordinators, civil servants, commissioners, Council members, etc. If one wants to convince his/her group but also the members of rival groups, he/she must know how to mobilize arguments that are not only ideological. By structuring exchanges between agents, these specificities of European deliberation progressively define what could be called a genuine European political *ethos*: fair-play, necessary open-mindedness, and mistrust towards any ethnocentric position. Agents must be in conformity with this form of ethics, for fear of excluding themselves from the game and making the construction of compromises impossible.

The relation to foreign languages is a first example of it. The consequences of interpretation imply different expression modes from what a communication within a common linguistic environment presupposes. To be understood (all the more when the times given are extremely limited and controlled as in a plenary session), one must make simple and brief sentences. One must also know how to mobilize a specific vocabulary which can be recognized by everyone and little likely to be misunderstood when translated. In such context, the specific symbolic power of a dramatized speech, which is considered in a national context as one of the most obvious characteristics of the political profession (also found in the word “parliament” itself), is much less central in the EP, the language effects being partially annihilated through interpretation. From this point of view, the ability to manage and evolve in a multilingual environment is to be underlined. It is reflected in the need to master other languages than one’s, in particular English. Beyond practical aspects (the resort to interpretation cannot become totally widespread), being open to multilingual exchanges is also an element of self-actualisation within the group. The ability to express oneself in other language than one’s mother tongue is recognized *de facto* as a quality and testify the agents’ good frame of mind towards the group, its own culture and values that enable it to exist as such. MEPs thus develop a range of strategies to acquire linguistic skills, such learning being directly encouraged and assisted by the institution itself thanks to the organization of foreign language classes followed by many MEPs, and also through assistantship. The MEPs’ personal assistants are indeed an important linguistic resources insofar as multilingual assistants can compensate their MEP’s weaknesses in such field and make *in situ* readings and translations of conversations. Hence, bilingualism and the mastery of English are key recruitment criteria of political assistants³⁷.

The second characteristic of this ethos specific to Europe’s professionals appears in the codes of conduct structuring the exchanges taking place within the parliament. One of the most noticeable points of the European parliamentary culture is in this way the use of cordiality in everyday interactions. MEPs often insist on the “fair play” characteristic to both interpersonal and political exchanges, on the necessary open-mindedness and mistrust towards any ethnocentric position. Such cordiality of exchanges has really institutionalised itself as a way

³⁶ HIX S., LORD C., *Political Parties in the European Union*, op. cit.

³⁷ MICHON S., « Les assistants parlementaires des députés européens : étude d’un groupe d’auxiliaires au Parlement européen », *Etudes européennes*, n°4, 2004, Revue en ligne du Centre des Etudes Européennes de Strasbourg (CEES) : <http://www.etudes-europeennes.fr> ; MICHON S., « Les assistants parlementaires au Parlement européen. Sociologie d’un groupe d’auxiliaires politiques », in COURTY G. (dir.), *Le travail de collaboration avec les élus*, Paris, Michel Houdiard Éditeur, 2005, p.118-135.

of being specific to a proper institutional culture, as an expectation of roles and attitudes agents must be in conformity with for fear of excluding themselves from the game, and causing internal crises within the various entities and making the construction of the multiple compromises necessary to decisions impossible.

Hence, codes of conduct structure the exchanges occurring within the institutional space. They are specific to this internationalised and very fragmented space. It is convenient for every player who wants to “be important” to learn them “on the job”. From this point of view, the EP’s groups, commissions and hierarchical authorities are all authorities of socialization to the European political culture. Actually, many interviews and observations reveal that calls to order are frequent. Those who do not respect the rules of the game (ability to compromise, fair play, open-mindedness, put of a foreign language into practice, etc.) are accused of making it impossible and of reducing the influence abilities of the potential partners. For instance, after the June 1999 election, the *Lutte Ouvrière* (LO) and the *Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire* (LCR) elected representatives, who joined the EP for the first time, paid for these calls to order in several votes. Having refused a vote on the Tobin Tax on principle, they were harshly reprimanded by almost all the Left-wing elected representatives. Agents must thus be in conformity with a form of ethics for fear of excluding themselves from the game and make the construction of compromises impossible. Holding one’s position hence implies, beyond knowing the technical and political aspects of a file, to master the implicit and explicit grounds of a very particular game. From this point of view, the effective presence in the EP is a crucial element of personal or collective influence.

In conclusion, the increasing complexity of the European political activity is accompanied by the emergence of a new category of political agents specialized in European questions and able to instance their capacity to master European political roles. By succeeding in monopolize the specific capital within a space under construction, these agents take control of the institution itself. In spite of uncertainties and its still very fragmented character, the institutionalisation of a European political space thus appears in the autonomization of a group of Europe’s « professionals » and the emergence of a genuine European political “profession” that is submitted to the different rules of this activity they must respect at the national level. In this way, socialisation process does not only concern an ideological phenomenon (for or against federal Europe) but more largely result of new political role creation and interiorisation processes.

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