

# How Committees Run the European Parliament

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## Declaration of Authorship

I, Ana-Iuliana Postu, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

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## **Abstract**

Parliamentary committees have become a key factor in the running of the European Parliament, considerably influencing the entire decision-making process of the institution. This thesis argues that with the EP constrained to increase its efficiency and legitimacy, the institution has seen the emergence of a strong committee system. In its attempt to consolidate legitimacy through increased legislative output, the EP has developed powerful committees that lead legislative debates, explaining why a largely consensus-based policy process dominates the institution. The findings contrast with existing theories that only place political groups in the EP at the centre of the decision-making process, responsible for passing all legislative acts through the chamber. Moreover, the research is based on a methodological approach that challenges existing ones on the EP, mainly quantitative and relying ostensibly on roll-call vote data gathered from the voting sessions. This approach uses process tracing as a method to track the interactions and the processes present inside the EP, forming and informing the decision-making at committee and plenary level. The committees' powers are tested with the help of the main argument, which stresses their influence over the full chamber, the space where the final decision of the EP is reached. This is done by an analysis of: 1. rapporteurs and their work in committees and the chamber; 2. amendments tabled to reports; and 3. political group debates related to them. These channels are identified as facilitators for the transfer of decisions from parliamentary committees to the full chamber, where they become the official EP position. In testing the main argument and with the help of the methodology, the thesis expands the existing understanding of the EP and its committee system, as well as verifying the potentiality of legislatures from federal or 'divided government' systems developing a strong system of committees.

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## List of Abbreviations

ALDE	Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
BUDG	Budgets Committee
CA	Common Assembly (of the European Coal and Steel Community)
COD	Co-decision Procedure
CULT	Culture and Education Committee
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community
EC	European Commission
EFD	Europe of Freedom and Democracy Group
ENVI	Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Committee
EP	European Parliament
EPP	Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats)
EU	European Union
GUE/NGL	Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left
HA	High Authority (of the European Coal and Steel Community)
IMCO	Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee
INI	Own-Initiative Procedure

MEP	Member of the European Parliament
NI	Non-Attached Members of the European Parliament
OLP	Ordinary Legislative Procedure
REGI	Regional Development Committee
S&D	Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats

# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**

The European Parliament (EP) is a legislature defined by characteristics different to others in Europe and yet, it has been founded on a structure and set of principles drawn from the experience of other Parliaments in the European Union (EU). It differs from other legislatures in Europe due to its multinational nature, its predominant consensus and its separation of powers. It has, nevertheless, replicated the principles of parliamentary democracy in Europe. Its members come from 28 Member States and for each of them the understanding of the EP is based on their national experience. Overall, it is a supranational body, with weak political groups and strong parliamentary committees. In the past decade, it has become an institution relying on a cohesive, sometimes confrontational, closed set of committees, whose influence has not yet been fully investigated and may evolve following the election of the eighth European Parliament (EP8) in 2014. Every month, the EP holds plenary sessions in Strasbourg and sometimes in Brussels. It is on this occasion that Members of the EP (MEPs) vote on all committee proposals and hold debates in order to create a unified view of the Parliament vis-à-vis the other EU institutions: the Commission and the Council.

Ever since its first direct elections in 1979, the EP has portrayed itself as a legitimate, efficient institution and, as a consequence, has gained more powers requiring it to rely increasingly on a strong and organised system of parliamentary committees. This thesis argues that the system of parliamentary committees has taken centre stage in

the EP, to the detriment of the full plenary session of this legislature. Moreover, due to institutional practices and procedural modifications that have been introduced in the last ten years, political groups have sometimes chosen to fall in second place, after committees, in the decision-making process. In spite of being key actors leading the decisions in the Parliament, due to increased policy competences, technicality of acts and the necessity to specialise in order to control the legislative process, political groups have had to rely more often on the parliamentary committees' decisions and on the opinion of their members assigned in the respective committee, lacking the resources to exercise control over committee output. Because they are able to distribute committee assignments, as well as appoint influential committee posts such as the Chair or Vice-Chair, political groups have an ex-ante control of decisions issued by parliamentary committees. However, they have less ex-post control in respect to the committee decision. Due to a high degree of specialisation needed for European legislation and an increasingly significant tendency of MEPs to assimilate policy preferences of their colleagues assigned to the responsible committee with their own, the political groups' lack of disciplining measures has created an opportunity for committees to take centre stage in the legislative process. A clear illustration of this influence is the similarity of voting results between committees and EP plenary; the replication of committee debates in the plenary sessions, where the same speakers take the floor; as well as the limited number of amendments that are submitted to the text of a report once it has passed committee stage. All of these aspects advance an image of the EP decision-making system where parliamentary committees no longer serve just the role of informing the decision of the full plenary. Instead, the committees may structure and define it, while the plenary sessions are only left with the option of sanctioning it. Based on a theory of committee precedence in the EP,

where parliamentary committees impact on the decision-making process of the Parliament, this thesis uses empirical evidence from part of EP7 – from 2010 to 2011 – of parliamentary committee influence in order to verify its validity. The findings of this study contribute to a body of literature analysing the activity of parliamentary committees in the EP, which rely significantly on a political group centred perspective. The principal aim of this study is to provide evidence of the significance of interactions, negotiations and debates to the entire legislative process of the EP and highlight the difficulty of identifying one set of actors, mainly the political groups, as the main source of influence exerted over the decision-making process. The complex nature of the EP legislative process constitutes proof of the existence of multiple such sources that impact on the final EP position and amongst those, parliamentary committees have become pivotal.

The next section of this introduction provides an overview of the institutional developments that this Parliament has witnessed, together with the increase in importance of its committees. It describes the place committees hold within this legislature and tracks the changes in the influence they exert over the decision-making process, coupled with the increase in the field of policy competences of the Parliament. This introductory chapter then goes on to present the main body of literature on this subject, highlighting some of the theoretical background on which this thesis relies, in order to frame the arguments of the study. This will help to establish the grounds of the hypothesis for the research, as well as those contained in each section. Finally, it details the plan of the thesis and the empirical aspects covered by each chapter, setting the foundations for the interpretation of the findings, which have resulted not only from descriptive data drawn from committees, but also from

extensive fieldwork observations carried out in EP7 from May 2010 to June 2011, after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty. This will provide an overview of the entire research contained in the thesis and how the findings contribute to the existing body of work on the EP, and more precisely, on its committees.

### **1.1 EP parliamentary committees and their influence**

Political institutions develop over long periods of time, shaped by the will and force of agents and circumstances. They evolve with the demands imposed on them by political agendas and policy requirements, depending on the will of State actors. Based in a supranational setting devised for economic reasons, the EP has, in recent times, provided a particular example within the framework of the study of legislatures in Europe and the entire world. It is dynamic, resourceful, constantly preoccupied with its image and is always trying to appear efficient in order to legitimise its growing powers and representativeness. This institution has turned out to be one of the most powerful legislative bodies in the world (Hix, 2005), but this was not evident at the time the Common Assembly was first created in 1953.

What was once referred to as a ‘democratic window-dresser and talking shop’ (Rittberger, 2005: 73) in the 1950s and 1960s has evolved to such an extent that it has attempted to obtain from national governments concessions that would situate it on an equal footing with the Council, where the latter are represented. Some scholars refer to this evolution of the EP as the result of a ‘democratic reflex’ (Costa, 2001) of the people of Europe who felt they needed some form of representation in order to

balance the power of national governments. However, an outcome where this institution would be judged as one of the three main bodies in the institutional triangle (together with the Commission and the Council) was not envisaged when the six founding Member States set out to create the governing bodies of the European Communities.

Today, the EP votes on all EU legislation. Its roles and functions are codified in the Treaties of the EU. It is an entirely supranational body, working in 23 official languages, amending and passing legislation that not only affects the policies the EU Member States, but also those of other continents. This is even more significant when all these developments are viewed in the light of the beginnings of European integration. Indeed, it is understandable why the evolution of the EP has caused a growing number of political scientists to analyse it in recent years.

However, in spite of the legitimacy it has gained from being the only directly elected decision-making body at EU level, it is still viewed as a distant, expensive and intricate body, maintaining little contact with the electorate that it represents. This is in part due to the fact that in line with the development of the EP, the citizens' perceptions of how this institution should respond and function have also changed, leaving them to hope for an EP that acts and interacts with its electorate just like a national parliament in their country. Such perceptions of the EP are hindered by the reality of the limitations that this institution has: being a supranational body, grouping members from 28 different Member States, with different political systems and without a single electoral system, with different parliamentary traditions and democratic ambitions.

One of the main reasons for its efficiency in debating and passing legislation, while contesting the separate positions of governments of Member States represented in the Council, stems from Parliament's ability to organise its work in a manner that allows it to quickly form a common position even on matters of a highly technical and controversial nature. This organisation relies on an important system of parliamentary committees, which has grown in strength at the same time as the Parliament has obtained more powers. Given the particularity of the EP as already presented, the current research focuses on the functioning of this institution, on the internal activities that take place and that form the decision-making process of this body. More precisely, it analyses the structure set at the centre of this legislature: the committee system and its functioning, the processes and rules that govern it, as well as the interactions that make up an intricate decision-making web.

As scholars have already recognised, parliamentary committees in the European Parliament are the 'legislative backbone' of this institution (Neuhold, 2001) and the core functioning mechanism. They have helped transform the EP from an assembly to a co-legislator. Like committees in some powerful national legislatures (such as the German *Bundestag*) the EP committees amend the proposed legislation forwarded by the Commission and provide a source of expert knowledge of European policies. They could thus be considered as serving an informational purpose (Krehbiel, 1991) to the entire Parliament. What is more, the committees are instrumental in the entire decision-making process. Interviews conducted for this thesis show that MEPs (Appendix: List of interviews) see them as a stage for the most important part of their work. Other political institutions, most notably the Commission and the Council,



follow their work closely and send delegates to all committee sessions who then report on the proceedings. Most importantly, these committees pass all legislation relating to the single market, creating the regulatory system for the EU economy, the largest in the world that implicitly affects the entire world economy.

In EP7 (2009-2014) there were 20 committees (plus two sub-committees and one special committee) which cover all policy areas of the EU. According to Corbett, Jacobs and Shackleton (2011: 144) they have been ‘a central part of Parliament’s work from its inception’ since what was then known as the Common Assembly of the Coal and Steel Community (CA) ‘had already set up seven committees by 1953’. They were modelled after the US Congress committees’ example, which explains, to an extent, the similarities that exist between them. However, they also hold organisational characteristics from other legislatures in Europe, such as Germany or Switzerland, especially when it comes to their strength, their number of members and high degree of specialisation.

From the first EP elections, the parliamentary committees (16 at the time) - covered policy areas where the EU had competencies, but not necessarily where the Parliament had significant influence in the legislative process. This was and still is the case, to some extent, with the Foreign Affairs Committee or the Development Committee. Some committees have always held a certain level of prestige amongst MEPs, the former committee being an example, while others, like the Budgets Committee, were considered more important because of the extensive powers that the EP holds over the EU budget (Corbett, Jacobs and Shackleton, 2011: 145; c.f. Benedetto and Hoyland, 2007). So far, committees have dealt with: legislative

proposals coming from the Commission; recommendations to the Council; resolutions that were later on voted in the full plenary of the EP; and increasingly, in recent years, they have had to deal with own-initiative reports, where the Parliament had the initiative of issuing an opinion on a specific topic, sometimes following a communication from the Commission, in an effort to signal its position to the other institutions, but also to put forward an issue that would require additional consideration from them. Moreover, committees work on opinions for lead committees – the main responsible for the policy that a proposal might belong to – in situations where the legislative act might touch on a number of aspects relating to different policies. These opinions may be drafted in respect to all series of acts, not just legislative, be it on initiative reports of the EP, recommendations, or all other acts that are not covered by the main legislative procedure, where the Parliament holds the most of its power: the ordinary legislative procedure in which the EP, alongside the Council, is the co-legislator.

Since 1979, MEPs have received assignments in committees from their political groups according to the principle of proportionality of political group size. Their interests and those of their constituents, as well as specialisation and the level of expertise also play a part in this, but such assessments are more often carried out at the national delegations level, where the number of committee seats received can be negotiated inside each political group. Over time, a certain level of cohesion may appear amongst members, an ‘esprit de corps’ (Corbett, Jacobs and Shackleton, 2011: 145) where MEPs share a common interest in gaining more prominence for their committee or resist being integrated in a larger one. This aspect is very well illustrated by Corbett, Jacobs and Shackleton (2011) who give the example of the Fisheries

Committee, which strongly resisted in 1999 the initiative of being reintegrated in the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee. And it is not only such instances that stand to prove the committees' cohesive nature and drive to obtain influential legislative assignments, but also the rather common instances where they come to fight over the quality of being the lead committee on a proposal debated in the EP. This is what British MEP Sharon Bowles, Chair of the Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee, was referring to in an interview given to the EU Observer as constituting 'Committee Wars'<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, over the past years, since 2004, the cross-sectoral nature of many of the Commission's proposals which covered several policy areas, has rendered these confrontations more common. They are usually dealt with at the highest level of the EP organisational structure – the Conference of Presidents – who, after hearing from all the committee Chairs involved, decides which parliamentary committee shall be assigned the main task of leading the work on the report and which will be the ones delivering opinions on that same text. It is mostly amongst committees that are labelled highly legislative (those dealing more with legislation in policy areas in which the EU has extended competences), that such conflicts may occur, rather than amongst non-legislative ones, which receive a smaller number of these due to the policy they cover and the limited competencies that the EU holds in that field.

EP committees have certainly grown in confidence and in their importance to the decision-making process alongside the Parliament's growth in powers. This is indicated by the great interest that they receive from the MEPs themselves and from the manner in which these view their work here. After the 2009 Lisbon Treaty, where

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<sup>1</sup> EU Observer Interview 'A day in the life of Sharon Bowles', 19 March 2012. Source: euobserver.com

the EP's influence in the legislative procedure has again been increased, the committees have had to consider even more legislative proposals. Therefore, this thesis analyses committees and their activity over the first two and a half year period of EP7, namely since 2009 until 2011, in an effort to establish if their decisions take precedence over the plenary sessions and if they shape the positions taken by the EP, more than the political groups do. This is not to say that political groups in the Parliament are secondary, but that the level of specialisation and the informational advantage obtained by the committees, puts them in a privileged position to influence the final decision of the Parliament very early in the legislative process. This institutional higher ground establishes them as key actors in the decision-making process, a position many political scientists have judged as being reserved to the political groups and not to parliamentary committees.

The powers of the EP have grown rapidly under the influence of the provisions of the Maastricht Treaty (1993), the Amsterdam Treaty (1999) and more recently the Lisbon Treaty (2009), and so have the competencies and the influence of its committees. Under such circumstances it has become more important to establish how far the parliamentary committees impact on the final position of the EP and through which processes and mechanisms they manage to do so. Influence is thus understood as the committees' ability to drive a decision that they have reached, forward until its adoption in the plenary.

A great part of the body of the literature on the subject has focused on the capabilities of committees to provide specialised knowledge to the full plenary of the EP before the final vote on a report. They have been analysed from a partisan perspective,

examining bodies formed of MEPs answering to the requirements set out by the political groups. Their capacity to represent the views of the entire House has also been tested in order to establish whether or not the high degree of specialisation might lead to the formation of committees of outliers rather than committees where the views held by the main political groups manifest themselves equally. However, their place within the institutional framework and the influence they exert can be explored further.

Therefore, this thesis presents a more in depth analysis of the activity in the EP committees. At the same time it refutes the idea that committees only serve an informational role for the institution and it argues that alongside the political groups they impact on the decision-making in the Parliament, acknowledging that groups exercise little ex-post control on committees after the assignments have been decided. It demonstrates that parliamentary committees influence the decisions of the plenary, and thus the EP's final opinion, through an institutionalised series of interactions, negotiations and debates that take place amongst the main actors in committees and their political groups. The main argument of the study maintains that the EP, in an effort to increase its legitimacy through an increased legislative output, has had to rely on a strong system of committees. As a result, contestation in the EP has been contained and expressed in meetings and closed circles, an unwanted effect for the only elected body in the EU. Moreover, by examining the work of rapporteurs, the number of amendments made by MEPs on a report and the debates in the political groups linked to committee work, it will be demonstrated that the result of the final votes in the plenary can be influenced early in committee stage and that it is here that divisions are expressed and then resolved, and not in the full plenary session with all

MEPs. The principle that provides part of the explanation to such behaviour is the perceived preference coherence (Ringe, 2010), which understands this process as relying on the belief of MEPs that they share similar preferences with the colleagues who are members of the responsible committees. This illustrates, to an extent, how it can be possible for a committee decision, taken by a small number of members, to be later on supported by all MEPs in the plenary in spite of the weak political groups that have few possibilities at their disposal to discipline their members.

Nonetheless, this particular principle only offers a partial image of the legislative process of the EP. I argue that, before reaching the point where MEPs perceive their committee members' preferences to be similar to theirs, they go through a series of interactions in group meetings and debates, where they internalise committee agreements. I test this aspect with the help of data issued from extensive fieldwork observation of committee meetings and preparatory meetings related to them, carried over a period of one year in the EP, which are analysed through process-tracing; as well as with data that are gathered from results of votes and amendment numbers from 545 reports in the first half of the parliamentary term of 2009. These are all supported by semi-structured interviews with MEPs and their staff, as well as political group staff and EP Secretariat staff, carried out over a period spanning from 2010 to 2012. Concerning the quantitative data, I verify and correlate the proportions of yes votes between results of votes in committee and plenary, and perform correlations between amendments numbers in committee and plenary. These are then contextualised with the help of the qualitative information from the observations. In this way, this study portrays a more complex, but also more comprehensive image of EP committee activity compared to what has been researched up until now.

## **1. 2 Plan of the thesis**

The next six chapters of the thesis will be presented below.

Chapter 2 provides an analysis of the body of literature on parliamentary committees. It first presents the existing theories from the American literature on the purpose of committees inside a legislature, which take two different approaches, identifying committees as serving a distributional role, where members seek assignments in order to address their constituency interests and ensure their re-election; or as serving an informational role, which is limited to providing a specialised level of knowledge to the House. The chapter goes on to analyse the body of work on the EP committees that relies on the theories issued from the abovementioned American literature. It opposes the approach taken by such studies and highlights the particularities the EP holds as a legislature that differentiate it from the US Congress. All of this stresses the importance of a more integrated study of the EP committees that uses an adapted framework of the theoretical approach from the US literature, employing it in a manner that is conscious of the structural differences that exist between the two models.

Chapter 3 presents the main argument of the study, which maintains that parliamentary committees impact considerably on the final position of the EP, even more than political groups at times. It is in committees that the decision is reached and then transferred to the plenary sessions of the full chamber where it is adopted. Three hypotheses are used in order to test the argument of the study and these

investigate whether rapporteurs have a significant role to play in the transferral of a committee decision to plenary; whether the number of amendments in committee is indicative of a consensus, signalling the adoption of committee decisions in plenary without additional amendments; and whether committee members form the linkage mechanism that ensures a committee decision is accepted and internalised by the political groups and therefore voted in the full chamber. Based on fieldwork observations, vote results and amendment numbers I test the validity of the main argument and the hypotheses and analyse a sample of committee reports in order to identify the aspects that would be central to a validation of this thesis throughout the next chapters.

Chapter 4 presents in detail the activity of EP parliamentary committees and identifies the key actors that structure and guide it. Based on the main argument of this thesis, which places committees at the centre of the EP, defining and influencing its decisions to a greater extent than political groups can, chapter 4 investigates how a committee decision is constructed and then transferred to the plenary stage, where it is adopted by the EP. It isolates the actors and interactions that lead to the transferral of the defined decision from committee to plenary. These are the rapporteurs (MEPs responsible for the preparation of the report and passing it through Parliament), group coordinators (political group appointed members that streamline the group members' activity in committee and act as whip) and committee members and the negotiations, meetings and debates associated with a report. The existing studies on the subject have so far focused on the support that EP committees provide for the plenary, considering them as a source of specialised knowledge, serving an informational role, where members' decisions are finally dictated by political groups' preferences. The



findings show a strong correlation between the voting results of committees in the EP and the plenary and indicate that rapporteurs are instrumental in achieving this outcome and the final transferral and adoption of a committee position in the plenary.

Chapter 5 investigates the amendments that are introduced, discussed and then voted in the committee and plenary stages of the EP. It makes an observation and an assessment of the existing correlations between their initial number and the result of votes in the House on a particular report. It analyses what the number of these amendments can reveal about the legislative process in the EP and looks to identify the stage at which the decision is in fact taken. The understanding of the EP's internal structure has, until recently, caused many scholars to simply look at the amendments introduced by MEPs in plenary without considering the set up of the amendments system in committees. Therefore, as part of the three-chapter section investigating the different factors that are part of the daily committee activity – the rapporteurs, the amendments and the group negotiations – chapter 5 analyses the amendments system in an effort to establish if the final result of votes follows the initial pattern set out in the pre-legislative stage.

Chapter 6 presents the activity and organisation of political groups that is related to committee workload. It looks at interactions inside the EP political groups during the monthly group meetings in order to reveal existing patterns of influence, inside the group, in the negotiations on legislative acts prior to the vote in plenary. The underlying argument is that committees constitute the main EP arena where decisions are reached. These are then replicated in the plenary vote through group mechanisms of voting alignment. Information gathered from the group meetings and field

observations indicate a pattern of exchanges and alignment of views inside the group with committee decisions, based on the input from the rapporteurs and group coordinators from each of the specific committees. Findings show that the influence exerted by the political groups is not externalised but rather internalised through group meetings and based on a position previously established and delineated by the members from the committee.

Chapter 7 first summarises the findings from chapter 4, 5 and 6 and looks to committees and political groups as actors influencing the legislative process, not competing but complimenting each other's position. It analyses the significance of the findings that committees have become stronger in the first half of EP7. The theoretical implications of this study shed more light on the internal decision-making processes in the institution, an institution which has built a strong reputation of a highly technical policy-making actor. As a result, the EP has developed a powerful, specialised and influential committee system.

## **Chapter 2**

### **The European Parliament and its Committee System - Existing**

#### **Research and Theoretical Models**

Chapter 2 introduces the literature this study is based on. It reviews existing studies on the EP and its committee system and the theoretical models that have been used to assess it. In the context of the thesis, chapter 2 aims to set the foundations for the theoretical, conceptual and methodological analysis comprised in chapter 3 and in the empirical chapters 4, 5 and 6. While each chapter relies on its specific literature, they are all grounded on the studies reviewed in this chapter. The first part of the chapter will cover the general literature on the EP and MEPs, the different angles that were used to analyse this organisation over the years; it will then look into the representation issues and present the literature on the US Congress. Finally, it will look at how the comparison with the US Congress has been used for the EP.

In terms of legislative studies there has been a lot of interest in the creation and evolution of the EP in the European sphere. This has also been complimented by a historical approach to the development of this institution in comparison to the other institutional actors and by a documentation of its interactions within the decision-making process. The EP has gained centre stage in terms of research interests in European studies and political science in general. One of the main reasons for this has been the fact that this is one of the EU institutions that has managed to increase its powers overtly and systematically in its attempt to grasp the limelight of the EU decision-making process. Ever since the first elections in 1979, this institution has

used the legitimacy given by the representation of the interests of all EU citizens as the only elected EU body in order to claim more powers and exert more influence upon the other two entities in the institutional triangle: the European Commission and the Council of Ministers.

The EP started off as a Common Assembly, which was meant to provide a counter balance to the creation of the High Authority. Since the beginning, the national governments of the founding Member States were preoccupied with the level of accountability of this newly created High Authority and were looking to avoid an instance where all aspects related to coal and steel would be ruled by a centralised number of experts (Rittberger, 2003). With the extension of policy areas that were decided at European level came the empowerment of the Parliament and along with the first European elections came the realisation of its members that this institution had the capacity to develop an increased amount of leverage upon the other institutions due, in particular, to the representation function that it was supposed to exert, unlike other European entities. This meant that in the years following the first elections of 1979, the EP tried, at great length, to use the powers that it had been awarded, most times even going against the expectations Member States had in mind for it when its institutional design and competencies were decided.

From a functional point of view, the EP's evolution can be explained by the will of any new institutional design to increase its potential and its capacities, especially in an environment where there was much talk about the lack of accountability of these European centralised institutions and their increased amount of power. That is why, in several instances, the EP has interpreted the attributions it had received in a broader

manner than expected, as it was, for example, in the instance of the decision on the members of the European Commission when an aspect, which only concerned an approval of the candidates chosen by the Member States, turned into an affair of accepting or revoking candidates based on the right the Parliament had gained to veto the Commission as a whole. This meant not only that Parliament could make a decision as to what should be the composition of the Commission, but also that during negotiations prior to the designation of the European Commission members, it could give strong signals as to which possible candidates are more likely to be accepted than others. An instance where this took place was during the nomination of the Barroso Commission where minutes before the announcement, the President had to withdraw the proposed set of Commissioners because the Italian candidate held what was thought of as too strong right-wing views on aspects relating to his designated policy. The Civil Liberties Committee in the EP, first rejected the appointment of Rocco Buttiglione with 27 votes to 26, due to the indignation that his views on single mothers and on homosexuality caused amongst MEPs. Buttiglione expressed his belief that homosexuality was a “sin”, one of the aspects that caused anger among the MEPs, especially the Socialists in the Parliament, and prompted them to stress his unsuitability for a portfolio of Justice Commissioner and for any other portfolio within the Commission as a whole for that matter. On the morning of the vote in Parliament, Barroso, realising that the proposed set of Commissioners was in danger of being voted off in block, requested that the EP postpone its vote and the following day Buttiglione withdrew his candidacy. The Buttiglione affair is an illustration of the influence the EP has developed over the other institutions in recent years, as well as of the manner in which it has chosen to make use of its powers. In order to better understand this evolution, the first section of this chapter will present Parliament’s

developments since the time of the Common Assembly and the historical aspects linked to the creation and construction of what later became known as the EP. Section 2 will introduce the existing research on the EP, namely that on MEPs and political groups, while section 3 will present the foundations of the EP committee system. Subsequently, section 4 introduces the US literature on parliamentary committees, which is then followed in section 5 by an analysis of the existing studies on EP committees. Finally, section 6 investigates the applicability of the US model of committee analysis and the caveats this might pose for the study of the EP.

## **2.1 The EP – ‘History in the making’**

This section summarises some of the main developments in the EP evolution as presented in the literature.

In the beginning of the European integration, when the founding Member States were convinced that a mutual endeavour, even if resulting in a certain loss of sovereignty, would benefit them more than a simple cooperation at governmental level, there was also talk of a form of institutional design that would be able to counterbalance the concentration of powers in the hands of a bureaucratic elite. Moreover, the times had shown that a deliberative institutional structure could bring along an important number of advantages that would contribute to the achievement of a supranational entity.

This is how the Common Assembly came into being, mainly based on what some would qualify as being a democratic reflex of the Europeans (Costa, 2001), a fact that

can be better described in the statement made by Jean Monnet (quoted by Rittberger, 2005:1), that:

‘In a world where government authority is derived from representative parliamentary assemblies, Europe cannot be built without such an assembly.’

However, it would seem that even from the beginning there were very different views as to how this Assembly should look and which should be the powers that it should hold (Rittberger, 2003). In its first instance, the Common Assembly was formed of designated representatives from the national parliaments of the Member States and its powers were limited to ‘only few negative powers, such as the right to censure the High Authority of the ECSC, and no positive powers, such as to actively influence the policy-making process’ (Rittberger, 2005: 73). Rittberger emphasises that the Common Assembly’s ‘main function was that of scrutinising, controlling and, if deemed necessary, censuring a supranational institution, the High Authority, forerunner of the Commission’ and indeed it is the only purpose for which it came into being. Rittberger (2005: 74) argues that Member States were eager to ensure that this new supranational body of the High Authority was applied some level of scrutiny. In time, with the advance of European integration, Parliament evolved and managed to secure a more important role, up until the moment where it became a directly elected Parliament of the European citizens. From that point onwards, the Parliament made use of the legitimacy offered by its representation of EU citizens, in contrast with the other institutions, claimed additional powers and played a more important part in the decision-making process. At the same time, its inherent nature of an institution which can hold open debates on matters of public European concern that have not yet been resolved, even if this might be on issues where it does not have

extended competencies, has allowed it to ask for more powers. While doing so, it has avoided any possible critiques of inefficiency by shifting the blame towards other institutions, such as the Commission or the Council. To a certain extent, this has constituted an efficient way of maintaining an ever-stronger position within the European project and in the eyes of the European public.

Nonetheless, the growing lack of interest the European public opinion has shown over the past years towards the European institutions, including the EP, cannot be neglected. This is clearly illustrated by the low level of support that citizens show towards the EU<sup>2</sup>, by the resounding rejections of the EU Constitution in 2005 in France and the Netherlands and then of the Treaty of Lisbon in Ireland, as well as by the low-level of turnout in the European elections and the second-order character that these have constantly had. Reif and Schmitt (1980) explain that the first European elections, as a consequence of their organisation and reliance on national parties, ended up being fought on national issues rather than European ones and appeared to be a revalidation of national elections, rather than elections in their own right. Schmitt (2005) confirms in a more recent study of the June 2004 European elections that these remain second-order and display the same patterns as they did in 1979, the only differences being recorded in the New Member States.

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<sup>2</sup> In his book *What's Wrong With the European Union and How to Fix It*, Hix (2008) makes the point of an extremely limited level of support awarded by the European citizens to the EU, by tracing the answers contained in the Eurobarometer polls from the 1970s to the question: 'Generally speaking, do you think that your country's membership of the EU is a good thing, a bad thing, neither good nor bad, don't know'. He finds that if the percentage of support started off at around 60 % in the 1970s, registering a growth in the 1980s and another decline in the mid 1990s, since then it has been fairly low, around 50 %. This seems to continue to be confirmed by the August 2012 Eurobarometer, which registers as an answer to the abovementioned question a number of 50 % of the respondents judging the membership of their country to the EU as a good thing, while 31 % see it as neither good nor bad.



Still, the EP remains one of the great points of interest in the field of European political science as well as for the lobbying community and industry associations active in Brussels. This is due to the increased legislative powers that this institution has gained through the extension of the former co-decision procedure, the now ordinary legislative procedure, and the high level of activity carried out within its parliamentary committees as a result of that. The addition in the number of fields that fall under EU competence, also as a result of the so-called spill-over effect, the continuous developments in the internal market and legal harmonisation efforts can account for the interest shown towards this institution and its members. Therefore, the next section will analyse the literature on the subject of the EP and its Members, in order to identify the perspectives and different approaches used to investigate this institution.

## **2.2 Existing research on the EP**

Considered one of the important institutions of the EU, from a legislative perspective and that of representation of EU citizens, the EP has been analysed from most political science aspects and even anthropologically (Abélès, 1992). Research has been carried out in regards to its legislative importance (Bowler and Farrell, 1995), its historical empowerment (Rittberger, 2005), its internal functioning (Costa, 2001; Corbett, Jacobs and Shackleton, 2011), its structure and organisation of its activity (Burns, 2005, 2010; Settembri and Neuhold, 2009), its legislative procedures (Burns and Carter, 2010; Jensen and Winzen, 2011; Judge and Earnshaw, 2011) the work of its members and the perceptions that they hold on the importance of their role within

this structure (Scully, 2005; Hix *et al.*, 2007). Having said this, there is an important amount of inside knowledge on how this institution functions internally, how it aggregates its views and its position towards other actors in the European sphere, and this knowledge can be built on in order to reveal a clearer picture of the EP.

Therefore, in relation to the existing studies, the purpose of this research is to identify the overall interactions at work inside the institution, amongst its members and in particular amongst parliamentary committee actors. Apart from data analysis of vote results and amendment numbers, the approach consists of mapping the decision-making process and establishing the occurrence of existing interactions first amongst its members, then between members and national parties and then EP political groups, as well as between national party delegations and political groups. I do this by focusing on the parliamentary committee activity.

Following the increased legislative powers of the EP, all EU legislation has had to be established by the Council and the Parliament, and therefore in the parliamentary committees. The latter have accumulated an extended level of importance in the EP framework and are at the core of the decision-making output of this institution. As a result, this research seeks to analyse the influence of committees on the decision-making process in the Parliament and, in the process of doing so, to reveal the type and level of interactions that take place in committees amongst MEPs and their domestic parties, represented by their national delegation, as well as between them and the EP political groups. In order to pin down these interactions and exchanges that are present in the decision-making process, the next subsection will identify what is already known about the actors active in this institution - the MEPs - their daily work and the existing literature in the field.

## 2. 2.1 MEPs – Individual or coerced units of action within the EP

Views on the MEPs and their influence in the decision-making process of the EU have been subject to different approaches. Hix and Lord are amongst the researchers who have shifted the focus from an understanding of MEPs' function as nothing more than representatives in a state of neglect and marginalisation from their national parties, to a status where they and their actions at European level became important (Hix and Lord, 1997: 60). Consequently, they have been regarded as an important tool capable of ensuring representation at European level and at the same time offering an insight to their domestic parties into the policy that is under way at supranational level. The decisions these representatives take at European level have always been presented as influenced by two different actors: either by the national parties that they represent, or by the EP political groups that they join once in Parliament. These two *Principals*<sup>3</sup>, take steps to ensure that the agent – the Member of the EP – will act in line with their instructions with a view to reaching the desired outcome. Most of the literature on this subject accepts that there is a clear line of influence from the side of the national parties and that might, in many situations, if in conflict with the EP political group's opinion, overcome any obstacle (Hix 2005: 180). More precisely, the commonly accepted idea in the existing literature is that MEPs receive their

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<sup>3</sup>I refer here to the "*Principal-Agent*" theory also used by Scully (2001) when discussing MEPs and national parties, and which conceptualizes the relationship between political parties and their representatives at EU level: *Principal* is the 'individual or the entity that delegates the power to others', in this case being the *Agent*. The main part of these theories is focused on the 'way in which these structures are established so that the *Principal* can ensure that the *Agent* will fulfil the requests of the *Principal*' (Peters, 1999; Scully, 2001). Whenever these terms are cited in this chapter, they will be outlined in italics.

instructions from their national parties, especially when issues considered to have an immediate impact at domestic level are under discussion. A strong argument to support this view is that national parties can use a certain number of resources to ensure that their representatives follow the instructions without insomuch as having to monitor them or their activity. One of the main resources they hold is the power over their re-election, since they are the ones controlling the re-election procedure, or at least guaranteeing their presence on the party list. Hix (2005: 181) stresses this aspect in stating that:

‘All politicians at the domestic and the European level are party politicians who owe their current positions and future careers to the electoral success and policy positions of ‘their’ parties.’

In this manner they are sure to follow the line of decision-making that is desired by their national parties without having their activity monitored. Moreover, it has also been suggested that, as part of their selection process of candidates for European elections, parties are more inclined to follow a pattern where candidates who are more likely to be loyal to the party line are put forward (Scully, 2001). This is in accordance with an approach placing EP groups, and national parties in general, at the centre of decision-making, dictating the positions that their members take, maintaining a strong hold on their political decisions inside the institution and disciplining them whenever their preferences might stray from the desired agenda. This study questions this image of the legislative process in the EP and, without denying the important role played by political groups, argues that committees have become more influential within the institution, sometimes even more than political groups, but never without their tacit acceptance. This is explained by the legislative burden the EP is faced with and by its constant preoccupation with gaining legitimacy

through an increased legislative output. The result is a strong committee system running the Parliament.

Regarding parties' changing attitude towards MEPs, with time, this has developed and national parties have turned their attention to what decisions their MEPs take and the votes they cast. Both domestic parties, as well as EP political groups have manifested this type of interest. A situation, which highlights this particular change, is the nomination of Jacques Santer as President of the European Commission. In this respect, after studying the data and the information gathered during the parliamentary sessions, Hix and Lord (1996, 1997) conclude that given the importance of the decision and of the situation, the vote of the euro parliamentarians had been under the influence of the suggestions and the preferences of national parties. Moreover, these 'suggestions' had been made to the detriment of the line of the EP political groups, proving that MEPs had been more inclined to follow the instructions they had received from their domestic parties, rather than abide by the position taken by the groups they were part of in the EP. The reason for such a development in the decision-making process is that national parties hold the 'monopoly of control' through the re-election and the nomination powers that they have over MEPs (Hix and Lord, 1996).

Some contentious issues arise from supporting the argument that the end result of the decision-making in the only elected institution of the EU is the result of an influence stemming from domestic parties. One of them would be that the entire legislative process carried out at supranational level becomes nothing more than a different setting for the national parties to exercise their power. One can even ask if this is not

another way of having national politics carried out through other means and channels (Carrubba and Gabel, 1998: 15). If this were the case, MEPs would be reduced to nothing more than national actors acting at a supranational level in view of defending national interests. Therefore, one argument resulting from these statements would be that the more influence is given to the EP in the decision-making process in the EU, the more interest national parties in the Member States will then take in them (Scully, 1999). There are already examples that exist among parties, such as the British Labour Party that has established a system allowing for a close monitoring of the voting and the decisions that are taken by their representatives in the EP and which involves the nomination of a Secretary for the EP for each department, when the party is in government (Spiers, 1998). Another example can be that of Denmark that has ensured all decisions of main importance taken at EU level by its representatives are first analysed and debated at national level by the *Folketing*, the Danish Parliament.

Nonetheless, Tapio Raunio (2000) argues that even if the interactions between the two sides have become more frequent, the neglect and marginalisation that were present in the beginning continue to exist. Only a small part of the parties that he questioned during the course of his study admitted to giving out instructions to their EP representatives (8.5%) – without actually using other means for control. Moreover, he states that:

‘National parties pay attention to the EP mainly when nationally important matters enter the legislative arena, however even on such issues it is still better to speak of consultation rather than control.’ (Raunio, 2000: 221)

Along the same lines Hix and Lord argue that:

‘There have been some notable attempts by the domestic parties to instruct their national delegations on how they should vote. This would seem to be fairly widespread on questions of fundamental political importance [...] However, there would seem to be only two major instances of domestic parties attempting to ‘mandate’ MEPs on a more regular basis: the French Socialists in the early ’80s and the British Labour Party since 1984.’ (Hix and Lord, 1997: 89)

Consequently, part of the existing literature on MEPs indicates that an analysis of interactions and parliamentary activity of MEPs in committee would only portray the results of actions taken according to ‘suggestions’ given by national parties when there are prevailing national interests and, when there would be issues viewed as less important to the latter, MEPs would then vote according to the indications of the EP political group or according to their own personal beliefs and political orientations.

However, such views can ultimately simplify the argument too much, thus failing to grasp the real nature of the debate and the interactions that take part inside the EP.

A more comprehensive account and analysis of the way MEPs, national parties and EP political groups interact in the EP have been provided by Hix, Noury and Roland (2007). When analysing the level of cohesiveness that exists inside the Parliament, they argue that the instruments that the political groups have at their disposal in order to discipline the MEPs ‘are relatively weak in terms of their disciplining power’ (Hix, Noury and Roland, 2007: 5). That is certainly true considering that national parties are the ones that can ensure re-election for their representatives, as well as prominent ministerial portfolios for their members to secure their careers. Except for instances where MEPs are driven by an ambition to secure a career at European level as high-profile *rapporteurs* (MEPs in charge of drafting a report and ensuring its adoption in committee and plenary), or committee chairmen and vice-chairmen, or by personal

beliefs in regards to a particular policy, it is understandable why domestic parties stand to have a better chance at disciplining their members with the use of the resources they have available. Moreover, Hix *et al.* point out that:

‘... to the extent that it is national parties that develop common positions in their European parties, it is national parties that play a key role in enforcing European party discipline. Individual MEPs nearly always vote with their national party delegation, independently of their own preferences. If one adds this to the fact that it is rare that a national party votes against its European party, one understands that national parties play a key role in determining the cohesion of the European parties.’ (Hix, Noury and Roland, 2007: 6)

There are, however, other aspects to consider apart from the voting instructions issued to MEPs by either one of the two *Principals*. Most data collected by researchers (Carrubba and Gabel, 1998; Hix *et al.*, 2007) relies on the use of the roll-call votes cast in the EP ever since the first elections took place in 1979 and from it can be concluded that MEPs will vote according to the indications of their national delegations when the views of the latter are in conflict with the EP group line. Such conclusions are relevant in pinpointing the balance of power among the three actors concerned: MEPs, national delegations and EP political groups. But, instances such as these are less frequent when compared to the total amount of legislation and decisions on which votes are cast in the plenary sessions. Many questions remain to be defined as to what happens in all the other debates on legislation or future resolutions. The fact that there have been fewer instances where views held by national parties have been in conflict with those of EP groups points to a process of debate and bargaining that takes place within the institution between these three actors prior to the votes. One of the main points of this thesis is to illustrate that this process of debate takes place in the parliamentary committees.



## 2. 2.2 EP Activity and the Place of MEPs

Moving onwards from the discussion on whether MEPs act on the instructions of their principals, existing studies have also looked at the roles MEPs take up within the EP, the framework of the different legislative procedures and the impact exerted on the legislative process.

Quite early on, studies have identified the important role played by MEPs as rapporteurs in shaping the outcome of a legislative proposal (Kaeding, 2004; Benedetto, 2005; Høyland, 2006; Lindberg, 2008a; Hurka and Kaeding, 2012; Costello and Thomson, 2010; 2011), concluding that this factor explains not only the different positions the EP might take towards the Council as a co-legislator, but also the outcome of the negotiations. Moreover, the procedure under which the EP decides on a report is another significant factor deciding its track through the institution. Reports under the ordinary legislative procedure, former co-decision, offer valuable opportunities for the EP, and MEPs implicitly, to leave their mark on a piece of EU legislation. The existing literature has looked extensively at case studies based on such reports (Kreppel, 1999, 2002b; Burns, 2005; Høyland, 2006; Jensen and Winzen, 2011; Judge and Earnshaw, 2011) concluding that, in these instances, MEPs and political groups display an acute understanding of the role played by the EP and the impact that it can have on the decision-making process with the Council and the Commission. At the same time, political groups' influence in the EP has been investigated to establish their ability to impact the decision-making process (Lindberg, 2008a; Lindberg *et al.*, 2008b), what the factors behind political group

membership in the institution are (Maurer *et al.*, 2008), as well as the relation that MEPs have with their national parties and EP political groups (Rasmussen, 2008). The image resulting from this analysis is a complex one described through interactions between MEPs, political groups and national parties, with each of these actors sharing, at different points in the legislative procedure and in the decision-making process, a similar array of policy preferences, either perceived (Ringe, 2010) or real preferences.

Niels Ringe finds support for the informational feature of the EP committees in the framework of a model based on the concept of ‘perceived preference coherence’ (2010: 6). Summed up, this concept implies that the ‘critical mechanism explaining the policy choice of MEPs’ is an exchange ‘between expert and nonexpert legislators’ (Ringe, 2010: 6). Ringe argues that:

‘nonexpert legislators make decisions on the basis of perceived preference coherence: They adopt the positions of those expert colleagues with whom they believe to share general preferences regarding the expected consequences of a policy once it has been enacted and implemented. [...] The best that legislators can do in the absence of full information about the policy preferences and positions of their expert colleagues, however, is to rely on those with whom they share a common set of preferences about the most desired political outcomes’ (Ringe, 2010: 6).

In practice this means that, depending on the policy nature of the issue under debate, an MEP with an informational deficit in relation to the subject will, in most cases, refer to the expert opinion of the colleague that is a member in the responsible committee. But, again, there are additional factors to consider in relation to this concept, related to the result of debates taking place in committee on the given subject. More precisely, in the process of identifying which of the members’ preferences might correspond to individual preferences on the matter, an MEP, as

chapters 4 and 6 will show, receives information relating to how much consensus there was in the committee concerned, how much lobbying there was at the time, as well as on the consensus amongst party group members from the specific committee during the debate and the vote. Thus, in the process of deciding whether an expert colleague might share the same policy preference on the matter, before making a decision, an MEP will also have to consider the outcome of committee debates and votes on the issue. Such factors can vary in terms of importance and significance depending on the legislative or own-initiative act concerned. But, in instances where a committee decision was reached with a broad majority, where committee members were united in their views, MEPs have no reason to question the agreement. For example, the observations carried out in one of the committees, the Culture and Education Committee, have revealed that on an own-initiative report<sup>4</sup> on *Unlocking the potential of cultural and creative industries*, on the basis of a full majority vote in the pre-legislative stage and on the eve of the plenary vote, strong lobbying from the industry organisations led the shadow rapporteur of the European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR) to take the initiative of tabling plenary amendments. The ECR group policy advisor was in contact with the other groups' policy advisors to inform them of his shadow rapporteur's wish to table plenary amendments to this report, thus going against prior inter-group agreements. This attempt was later abandoned because the shadow rapporteurs from the other political groups accepted some minor modifications to the text, thereby avoiding any more amendments being tabled for the vote in the plenary session, but they also rejected many of the other last-minute changes that the ECR wanted to put forward. Such cases provide evidence

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<sup>4</sup> According to Rule 48 of the Rules of Procedure 'In the areas where the treaties give the European Parliament the right of initiative, its committees may draw up a report on a subject within its remit and present a motion for a resolution to Parliament. The committee must request authorisation from the Conference of Presidents before drawing up a report'. The numbering of the Rule referred to here is the one corresponding to EP7.

that, regardless of the perceived coherence of preferences one MEP might have towards a committee member, good coordination inside the committee, an established position inside the political group, as well as a consensus amongst the members from different political groups shadowing the report, can prevent possible disagreements from coming to light in the plenary session through amendments tabled at this last stage. This can also help avoid exposure in the session of the full chamber of any divergent views MEPs might have on the matter. So, in addition to considerations derived from Ringe's model, I believe that MEPs also make decisions based on the outcome of debates in committee. Ringe does uncover a very good explanation for group cohesion in the EP through perceived coherence but, when voting in plenary or even discussing inside the group, MEPs also draw conclusions on the basis of committee results. Therefore, members receive input before the vote from two sources: first, their expert colleagues, committee members or rapporteurs, and second, the committee process itself. If the committee debate was mainly uncontroversial, an MEP will not have any doubts on having shared policy preferences with his or her group's committee member. However, if the committee vote adopting a report was not done by a large majority and if divisions expressed in committee were strong, then a member will factor them in before deciding how to vote in the plenary session. Put simply, committee results impact on MEPs' choices and political group ones in the plenary final vote. There are, of course, other factors that contribute to the manner in which a decision is reached, as in documented cases such as the Biotech Directive, where lobbying from interest groups clearly influenced the vote in the full chamber. But, as shown in chapter 4, there is a general pattern of replication of committee votes in the Parliament.

Therefore, such processes and interactions are impossible to overlook and have been acknowledged but they need to be analysed in more detail. They take place at the committee stage, during the political group meetings and in national delegations meetings and, except for committee debates, are difficult to document during the first discussions on the legislative proposals forwarded to the EP. Consequently, in order to better analyse the activity in the EP and make sense of the interactions at play within the decision-making process, this study will focus on committee activity and negotiations.

So far, section 2 has introduced the literature on the EP and the actors inside this institution: the MEPs. It has revealed that there are interactions that take place between MEPs, EP groups and national parties during debates in the Parliament, and that such interactions are mostly present at committee level, where diverging views are expressed and integrated towards a common line. In order to better understand this process, section three of this chapter will present the committee system in the EU and its evolution.

### **2.3 The committee system in EU legislation**

Section 3 presents the beginnings and the evolution of EP committees, identifying some of the European integration advances that have led to the creation of the committee system active today.

Committees in the EP have been set up from its first stages when it was the Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community. They were set up to ensure the efficient functioning of a chamber that was formed of representatives chosen by the

national parliaments of Member States, who would meet just several times a year. In time, they have gained more power and their numbers have increased, especially after the first EP elections of 1979. From an historical perspective, it can be said that committees have gained more importance in the complete makeup of the institution over the years due to the increase in legislative powers. Once the EP was assigned legislative and budgetary powers and it had to debate on EU legislation, there was also scope for a more specialised information and work on issues presented to the Parliament. Over the time of several legislatures these committees have attracted interest from MEPs who now see them as an essential part of their activity and the main focus of their work (according to the 2010 MEP Survey Data from the European Parliament Research Group - EPRG, the choice of committees by MEPs was motivated mainly by their personal interests - 28% - and by those of their constituents - 18% - and 46% of those who answered the question on the role of MEPs, considered that their role was working on legislation). If in other national legislatures, from France or the UK, committees have limited, if no powers, and have not gained more prominence over the years, in the EP system of separation of powers and multinationalism, committees have become the centre of decision-making.

The Single European Act, signed in 1986, entered into force on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 1987 and brought about the need for extensive legislation, rendering the activity in committees more intensive and specialised, given that the policy areas covered by the legislation were more numerous. At the same time, political groups became interested in obtaining a balanced representation in these committees and ensure that their presence at this stage in the decision-making process structures, a priori, the results of vote in the plenary sessions. Therefore, assignments in committees grew in

importance, as well as the high-profile functions attached to these, such as Chair or Vice-chairman, or even the rapporteurship (the quality of an MEP rapporteur, involving the preparation and negotiation of the report and the EP's position on a legislation) on key acts.

Changes in the treaties, such as the introduction of the co-decision procedure with the Maastricht Treaty and its later simplification brought about by the Amsterdam Treaty, have led to what Maurer (2003: 236) refers to as a 'structural concentration of workload in only three of the 17-20 permanent committees: the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Protection; the Committee on Transport policy and the Committee on Legal Affairs.'<sup>5</sup> Thus, a differentiation has been operated between what are known as *legislative* and *non-legislative* committees and that is the result of the fact that legislative committees are, as stressed before, confronted with more legislative acts that can affect the evolution of European integration. As a result of that, they are more lobbied and more present in the view of the public opinion. The above-mentioned differentiation is particularly important to MEPs, because an assignment to one of these committees can also offer them the opportunity to gain recognition by obtaining a number of rapporteurships on high-profile cases. In such instances, the national party can see that its representative is active. Moreover, this information could also attract the interest of European and domestic media and guarantee a degree of notoriety for the MEP in question in his country and to his electorate.

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<sup>5</sup>The period that the author is referring to is the 1994 – 1999 parliament and the 1999 – 2004 one, that of EP4 and EP5.

Indeed, committees have become central to the activity of any MEP and, as this section has shown, they have evolved in parallel with the EP as a reaction to the EU policy developments and subsequent legislative demands. Unlike committees in other national legislatures, they became more powerful also as a consequence of the EU system of separation of powers and multinationalism.

#### **2. 4 ‘Sub-Government’ type committees**

The current section investigates the different theories that explain how EP committees function and are structured. It first introduces the existing literature on committees, namely the literature on the US committee system, and then continues with the analysis of the studies that have been carried out in regards to aspects pertaining to the EP.

A legislature commonly finds its standing point in committees, which are at its core and, as a consequence, there is an important literature written on the subject that analyses how a committee system structures itself (Whitaker, 2011), how the members are selected and the reasons that form the basis of their assignment to a particular committee, how committees become more specialised and how representative they are in practice of the whole chamber (Mamadouh and Raunio, 2003; McElroy, 2006).

American literature analysing the committee system and its underpinnings is centred upon the idea of specialised committees that form a distinct case of ‘sub-government’



as they can be mostly composed of preference outliers (Weingast and Marshall, 1988). This implies that they are formed of members who have chosen a particular committee because of the special interest their constituency might hold in that area, becoming in time increasingly specialised and non-representative of the views of the House as a whole. In addition to this, since studies on voting behaviour in the EP have revealed a pattern of floor voting where the view put forward by committee is very likely to be accepted by other members of the party (mostly due to the fact that they acknowledge the degree of specialisation and seniority of the members of that committee) this has led some to say that the power has been transferred to a system of committees that does not represent the views of the House as a whole and forms a so-called 'sub-government'. These are interpretations that have been projected on the activity of committees in the EP and have been tested (Whitaker, 2005; McElroy, 2006; Yordanova, 2010). Others also sharing these views are the internal actors – the MEPs. In such cases most of them see certain committees as being mostly sought after by members from particular countries (French in the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee, Spanish and Portuguese in the Regional Development Committee, British in the Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee).

Referring to the US literature on committees, Cox and McCubbins (2007) conclude that most studies present an image where parties are seen as having a minor role in the House. In an attempt to summarise the conclusions of existing studies on the Congress they put forward three commonly held views: that parties have little 'systematic influence on pre-floor behaviour' (Cox and McCubbins 2007: 4) - they are not able to exert control over the decisions and the outcomes of the votes that take place in committees; that 'parties are primarily procedural coalitions that have

relatively little influence over the substance of legislation' - they are the ones organising the processes but take little responsibility for the outcomes of the processes themselves; that 'party leaders' actions in Congress are conditional on the support of the party membership on a case by case basis, rather than taken as a part of a more general and unconditional delegation of power'(Cox and McCubbins, 2007: 5). Nonetheless, both authors see a 'translation of procedural into substantive advantages as occurring on both an 'active' and a 'latent' track' and note that:

'Much less attention has been paid to the substantive advantage that the majority party can attain simply by structuring the committee system – setting up jurisdictions, allocating resources, assigning members, and so forth - and then letting things proceed on 'automatic pilot' (n.a)'(Cox and McCubbins, 2007: 5).

Their view is that parties, in spite of their apparent lack of control in the committee stage of legislation, are still able to structure these committees in a manner that would give them the opportunity to use these procedural means in order to influence the substantive aspects that are part of committee activity. Subsequently, the Cox and McCubbins (2007) model supports the theory that parties are more likely to try and ensure representation in committees where the policy decisions reached may affect a large part of the electoral districts and therefore the majority of the electorate. This causes in turn a lower level of interest in representation in committees, which have what they call 'targeted externalities' or 'mixed externalities', meaning that the decisions reached in such committees have the potential to affect a specific type of electorate or different types of electorate but not the electorate as a whole. According to the same rationale, this would mean that members who tend to focus their attention on committees that are most likely to affect their electorate and try to follow the interests of their constituency would more likely be present in committees with

‘targeted externalities’. Such behaviour could have two results: a concentration of policy outliers in certain committees and the predominance of these in committees with ‘targeted externalities’, where EP groups would have a lower interest in ensuring representation. It would also result that there might be a greater level of variation between policy decisions taken by committees and the opinions of the party in regards to that policy, just as much as it would imply that decisions reached by committee might not correspond with the interest of the electorate as a whole. Indeed, as Weingast and Marshall (1988) point out, a strong set of committees can have considerable influence over the legislative process, while a system with strong parties also could, but would in turn have to feature a committee system more susceptible to control exercised by parties (Weingast and Marshall, 1988: 159).

Unlike the distributive and the partisan selection models, Krehbiel (1990) has a different approach in that he sees the main function of committees as a provider of information for the legislature in regards to the possible results of different policy options. They can develop specialised knowledge, which can benefit the legislature as a whole and they will be selected by the party on the basis of their level of knowledge and the close alignment of their preferences with the ones of the party. This makes for a more effective and majority based legislature where the policy outcomes of committees are more likely to be in the interest of the electorate as a whole and not a small minority represented by policy outliers concentrated in the committees.

Consequently, transferring these inferences to the EP scene would imply that if one works based on the assumption that there is no party structuring and leadership in the EP when it comes to committee activity and votes are cast according to committee

members' preferences then, the possibility of the party setting out a specific allocation pattern in committees to suit an agenda would be overlooked. As a result actors would only follow their own preferences. Such an approach would be detrimental; particularly when, in practice, European parties allocate their seats in committees based on a system of proportionality and are not entirely reliant on the requests of their members or of the national delegations that compose them. This is an example of the particularities that the legislative system in the EP presents in comparison to the US one and it stresses again the need to apply an adapted theoretical model when analysing its activity. Nonetheless, these inferences help structure the analysis of EP committees, in that they offer a basis for the investigation of political group influence on parliamentary committees. Therefore, in the framework of this study, the Cox and McCubbins partisan selection model will be verified against observations in the EP, mainly those presented in the empirical chapters 4, 5 and 6 to establish if, by controlling committee assignment, EP groups can impact on the decision-making process in the Parliament, enduring voting cohesion and coherence of committee-plenary decision. The findings in chapter 6 indicate that this does not happen because committee members end up delineating a line and establishing agreements in committee, which then get internalised by the group, explaining the transferral of committee decision in plenary.

After presenting the US literature on committees, referred to up until now in order to account for the activity and the powers of EP committees, this section has revealed that the US model of analysis has to be adapted when applied to the Parliament. Therefore, section 5 will investigate the existing studies on the EP committee system and the fitting models they have found for their analysis.

## 2.5 Committees in the EP

Section five discusses the literature on EP committees and isolates the main argument in the debate regarding their influence in the decision-making process.

Research on committee activity in the EP has looked at different aspects: it has focused on report allocation in committees taking as a variable the presence or otherwise in the Council of the political group to which the rapporteur belongs (Benedetto, 2005; Høyland, 2006; Yoshinaka *et al.*, 2010), on the composition of the committees and the extent to which they reflect the EP composition as a whole (McElroy, 2006; Kreppel 2002b; Whitaker, 2005), on the committee system (Mamadouh and Raunio, 2003), on the role committees play in reaching early agreements under the ordinary legislative procedure (Reh *et al.*, 2011; Reh, 2014; Yordanova, 2013) and on the level of consensus in committees (Settembri and Neuhold, 2009). They have revealed that committees are generally representative of the EP (McElroy, 2006), mirroring the composition of the full chamber, and that they follow a consensus policy, even more so since enlargement, trying to achieve this consensus at an early stage in the legislative process (Settembri and Neuhold, 2009). Studies, such as the one from Whitaker (2005) which looks at the extent to which national parties are ready to ensure their representation in committees, are extremely relevant in showing the interest that national parties take in the activities of their MEPs as opposed to the views that still judge them as being simple followers of the national party rule. If some years back MEPs were seen as ‘marginalised’ members of

their domestic parties and had little scrutiny over their work (Raunio, 2003), in EP6 (2004-2009) and EP7 (2009-2014) the situation has changed. Mostly as a consequence of the increase in EP powers and the impact of legislation drafted at EU level, the work of MEPs has also become more valuable to national parties (Ladrech, 2002), which can turn to their members for information on EU legislation and advice, contributing, in certain cases, to a process of Europeanization of their own domestic parties. Others, such as Yoshinaka, McElroy and Bowler (2010) have attempted to identify the main actors in EP decision-making, in particular those who influence the dynamics of this institution, and have found that committee rapporteurs play a significant role in the process.

Nonetheless, the studies can be complemented with a broader image of what the functioning inside the committees really incurs, namely that apart from the background exchange of influence amongst national delegations and EP political groups, there are also daily debates and arguments that are held during the sessions where MEPs may express their opinions and personal beliefs on a matter. There are indeed interactions amongst the members and their political group coordinator that take place during the voting time, refusals to vote according to the voting lists or failure to do so because of lack of interest, interactions that cannot be accounted for by analysing the allocation of reports, the results of the votes or the number of members that a party has in a particular committee. They are important aspects of an analysis of the activity in committees but they are not the only ones. Therefore, I believe that a quantitative analysis cannot illustrate the full spectrum of activities taking place in the committees, but needs to be complimented with qualitative

methods capable of filling the gaps. The raw data, once interpreted, makes the case for a very clear and unequivocal presentation of an event that has unfolded within the EP, but it cannot account entirely for all other interactions and aspects that are involved in the decision-making process. Therefore, this research wishes to make the case for an integrated approach where descriptive and qualitative data will be gathered and used in mapping the existing processes active in the EP committees.

In line with what was previously mentioned and considering the findings of Høyland (2006: 42) who argues that ‘being in government increases the predicted production of co-decision reports’, it is clear that this result is also influenced by the interest of national parties to have an important leverage in both institutions, as well as by the ease with which rapporteurs (MEPs in charge of preparing a report and passing it through the chamber) can gather essential information on a particular report and the existing debates in the Council. There is an informal network of information that is set in motion in such instances in order to ensure the representation of the same decisions in both the Council and the EP. This same network can support MEPs from national parties represented in the Council in their attempt to obtain political notoriety and in highlighting the importance of their activity in the EP to the leadership of their parties back home and the national delegations. I believe that this sort of exchanges must also be analysed in order to grasp the real level at which decisions are made within parliamentary committees.

Høyland stresses a number of important facts which are also in line with another body of research on the parliamentary committees, that of Mamadouh and Raunio (2003), such as the leverage that the size of the EP group and the national party have in

contributing to the nomination of an MEP as a rapporteur. Also, political groups that incur higher costs in reaching a level of coordination have a lower volume of reports. This is in accordance with the facts presented by Mamadouh and Raunio (2003: 342) on the way that rapporteurships are distributed in the committees:

‘ ... party groups have developed a system based primarily on the rule of proportionality, with procedures that may differ between committees. Each group receives a quota of points out of the total point tally based on its share of seats in the committee. Party group co-ordinators and committee chairs decide the value of each report to be produced by the committee, and co-ordinators identify their groups’ priority reports and make bids on behalf of their groups in specific co-ordinators’ meetings.’

Therefore, it becomes clear why, in practice, due to the existing system that is in place, the larger their political group, and then their national delegation inside the group, the more rapporteurships are some MEPs in a committee likely to obtain than others. Still, there are a number of other factors that might lead to this outcome and that is linked to how an MEP is perceived by his or her group co-ordinator in the committee and this will affect his or her chances of actually obtaining a particular report on which interest has already been expressed. This perception is also linked to the level of involvement that an MEP might have expressed in time in the existing activities of the committee in question, as it is also linked to the level of knowledge and specialisation that a member might have on the topic concerned by the report (Mamadouh and Raunio, 2003: 343). Such aspects are extremely relevant to the validity of the main argument of this study and will be analysed in detail in chapter 4 on the role of rapporteurs and the part that they play in the activity of committees and in the transferral of a committee decision to plenary.



In line with the research looking to establish the existing correlations between national parties, represented by their national delegations in the EP, and MEPs, Whitaker (2005) analyses the activity of parliamentary committees for a one-year period. His research focuses on the roll-call vote data in the EP in an attempt to establish the extent to which members active in committees keep in line with the views of their national party delegations. By comparing the votes cast in plenary by committee members with the votes of the rest of their group he observes a high level of similarity between the preferences of both the specific members and the rest of the group, as expressed on particular reports that were under debate.

Nonetheless, research analysing EP votes has its caveats and this is mostly due to the fact that votes cast in committees are not recorded in the same way as roll-call votes are in plenary. This makes it difficult to compare committee voting with roll-call plenary voting, given that one can only see the final results of the votes in committee, without having the exact voting record for each member. Still, there are other means available for analysing this aspect, mainly using proportions and correlations between the overall final result of a vote in committee and the result in plenary. The fieldwork of the current research done in the parliamentary committees and the compiled data from the final votes expressed at this level, point to a high degree of unanimity, with many reports seeing an undisputable vote in favour. As such for most cases, if there is a unanimous vote or a very significant majority (with only one or two votes against and a small number of abstentions) the variation between the vote in committee and the one in the plenary can be verified, as seen in chapter 4 and 5.

Additionally, an interesting aspect of Whitaker's research underlines that the level of representation of national delegations in parliamentary committees, as well as the congruence amongst the votes of the members and the rest of the group, are linked to the level of legislative activity of the parliamentary committee. In short, the more say a committee has in influencing policy outcomes, the more interest there is from national parties in being represented in these committees and ensuring that their views and interests are portrayed accordingly:

‘...national delegations maintain higher levels of representativeness on committees that hold legislative powers, compared with others.’ (Whitaker, 2005: 7)

At the same time, members of the political group will be more likely to follow their colleagues' views on matters that were debated in committees and judge the latter as holding a high degree of expertise on a certain subject.

Moreover, Whitaker approaches the analysis of the representativeness of the national party preferences throughout a committee using the mean absolute difference score between the votes cast by committee members in plenary and the ones of the rest of the party. In this respect he issues a number of hypotheses, using the Cox and McCubbins (2007) partisan selection model, stating that the more widespread an interest is for a particular committee, due to its capacity of issuing decisions that may affect constituencies to a similar level - that is to display an ‘uniformity of externalities’ (Cox and McCubbins, 2007) - the more interest will a political group have in ensuring its preferences are well represented throughout committees. He then makes a comparison between the EP and the US Congress committee system, arguing that the latter makes a clearer point of active involvement in committees of members

that are interested in reaching policy outcomes that benefit their constituents, concluding that the low level of variance between the pattern of votes of EP members from committee and the rest of the group is an indication of growing interest from national parties, and therefore national delegations, in the activity of MEPs and the level to which they are representative of the rest of the EP group. However, the comparison to the US Congress committee system is incomplete, as Krehbiel (1990) points out the variance in the preferences of members of committees and those of the rest of the House is not significant enough in order to account for a specific difference in the orientations of the committees on certain policy aspects. More precisely, there is no clear argument to support a theory where MEPs from a particular region or a particular country that has additional interest in a European policy, would focus upon committees involved in that policy.

Bearing in mind all of the abovementioned studies, the research of Gail McElroy (2006) on parliamentary committees addresses a number of issues that might first seem self-explanatory but have not been fully tested yet: the level to which the committees are representative of the EP in general, and the degree of specialisation of MEPs on a certain committee. An MEP's assignment to a committee might, indeed, lead the member to establish his own agenda in terms of policy outcomes, which could be different from the national party's or the EP political group. Still, it seems natural that depending on the legislative powers of a certain committee, the interest for the main EP groups to have representatives on it would be greater and therefore, naturally, political parties in committees would reflect the composition of the EP. This would also be supported by what Mamadouh and Raunio (2003: 338) refer to as

a division of committee membership and chairmanship according to the principle of proportionality.

In addition to that, given the high level of specialisation of the legislation discussed in these committees, it is understandable why an MEP would choose to serve on a more technical committee if he/she would fit the technical profile. The high degree of specialisation and the specificity of the profiles of MEPs do not automatically call for a development of a voting behaviour that no longer follows the European group or national line. This is mainly due to the existing rules inside the group in a committee, which account for voting lists and preparatory meetings that ensure cohesiveness of the group's position in the given parliamentary committee.

Furthermore, McElroy uses the informational approach to explain the organisation of the committee system in the EP and concludes that committees in their make up reflect the composition of the parliament as a whole (McElroy, 2006: 25). In line with the informational perspective put forward by theorists such as Gilligan and Krehbiel (Gilligan and Krehbiel, 1990; Krehbiel, 1991), the argument here is that the institution in itself is interested in organising committees that can provide it with additional information and that, in order to render it more efficient, benefit from an important level of specialisation of their members on designated policy fields (McElroy, 2006: 10). By focusing the argument on the informational perspective, McElroy views the 'lack of 'pork' (selective goods to offer as rewards to constituents)' that the MEPs have within the European institution as another reason to refute a distributional approach (McElroy, 2006: 10), where the membership of a committee is sought by the members to purposely influence the developments of a policy in view of obtaining

accrued gains for their constituents and ensure their own chances of re-election. However, the distributional dimension cannot be side-lined since MEPs, unlike the members in the US Congress who appear to be following the policy preferences of their constituencies, try to follow the preferences that are expressed by the main electorate in their countries, simply put - their country preferences. Even if this does not cause them to disregard the group line, the possibility of their clustering in committees according to their country's interests can be envisaged and could lead to a diminished representativeness of the Parliament.

In reference to the degree of representativeness committees might have of the plenary as whole, as well as regarding transparency of the legislative process, another significant body of research has focused on the wide-spread use of early agreements in first reading under the ordinary legislative procedure, how it has impacted the decision-making in the EU and implicitly in the EP (Reh *et al.*, 2011; Héritier and Reh, 2012; de Ruiter and Neuhold, 2012; Yordanova, 2013; Reh, 2014). The study on the codecision files for EP5 and EP6 done by Reh *et al.* (2011: 1113), points to an 'informalization' of the political process', where negotiations are carried and agreements are reached amongst a closed number of actors. Like Yordanova (2010), Reh *et al.* (2011: 1113) stress that once a compromise is agreed at this stage between Parliament, Council and Commission, it becomes difficult for the EP committee or plenary to modify it. Thus, committee's ability to influence the decision-making process in Parliament is questioned, especially when 'such "early conclusion" accounted for 72% in the 2004 - 2009 parliamentary term' (Reh *et al.*, 2011: 1113). Moreover, Yordanova (2013) concludes that committees have limited legislative influence under early agreements, arguing that when an agreement is already reached

before the vote in committee and later confirmed in both committee and plenary, it renders ‘both committee and plenary discussion virtually obsolete’ (Yordanova, 2013: 89). However, it is the committee’s prerogative to cast the vote allowing the agreement to reach plenary, thus the committee retains the power to sanction it. In addition, the EP Rules of Procedure provide clear guidelines in both instances: where negotiations in view of an agreement are entered into after the adoption of the committee report Rule 70<sup>6</sup> applies, and when negotiations start before the adoption of the report Rule 70a is foreseen. The negotiations Parliament, Council and Commission enter in view of reaching an early agreement, known as trilogues, are made up, on the EP side, of Chair, Vice-chairman or committee members of the responsible committee. This ensures a significant representation for the committee and, as it will be detailed in chapter 3, cannot be seen as substituting committee influence with that of the trilogue negotiation team. Moreover, Toshkov and Rasmussen (2012) indicate that the instituted practice of early agreements may have led to an extension in the duration of first reading after 2004, especially when 'salient legislation is on the bargaining table and there is a level of political disagreement between the co-legislators' (Toshkov and Rasmussen, 2012: 17). Thus, sufficient discussion and information at committee level may still be carried out. It is, however, impossible to overlook that early agreements used at this scale point to a closed doors, efficiency based approach towards the legislative process, characterised by little transparency, and committees are a part of this process. But, as it will be shown in the other chapters, early agreements do not prevent committees from having any impact on the final decision and the institutional compromise.

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<sup>6</sup>The numbers for the EP Rules of Procedure are those which operated in EP7 and are accessible at the following address: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+RULES-EP+20140310+0+DOC+PDF+V0//EN&language=EN>. In the meantime, EP8 Rules of Procedure have been renumbered.

From the studies mentioned so far it results that an important number of questions are still left pending in respect of committees. Do parties deliberately operate committee assignments in order to ensure this representation? Do they discipline their members in the committees as much as they plan to do in the plenary? Are there essential differences between the votes cast in the committees on a particular report and the votes that are cast in the plenary on that same file? And more importantly, are the EP groups operating most of these actions in consultation and accordance with the national party delegations or are there instances of conflict as well? This study clarifies some of these questions in chapter 4, 5 and 6, relying on the main argument of centrality of committees to the EP legislative process. It puts forward a more comprehensive model of analysis of the committee system.

Therefore, section five of this chapter has introduced the existing literature on EP committees. It has analysed the reliance of these studies on US Congress literature, its advantages and shortcomings, and has demonstrated that a more integrated approach, mapping all interactions in committees is required in order to gain a better understanding of the activity of parliamentary committees and its implications for the decision-making process in the Parliament. Consequently, the next section of the chapter seeks to establish how and why this integrated approach should be pursued.

## **2.6 The committee system in the EP through input data and interactions**

Based on the arguments presented in the previous section, relating to the models used up until now for the analysis of parliamentary committees in the EP, the last section of the chapter offers an explanation for the use of a more comprehensive account of committee activity through qualitative and quantitative methods. It highlights the issues linked to committee analysis limited to quantitative tools and based on the US literature theoretical models. Subsequently, it brings evidence in support of the analytical approach used in this study.

The existing literature on parliamentary committees is complex and based on observations and conclusions reached in the study of US Congress committees. The results of the studies differ widely and have led to several interpretations as to what would be the function of committees in a legislature and the impact that their activity might have on legislative outputs.

If, however, these models of analysis are applied to the committee system in the EP, one finds that there are significant differences in terms of rules and procedures, as well as legislature organisation, between the US Congress and the EP, not to mention the differences in characteristics between US parties and EP political groups. As mentioned, Whitaker looks to find, based on the Cox and McCubbins partisan selection model, levels of variation between the committee members' votes in the EP on their own committee report and the national party delegation votes. His findings are to a certain degree in accordance with the predictions of the model but there is too little variation for them to be strongly supported. He then concludes that the level of



representation of party preference in committees is indicative of the growing interest that national parties have demonstrated recently, mainly as a result of the increase in the EP powers.

Still, there are a number of issues that put Whitaker's (2005) analysis into question, one of them being that roll-call votes in the EP do not represent the totality of the votes cast, nor do they express the exact views on a particular report (Carrubba and Gabel, 1999). There is also the issue of defining in the EP the committees that have indeed 'targeted externalities' and for which countries that might be more relevant. Such aspects might be essential in judging results as a consequence of applying the Cox and McCubbins model. However, one of the points that seem to cause the greatest level of doubt is the fact that, even when applying this model to the US committees, the level of variance in policy decisions between committees and the House is still rather limited. And this in a context where parties have less cohesion and the impact of policy decisions reached by the US Congress is more visible for the electorate, in comparison to the way in which the European electorate can perceive the level of impact of EP decisions on their daily activities. It seems more likely and self-explanatory for EP committees to portray an important level of representation of the national party opinions, given the circumstances, than it would in the case of the US committees. That is why EP committee research should not stop at the interpretation of roll-call votes but look into the qualitative side of the argument.

Therefore, a better way to approach the analysis of the parliamentary committees would be to keep in mind the important effect that discussions in committees and preparatory meetings held by each political group have in shaping the votes of their

members, as well as the influence of the group coordinator and the policy advisor on the output of the policy decisions of a group. Moreover, there are significant interactions that take place between members in the committees, the national party delegations and the EP group coordinators during the vote on a specific report and they all make up an intricate part of the decision-making process inside the committee. They are the ones that give MEPs the opportunity to organise and rank their preferences and the ones of their national parties and political groups in order to form a view on the matter at hand. A close look at all these factors, cross-referenced with results offered by the quantitative data, mainly roll-call votes, would be able to portray an image of greater variation in term of policy preference in committees in comparison to the actual end result of the votes. It would present a clearer image of the consensus mechanism in the EP and explain why it still prevails even in times when the EP's competencies have extended so far.

The justification for such an approach, which combines quantitative analysis with qualitative data, stems from the special characteristics and the intrinsic nature of the EP and its committees in comparison to other legislatures. The organisation of the US Congress committees might see similarities with that of the EP but the nature of the parties standing in the two legislatures is completely different: the EP groups are parliamentary organisations that incorporate a great number of national parties with different political traditions and policy backgrounds compared to the US. On the other hand, they still show a greater level of internal cohesion compared to the US parties and that is not necessarily explained by the rules of procedures but more by an informal set of rules and interactions in the EP. It is not the fact that a national delegation in the EP votes against the EP group position that might cause it to be

expelled from its EP political group, but it might lead to a loss of credibility of that party inside the group and a reluctance to assign high profile reports to members of those delegation. This is just an example to illustrate the tools that an EP group has at its disposal in order to react to group disruptive forces and maintain intra-party discipline.

The benefits of such a view on parliamentary committees in the EP would come from a realisation that matters cannot be simply defined by asserting the control of national parties or EP groups upon their members on aspects that have a direct impact at national level and, at the same time, their complete disinterest in the other aspects of their MEPs activity. But rather by taking into consideration the sometimes-intricate bargaining process that takes place in the EP in between votes. This study will do just that in the course of the following four chapters, analysing the data from fieldwork observations, vote results and amendment numbers. With an understanding of the different models used for the analysis of EP committees, as presented throughout this chapter, this thesis will go on to present in chapter 3 the theoretical basis for the study, while chapter 4, 5 and 6 will reveal how committees exert their influence with the help of three ‘relais’ channels: rapporteurs, amendments and political group interactions.

## **Chapter 3**

### **The European Parliament Committees - A Source of Influence over the Plenary?**

This chapter presents the main argument underpinning the thesis, emphasising that the EP, in an effort to gain legitimacy through increased legislative output, has developed a set of internal processes of decision-making which are sometimes highly technical and depoliticised. As a result, it has created a strong system of committees where negotiations are carried out and agreements are forged before the final plenary vote. The hypotheses presented throughout the chapter and analysed in the study test the influence these committees exert over the internal decision-making process. When verified, in the following chapters, they reveal an image of the EP where committees, define the institution's opinion.

Existing studies (McElroy, 2006; Settembri and Neuhold, 2009; Ringe, 2010; Whitaker, 2011) have acknowledged committees in the EP as prominent actors of the institutional process, starting with Maastricht and continuing with the Lisbon Treaty provisions which extended the ordinary legislative procedure to most EU policy areas. However, in spite of the increased profile given to committees, they place political groups at the centre of decision-making in the EP and regard the plenary as the final forum where the Parliament's opinion is defined.

Within this framework, the current theory supports the idea that EP has, over time, internally developed a more depoliticised decision-making process, with a strong

system of committees becoming responsible for resolving dissent and bringing ideological and political differences towards a common centre of consensus. However, when decisions on certain files in the EP become depoliticised, it is for efficiency purposes and is thus underpinned by a conscious political choice of EP groups to speed up the legislative process on salient issues. Consequently, the main argument of this study stresses that around a centre of consensus and in the parliamentary committees, the institution's opinion is structured. This thesis argues that committees, as institutional actors, lead the legislative process, while political groups may choose to intervene only if they judge it necessary, in most cases relying on the opinion expressed by their members from the respective committees.

Therefore, throughout this chapter, the theory will be analysed with the help of the main hypothesis. This emphasises that parliamentary committees may, at times, form the opinion of the institution on legislative matters to a greater extent than political groups. The chapter goes on to present the hypothesis and three supporting sub-hypotheses in order to identify the processes and the extent to which committees impact on the institution's decisions. Relying on process tracing of the activity of parliamentary committees and of MEPs' work, the research isolates three different channels through which the influence of committees within the internal process is exerted: rapporteurs and their work, amendments tabled to reports and political group meetings. The hypothesis and sub-hypotheses used to test the impact of each of these channels aim to show that the high level of political cohesion in the final stages of decision-making cannot be explained by party discipline or control alone, but rather by a strong set of committee agreements forged and lobbied for by committee members within their political groups and in the plenary. Moreover, the strong

correlation discovered between the result of votes on reports in committee and in the plenary, which will be analysed in more detail in chapter 4, is explained, on the one hand, by the influence of committees and, on the other hand, by the perceived coherence of preferences (Ringe, 2010) that MEPs from a political group may have in relation to their colleagues, members of the committee responsible.

Finally, once the hypotheses have been presented, the chapter will show that the institutional constraints imposed on the EP and the constant need to legitimise it as an efficient supranational entity have all been decisive factors in the development of a powerful committee system that delineates the EP opinion. All this with the added consideration that such developments have not necessarily been applied to the detriment of political groups but rather with their knowledge and approval in view of rendering the legislative process more efficient. This implies that there is no distinct win or lose relationship between political groups and committees, but rather an institutional compromise, where a concern for efficiency causes political groups to let committees take centre stage.

The first section of this chapter looks at EP developments accounting for the increase in committee activity and their influence. The second section presents the main argument and the hypotheses of this study, while the third details the data and the methodology.

### **3.1 The Road to Power of the Parliamentary Committees**

Within the framework of European integration, the EP has been an institution with the most interesting evolution, due to the constant changes it has undergone over the course of the years. It has been, by definition, an institution in transition, even more so after the first direct elections of 1979, and it continues to be so. For these reasons it constitutes a focal point for research on the EU and it has favoured the analysis of its internal mechanisms in an attempt to become more prominent among the other institutions but, also, to define itself as a main actor in the decision-making process at European level.

The pattern of changes to the structure of the EP has been driven by an accumulation of powers gained over time and by developments within the EU. The ‘talking shop’ (Rittberger, 2005: 73) comparison that used to define EP in the early stages of its institutional development has gradually been replaced with that of co-legislator. The Parliament now has the ability to amend and decide on legislation that affects more than 500 million citizens all over Europe and it has, in practice, more power than other national legislatures. This partly explains why its organisation system is so complex, a factor that renders more difficult the mapping of its internal decision-making.

At its core, the Parliament has become a legislature defined by its changing nature brought on by successive Treaty modifications. That is why studies documenting its activity and decision-making process have become more important than in the case of

other legislatures. They respond to a need to investigate the EP's influence and explain its positioning within the institutional triangle structure.

It has to be said that, given the supranational character of the EU and the constant representativity gaps and legitimacy issues for which it has often been criticised, the EP has used to the fullest its representational features and legitimacy when confronted with the citizens of Member States. The only elected institution in the EU has, since the first elections in 1979, succeeded in exploiting the legislative advances it has gained over the course of the years and in minimising its institutional marginalisation by expanding the scope of its influence and policy competences. To date, it has achieved an equal footing with the Council and has influence over most, if not all, legislative acts that are drawn up at European level. However, in doing so, it has also had to maintain and improve the image of an efficient institution. It is particularly this aspect that I believe has caused Parliament to sometimes sacrifice political competition for the purpose of achieving a speedy accomplishment of legislative tasks through consensus. Resolving dissent in the early legislative stages through a consensus-based policy and with the help of internal mechanisms set up to support it has allowed the EP to improve its image as a well-oiled and functioning supranational institution. But, in the process, the EP has become, in part, a 'closed doors' institution, which is less transparent, due to the high level of technicality of legislation that it has to deal with and, to a certain extent, sometimes depoliticised. This is most clearly expressed in the emergence of a strong system of committees that cover all EU legislation matters. However, this is not to say that EP has become devoid of politics, since political deals are struck amongst the groups as in any other legislature, but rather that it is characterised by a contained type of politics as far as this does not



ultimately impact on the final agreement on a piece of legislation. Nor does this imply a voluntary choice of the EP itself to ground its politics in consensus, but a result of the institutional make-up and overall structure of the EU political system. In order to be able to bring significant input to legislative proposals and set the mark for negotiations with the other institutions (the Council and the Commission), EP committees have had to set up internal mechanisms that allow for conflict and ideological differences to be resolved before the final vote of the full chamber. The fieldwork carried out for this study shows that these mechanisms involve: setting up meetings between the rapporteur (MEP responsible for drafting the EP's position on a legislative or non-legislative matter) and the shadows designated by the other political groups; encouraging common as well as compromise amendments to legislation, which can be negotiated in more detail before the committee vote and hold more weight in plenary; facilitating debate amongst committee members on controversial issues, by setting up additional committee meetings, if necessary, for the expression of views of MEPs, in order to allow for conflict to be resolved and agreements to be forged before the vote. All of these factors lead to quicker legislative results and, in spite of the heated and conflicting political debates that take place here, the committee's final decision, as is shown throughout chapters 4, 5 and 6, remains largely consensual. Most importantly, as the data in chapter 4 will show, the decision taken at committee level is replicated in the vote of the full chamber, a fact that stresses the importance and the influence of committees.

Therefore, in order to try to highlight developments in the organisational structure of the EP, but also to analyse its internal functioning in an effort to identify the stage at which agreements are forged, this research looks at the committees that make up the

EP and the part they play within its decision-making process. It is in the committees that the EP deploys its strength and in this area it is clear that the institution is no longer just a talking shop. The study will compare existing models used to analyse parliamentary committees in the EP and test them against fieldwork observations carried out in the institution over the course of one year – from May 2010 until June 2011 – supported by structured interviews with MEPs, their staff, political group's staff, officials from the Secretariat of the EP and interest group representatives. It will assess committees' role within the whole legislative process of the institution. All this will be done using a comprehensive approach that looks at the way in which political preferences develop and choices are made inside committees amongst their members, as well as amongst members of the same EP political group. In other words, the focus is on the findings from the actual committee sessions and their outcome, as well as on the interactions and debates that lead up to them in order to determine whether, through the transferral and adoption of a committee decision in the plenary session, parliamentary committees can have more say in establishing the final position of the EP than political groups.

After looking at EP developments that explain why committees might have gained more power, the next section of the chapter will analyse some of the EP committee system features. It will then present the hypotheses that can help test and establish if decisions and votes in committees constitute the essential output of this legislature, an output subsequently sanctioned in the plenary of the Parliament and if the main hypothesis stating that can be verified. This main argument will be developed by an analysis of the factors that explain and indicate the reasons for such interdependence between the two legislative stages, these being the rapporteurs, the amendments

tabled on reports and the group debates on the reports. Each of these will be tested with the help of sub-hypotheses that will be presented in more detail. The aim is to investigate whether or not the activity of a rapporteur on a report, or the number and type of amendments or the debates and position of the political group on a specific matter can be used to explain if and why the House chooses to simply formally recognise a decision already formulated by its parliamentary committees.

### **3.2 A theoretical framework for analysing the EP committee structure**

Existing work on EP parliamentary committees' activity has tried to clarify the purpose they serve and analyse the main characteristics of their work. The previous section presented the changes in the EP and the consolidation of committee activity inside it. The following paragraphs will discuss the implications of the literature on this subject.

As presented in chapter 2, research so far has focused on the different perspectives of committee activity, but also on committee composition, representativity and consensus level. As far as the EP is concerned, the three theoretical models derived from the US Congress, and on which most of the literature on the subject is based, seem to explain different facets of the organisation of parliamentary committees and their activity. The models, however, must be used with the understanding that they can help as a tool for structuring the research and the findings without restricting their results to a predefined framework. Furthermore, their use must complement the other

research methods employed to study an institution which is so specific from a procedural point of view.

So far, the fieldwork observations in the EP have supported the validity of the concept of ‘perceived preference coherence’ (Ringe, 2010), while at the same time stressing the influence that committee decisions can have over plenary ones. Accordingly, it must be mentioned that an assessment of the activity and the discussions that took place in the EP political groups was also part of the study and contributed to the testing of this principle. Knowing that the monthly group meetings are distributed and divided in three separate Working Groups in accordance with the different committees, in the framework of these groups, MEPs have the capacity to discuss and debate reports that are being managed by their colleagues or for which one of their colleagues is a shadow. These reports are the ones that can be found on the agenda in the committees. In this manner, an MEP, expert on the issue under discussion, provides an overview of the topic and the matters at hand, including the implications for the group position on the subject and the national party interests in different Member States. From then onwards, the debate is open as to how things should proceed and be voted on, all this in accordance with the line set by the shadow or the rapporteur. This constitutes evidence that the group itself can ensure, to a certain extent, that a decision is already taken before the plenary. However, due to outstanding national interests, MEPs may choose to put forward oral amendments in plenary, thus raising specific points, making interventions and detouring from the rapporteur or the shadow rapporteur line, changing the voting list altogether. But, as illustrated in the case studies from chapter 4, 5 and 6, the decision taken at group level on the basis of prior deliberations and consensus achieved at committee level, can

limit the plenary vote to a mere exercise, to a framework upon which opinions, views and policy preferences can be stated and reinforced, this time with a greater audience. Contrary to this, if parliamentary committees were outliers and unrepresentative of the House as a whole, as one would expect under the distributive perspective, or would only provide technical information to the chamber and offer it additional knowledge on policy and its outcomes, then the data from committee votes and plenary should display significant variation between the two levels and different results of votes as a general rule.

Also, from a legislative process-oriented perspective, if the EP were to have a different view to that of the committee, then more modifications to the text of the report should be tabled through plenary amendments or, according to the Rules of Procedure, there should be alternative motions for resolution tabled by the political groups to a specific report. On account of the data available so far from committee and plenary votes, from the amendments and from group meetings, such practices are very rare. The explanation is linked to the great workload the EP needs to go through during a voting session in plenary. The number of reports is so high that the EP tries, when possible to limit the number of amendments, especially when this concerns a legislative decision that has to be taken by roll-call vote. There are, however, instances where the plenary chooses to refer a report back to the committee and such a practice is also codified in the EP rules (Rule 162 and Rule 57). Rule 162 states that in the case where more than ‘fifty amendments and requests for a split or separate vote have been tabled to a report for consideration in Parliament, the President may, after consulting its chair, request the committee responsible to meet to consider those amendments or requests.’ On the other hand, Rule 57 foresees that in an instance

where the Commission has not expressed its position on Parliament's amendments or, as mentioned in paragraph 2 of this Rule, 'if the Commission announces that it does not intend to adopt all Parliament's amendments, the rapporteur of the committee responsible, or else the Chair of that committee, shall make a formal proposal to Parliament as to whether the vote on the draft legislative resolution should proceed.' In this case, if the vote is postponed, the committee can reconsider the legislation and then the committee alone can table amendments in view of reaching an agreement.

The procedure under Rule 57 has gained a significant momentum in the EP over the last years because it facilitates the continuation of negotiations between the EP, Council and Commission under first reading, in view of reaching an early agreement. It involves Parliament voting on an initial set of amendments to a proposal for legislation and postponing the final vote in order to move on and negotiate with the other institutions a common agreement that is very likely to be adopted. Once the agreement has been reached it is presented to the House in the form of an amendment replacing those voted in a previous session. It is particularly this practice that has been referred to as a closed, informal type of negotiation (Reh *et al.*, 2011: 1136) between a set of actors who operate outside committee reach and overturn committee decisions. I argue that, in spite of the small number of actors involved in negotiations for completing early agreements at this stage, the representation of committee is still ensured. These 'relais actors' (Judge and Earnshaw, 2011) are in fact committee members and the negotiating team includes the Chair or Vice-Chair of a committee, who keep in contact with the other members at each stage to inform them of the outcome of negotiations. Moreover, the consolidated amendment tabled for plenary and containing the early agreement has to be 'submitted to the committee responsible

for consideration. If approved by a vote in committee, the agreed text shall be tabled for consideration by Parliament in the appropriate form, including compromise amendments' (Rule 70). Annex XX in the Rules of Procedure on the conduct of negotiations under codecision gives clear indications as to how these should be carried and stipulates that the 'lead parliamentary committee shall be the main responsible body during negotiations both at first and second reading'. Therefore, committees still have an important say in the decision-making at this stage, even if the result of voting down committee amendments in favour of a consolidated amendment containing the agreement might offer a different image.

Committee work is prevalent in all aspects of EP decision-making, including in early agreements and it is therefore difficult to establish precisely at what point committee preferences are overruled by those of the negotiating team members. It is however clear that for efficiency purposes the EP has adopted a practice which limits open committee deliberations and contestation is also more contained as a consequence of the small number of actors involved. The Directive on consumer rights, which had been sent back to the responsible committee in view of completing an early agreement, provides a good example. (Initially, there were 1600 amendments in committee limited to 600 compromise amendments by the rapporteur and finally 210 plenary amendments). This was a particular case of legislation that had set out to regroup all of the already existing Directives in this field into one text and which had a very difficult process in committee. It will be investigated in more detail in part 4 of this chapter, as well as in chapter 4 that looks at rapporteurs and their role in passing legislation swiftly and consensually through the EP.

As a consequence, this research starts from the understanding that, considering that the extension in the ordinary legislative procedure after the Lisbon Treaty has increased the power of the EP, the volume of work in its parliamentary committees and, subsequently, their strength, one would expect to find the decision-making process bogged down by legislative burden. Having to pass more acts involves more debates, consultations, negotiations and, inevitably, more significant chances to be confronted with disagreement, even conflict. Still, the EP has continued to vote on legislative and non-legislative procedures in plenary at a constant pace, all having been debated and voted previously in committee. Can such developments be accounted for by a strong party discipline or by an internal policy of consensus that prevails in the institution? Does committee activity play a significant role in the swift passage of legislation through the House? Can this role also be expressed through proportionality between the voting results at this stage and those in the plenary? Are there certain political actors or particular internal, formal or informal, procedural arrangements that allow for the voting in the EP committees and plenary to be done with such large majorities? Answers to these questions will offer a clearer view and provide a better understanding of the links that exist in the EP between committee activity and plenary voting results. They will identify process-related patterns and particularities for the EP.

### 3. 2.1 Hypothesis and sub-hypotheses

Most studies on EP place political groups at the centre of decision-making in the institution and analyse committee activity with a partisan view in mind. Undoubtedly,



political groups play one of the most important roles within the Parliament and the organisation of the highest decision-making body is evidence to that: the Conference of Presidents, which decides on all matters related to parliamentary activity, including committees and plenary and is composed of leaders from every political group. However, they do not always make full use of the tools and available resources to ensure policy cohesion and exercise full control over the activity and the voting decisions of their members, in both committee and plenary. To a certain extent, they are relying on ex-ante control of their members through committee assignments and afterwards it falls to the committee group coordinator to steer members and ensure the group line is followed. Political groups, as stated before, have procedural tools available to impact on committees but they act on the basis of an understanding of preference coherence and representativity of their members in committee. Moreover, what fieldwork from this research will show is that, during committee meetings and informal group meetings preparing the committee agenda, members develop, over time, an ‘esprit de corps’ as Corbett, Jacobs and Shackleton (2011: 145) refer to it. This causes them to share and expand on their expert knowledge, impacting considerably, if not shaping entirely, the group line. Such exchanges of information and policy based interactions are evidence of committee activity impact on political groups and, eventually, on the entire House through the vote in plenary. A decision-making process based on such interactions does not diminish the importance of political groups. It does, however, illustrate how the groups and the House as a whole follow committee decisions and agreements, in the later stages of the legislative process. More precisely, it uncovers a systematic influence from the side of parliamentary committees on the EP’s opinion. For reasons related to efficiency, streamlining of decisions and embedded institutional consensus policy, political

groups integrate committee views and assimilate them with help from the input of their committee members. Therefore, these aspects will be tested using the main argument of the research, which can be expressed by the following question:

*Are parliamentary committees more influential than political groups in forming the opinion of the EP and do they play a pivotal role in the decision-making of the EP because the decision is defined at this stage, transferred to the plenary where it is then adopted?*

This question underpins the research of this study and is underlying for all the other sub-hypotheses drawn from it, which are tested in each chapter. It encompasses the specific viewpoint adopted in this thesis for the analysis of the EP decision-making process: that is to look at committees, their technical input and influence, having as prior expectation that they are a more important factor than political groups. If the majority of studies so far considered political groups as the most important variable in the analysis of the EP institutional processes, this research, without denying the former's importance, shifts the focus towards parliamentary committees and discovers they have developed into strong political actors with considerable impact on the daily parliamentary activity. Therefore, in order for the main hypothesis to be verified, there should be significant evidence of committee agreements being sanctioned by the House. Most importantly, there should be strong similarity of results between committee votes and final votes of the full chamber to be able to account for an influence of committee over plenary. At the same time, the null hypothesis in this case would be that committees do not play a significant role in the decision-making process of the institution and have no effect on the proceedings and the final opinion

expressed by Parliament. If there is evidence of engendered disagreement in the plenary sessions resulting in different voting patterns in these sessions as opposed to committee meetings, then the null hypothesis will be supported. Strong divergent views expressed by political groups in the final stages of the legislative process, resulting in different voting tendencies at the two stages, rendering committees' views unrepresentative of the House, would all constitute signs of an EP where political groups alone dictate the rules and can turn the balance in favour of a strong plenary opposing a system of committees that serve purely an informational role. In such cases, the plenary sessions would be expected to hold significant relevance in the intra-institutional process. By looking at debates in the plenary sessions and in committee on a sample of reports, using process tracing and interviews with actors involved, one would expect to find great interest from MEPs into plenary debates and the expression of dissent issued from opposing views in the speeches. The result foreseen in this case would be the acknowledgement of a strong plenary in a first instance and that of a weak committee system working in the background. Also, the analysis of vote results for the first half of EP7 in both committee and plenary should provide sufficient evidence to establish whether the full chamber vote mirrors the committee one.

Moreover, in order to test the hypothesis, three instruments, which allow for committee influence on the decision-making process, will be investigated. These are: the rapporteurs, the number of amendments and the political group meetings. Each of these will be analysed in detail in the empirical chapters and tested with the help of the sub-hypotheses below.

*H1: Starting with the decision reached in the parliamentary committee, the rapporteur influences the final text of a report throughout the entire process up to its adoption by the plenary.*

This first sub-hypothesis is tested in chapter 4 in order to investigate how rapporteurs contribute to a committee decision being adopted by the full chamber. As mentioned in the previous section of this chapter, studies like that of Yoshinaka *et al.* (2010) have identified rapporteurs as the main figures acting in committee and plenary to structure EP opinion on a proposal for legislation or a non-legislative act.

Consequently, chapter 4 analyses in detail their activity and verifies with the help of H1 if the rapporteur is one of the instruments that acts as a linking mechanism, helping transfer the result of committee decisions to the plenary. Based on the theory and the main hypothesis, the rapporteur would be expected to act as a pivot between the committee and the full chamber debate, ensuring agreement through debates and informal meetings with the shadows from the other political groups and moving the committee decision to plenary. The chapter focuses on the sequence of events, the institutional mechanisms in place and the discussions that form the process of drafting and voting the sample of reports from the case studies in committee and plenary, as well as on the result of votes that are part of the process. If there were evidence of considerable involvement from political groups in the drafting of a report, in the meetings with the shadows representing the other groups, in the results from committee meetings and in the forging of agreements, this would cause H1 to be false. Moreover, if such evidence is found, rapporteurs will appear to merely serve the functional role of conducting procedures linked to the passing of legislation in the EP,

being under the control and strict guidance of their political groups. They would not be in a position to ensure a committee opinion is accepted in plenary.

In addition to rapporteurs, there is another factor that can point towards the level of committee influence: the number of amendments a report receives in committee and in plenary. Chapter 5 will investigate it using two sub-hypotheses:

*H2a: A large number of amendments tabled in committee leads to a report receiving fewer amendments in plenary.*

*H2b: The number of committee amendments tabled to a report signals plenary voting behaviour and the extent to which it will follow a committee decision.*

Both H2a and H2b test whether there is any significance that can be attached to amendments submitted at the two stages. First of all, the assumption is that a large number of amendments initially submitted in committee would indicate disagreement on a report and different views held by committee members. If committees play a pivotal role in the decision-making process of the EP, looking to secure consensus, then amendments tabled here, even if they are numerous would serve to draw the lines along which agreement can be struck. Once these are then integrated in the form of the report that goes to plenary, assuming the consensus has been reached at this level and bearing in mind the way committees can influence the outcome of the decision in the full chamber, one would then expect fewer amendments to be introduced in plenary. Following the same logic, fewer amendments tabled in committee should signal less disagreement on a report at this stage and a complete transferal of the

committee vote result to the full chamber. Therefore, looking at the number of amendments tabled on reports in committee for the period selected and comparing this with the number that has been tabled on the same reports in plenary, should indicate if there is a connection between amendments that an act receives and its voting results. If committees exert influence over plenary, then amendments at the last stage in the legislative process should be fewer and, subsequently, a report, which already received a limited number of modifications in committee, should be voted in the full chamber with a large majority. Similarly, if H2a and H2b are not verified, then findings should reveal that there are more amendments submitted in plenary than in committee, thus indicating that disagreement has not been resolved prior to the final vote. Also, should a report with many amendments tabled in committee and a large majority vote then be voted down in plenary, H2b would fall. Therefore, a validation of both H2a and H2b would establish a clear connection between amendment numbers at committee and plenary stage and the success of a report, while also recognizing amendments as an instrument to verify the impact committee activity has on the Parliament.

Finally, chapter 6 looks at the political group meetings that take place before the plenary sessions of the EP and the role that committee members play during these. In order to test this, it relies on the following sub-hypothesis:

*H3: Through their activity, appointed group members ensure committee majority decisions are supported and followed by their political group in the plenary session.*

Through an analysis of the ALDE political group meetings, which debated the reports that are amongst the case studies used in chapters 4 and 5, chapter 6 looks for evidence of committee members involvement in debates, using the method of process tracing. If H3 were valid, then committee members assigned by political groups would be expected to contribute to these meetings, bringing expertise and information back from committee and establishing a group line through negotiations and debates. On the other hand, if analysis of these group meetings were to illustrate committee members as being outliers, sharing different policy preferences to those of their colleagues and in disagreement with them, then H3 would fall. Following the same logic, the voting results from committee and plenary should then be different, since members in committee act as outliers. Nonetheless, a non-validation of H3 would not exclude the possibility of having a replication of committee voting result in the final vote of the full chamber, provided political groups ensure control over both decision-making stages in the institution. As discussed up until now and based on the findings of previous studies, it is clear that, apart from an ex-ante control, political groups have few tools and resources available to discipline their members and exert strong influence. Consequently, if findings offer proof of a replication of committee voting results in plenary, then this can only be explained by the existence of a significant rapporteur input at both stages, verified by fewer amendments to reports in plenary, as well as by the impact of committee members expertise on their colleagues preferences and on the group line.

This section of the chapter has summarised the main hypothesis of the thesis and presented the sub-hypotheses that will be tested in the three empirical chapters. The

next section will look at the data used in this study and the findings that it might lead to.

### **3.3 Committees vs Plenary - Data, methods and research**

The previous section of the chapter has put forward the hypothesis and sub-hypotheses belonging to each chapter. They will be tested against data I collected over a period of one year, during EP7, from committee meetings, ALDE political group meetings and plenary sessions of the EP, together with interviews of political actors involved and the result of votes and number of amendments from committee and plenary. Therefore, this section will present the data collected, the methodology used and the research.

To begin with, I have gathered data on votes available on the EP website of the Legislative Observatory, from all the standing committees in the EP, including the two special committees that were active until July 2011. It contains the number of votes in favour, against and abstentions for each of the reports voted in committee during the period of September 2009 until July 2011. These results have been cross-referenced with those from the plenary votes, more precisely with the votes in favour, against and abstentions. In addition to this I have gathered the data on the number of amendments tabled in committee and in plenary to reports voted during that period. Also, specific proposals for legislation and debates on reports were analysed in a sample of five legislative committees (that deal with acts where the EU has extended competencies and the EP decides under the ordinary legislative procedure) and non-legislative committees. The monitoring of these reports was carried out during the



one-year fieldwork observation, starting with their initial stages and concluding with the final vote in the full chamber.

For this detailed analysis I have used the method of process tracing (Box-Steffensmeier, Brady and Collier, 2008: 703; Checkel, 2005), which fits in with the initial question of the study and tries to establish how committees influence the EP. Since an observation of the institution's activity requires tracing the causes that are behind the ability of committees to impact on EP decisions, process tracing is in this case, the method most suited to investigate the internal interactions in action. As Checkel stresses in a paper discussing this method, 'methodologically speaking, process tracing provides the how-we-come-to-know nuts and bolts for mechanism-based accounts of social change' (2005: 5) and this is what the thesis wishes to achieve in regards to understanding how decisions from committees can influence the opinion of the full chamber. Starting with a prior expectation that parliamentary committees can impact on the decision-making process in the institution, with the help of process tracing, this study looks to interactions and mechanisms that delineate the process, so as to finally establish that these are important actors influencing the EP, in certain cases more than political groups. In practice, this methodology has involved following a EP report from the inception phase in a parliamentary committee, to the vote in the committee up to the plenary debates and the final vote cast in the plenary session by all MEPs. Moreover, comparisons between the vote results, as well as between amendment numbers, in committee and plenary have also served as an alternative approach to testing the hypotheses and have supported the evidence which resulted from process tracing. The findings have all been analysed in

relation to the pre-floor (committee) and floor (plenary session) voting results and supported by structured interviews.

The political group meetings that were investigated to see how committee output influences a group line, were those of the ALDE group in the EP. The choice for the group was made based on findings from previous research (Hix, 2005) that this is one of the groups with the highest potential of becoming a coalition partner for the other two large groups: the EPP and the S&D. It plays a pivotal role in consolidating the opinion of the EP because, in order for the other two groups to be able to influence the final plenary vote, they have to accommodate the views of ALDE. Moreover, during the fieldwork I conducted, this was the group that has provided me with the opportunity to have a full insight in their internal procedures and an access to its meetings.

The choice of committees has been operated so as to ensure that a multitude of decisions and reports causing debates in the EP are covered. Since the more controversial and significant reports in terms of impact on EU legislation are discussed in legislative committees, the sample selected has focused on the activity of the following committees: the Committee on Budgets (BUDG), Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI), Committee on Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO), Committee on Regional Development (REGI). Apart from this, the activity of the Committee on Culture and Education (CULT), a non-legislative committee, has been monitored in order to allow for an account of the any existing differences between it and the others in the sample.

The time frame of the analysis has been limited to a period ranging from September 2009 until July 2011 for the roll-call data, with the fieldwork taking place from May 2010 until June 2011, in order to establish a pattern of representation and clearly mark the trends of variation in committee work, especially after the Lisbon Treaty provisions were introduced. Another reason for imposing this time limit is related to the high level of qualitative information that had to be collected as part of process tracing and to compliment the roll-call data. Moreover, the content of reports has had to be analysed, as well as that of the opinions, of the interventions and debates in these committees, together with the number of amendments put forward. The interviews with MEPs, staff and secretariat, which were part of the process tracing, inevitably demanded that the study be performed on events of immediate nature, so as to ensure the accuracy of the account recalled. The imperative of interviewing MEPs in a timeframe immediately following, or soon after, the debate in committee offers another explanation for the limited period covered by the study. Furthermore, the act of studying these interactions and decisions within a short-term remit from the events that they were part of, has allowed for an in-depth analysis into the interactions at play amongst the MEPs, their national delegations and their EP political groups. In addition to that, the study has also identified high-profile reports and has compared the debates and interactions around them with the rest of the subjects on the committee agenda at that time.

The analysis has been focused around testing whether committees mirror the decisions of the whole EP, whether there is a degree of specialisation in these committees and test if they only serve an informational role for the institution. In a first instance, the initial aim has been to establish if there are differences between the

vote in the committees and the vote in plenary, in order to test the level of representation that the former holds over the latter, as well as the committee level of specialisation. Bearing in mind that the voting in committee was not a roll call vote and therefore not registered or reported separately according to the party membership, unlike the plenary, this has consequently been analysed using proportions. The results will be presented at length in the next chapter, which analyses committee activity, its key actors and how they affect the transferral of a committee decision to plenary in view of its adoption.

Chapter 5 of the thesis will analyse the amendments tabled in committees as opposed to those submitted in plenary. This is due to the fact that the EP, once presented with a legislative proposal and after having established the committee that will analyse, draft a report and vote it, can still add amendments to a report in its plenary phase. These can be introduced by an MEP who is not a member of the relevant committee. The account of any instances where amendments are added at plenary stage reveals the representativeness of the assigned committee and the level of support that the plenary has for the committee's views.

An important test in this study is also constituted by the account of the voting patterns associated with the expression of views made by MEPs. This has been presented in detail in chapter 6 and has allowed for an investigation of the political group level of control over their MEPs. It has also unveiled the level of cohesiveness and typology of the issues that MEPs are most likely to be cohesive on.

All this in order to provide a clearer image of the organisation of parliamentary committees in the EP and establish whether the pattern of disagreement is more

present in the committees and whether the decision is taken at pre-legislative level and carried onwards to the floor.

### 3. 3.1 Evaluating the data

In order to test a part of the theory on the similarity of votes between committee and plenary, I have taken a sample of reports discussed in five of the EP committees: Committee on Budgets (BUDG), Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI), Committee on Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO), Committee on Regional Development (REGI) and the Committee on Culture and Education (CULT). These are only reports voted under the two main procedures of the EP: ordinary legislative procedure and the own-initiative procedure, where Parliament can prepare a non-legislative report to signal its view on a matter where it does not have competence. I have looked at the votes that were cast in the committee on the own-initiative and ordinary legislative procedure reports and, subsequently, at those cast in the plenary, in the current legislature. The reason for the choice of period is linked to the beginning of EP7, when the Lisbon Treaty came into force with enhanced powers for the Parliament. A second reason for this is related to the extended access that I have been granted in the course of the fieldwork, in order to document aspects related to the internal political group and committee works from the beginning of 2009.

Consequently, a mapping of the votes on the reports present on the agenda for the IMCO, REGI, ENVI, BUDG and CULT committees between September 2009 and

July 2011 has provided a body of evidence that points to a high level of similarity between the vote tally of a report in the pre-floor and floor stage.

In the case of IMCO, most reports seem to have followed in plenary the voting line established in committee (Table 3.1). Some reports stand out, like the report on *Textile names and related labelling of textile products*, which presents the highest number of abstentions and that might very well be explained by the high degree of technicality of the matter under discussion and the inability of smaller groups to put forward a position on this subject. For example, members of the European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR) had all decided to abstain. The perceived preference coherence model in this case seems to explain the similarity between the votes in the pre-floor and floor stages. European party group members appear to follow the position of their colleagues in the committee responsible when voting in the plenary session, since the 3 ECR members in IMCO and the 3 members of the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA) abstained in the final vote on the report in Committee, as did their groups in plenary.

The Consumer rights directive also illustrates a specific case. As mentioned before, this was a legislative proposal negotiated over a lengthy period of time and was subject to an early agreement.

**Table 3.1: Results of votes in the Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee (September 2009 – July 2011)**

<b>Report</b>	<b>Committee Yes</b>	<b>Proportion Yes</b>	<b>Committee No</b>	<b>Proportion No</b>	<b>Committee Abstention</b>	<b>Plenary Yes</b>	<b>Proportion Yes</b>	<b>Plenary No</b>	<b>Proportion No</b>	<b>Plenary Abstention</b>
Internal Market Scoreboard	22	59%	15	41%	0	530	86%	85	14%	3
Consumer protection	34	92%	0	0%	3					
SOLVIT	34	92%	2	5%	1					
Delivering a single market to consumers and citizens	32	91%	0	0%	3	578	93%	28	5%	16
New developments in public procurement	28	78%	0	0%	8					
EEA-Switzerland: internal market	32	94%	2	6%	0					
Completing the internal market for e-commerce	32	100%	0	0%	0					
Future of European standardisation	36	97%	0	0%	1					
Impact of advertising on consumer behaviour	30	91%	1	3%	2					
Implementation of the Services Directive 2006/123/EC	32	84%	1	3%	5					
Revision of the General Product Safety Directive and market surveillance	36	95%	0	0%	2	628	97%	11	2%	7

A Single Market for Enterprises and Growth	24	65%	0	0%	13	570	89%	44	7%	28
A Single Market for Europeans	21	57%	3	8%	13	600	89%	48	7%	27
Governance and Partnership in the Single Market	24	65%	1	3%	12	595	89%	61	9%	10
A more efficient and fairer retail market	32	91%	3	9%	0					
Universal service and the 112 emergency number	33	97%	0	0%	1					
Repealing of Council Directives regarding metrology	30	91%	3	9%	0	656	100%	0	0%	2
Textile names and related labelling of textile products	30	81%	1	3%	6	528	81%	18	3%	108
Late payment in commercial transactions (recast)	30	83%	0	0%	6	612	95%	12	2%	21
Second reading: Regulation laying down harmonised conditions for the marketing of construction products	36	97%	1	3%	0	390	98%	4	1%	6
Consumer rights	32	65%	16	33%	1	615	94%	16	2%	21
Textile fibre names and related labelling and marking of fibre composition	30	83%	2	6%	4	528	81%	18	3%	108
Enforcement of consumer protection laws	33	100%	0	0%	0					



The Regional Development Committee also orients the votes that are cast in the plenary (Table 3.2). Indeed, the only way we can say that with certainty is by attending the committee at the time of the votes. For example, in the case of the report on the *Eligibility of housing interventions in favour of marginalised communities*, the Europe of freedom and democracy Group (EFD) voted against the report in Committee and most of their colleagues in the plenary voted against it as well, or chose to abstain. Without mentioning the big parties who formed a majority on this vote, such as the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) (EPP), the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the EP (S&D), the Greens/EFA and who all voted according to the line set in the committee, we have to say that the smaller groups, like the ECR or the EFD were less cohesive. That could be explained by the fact that the members of the REGI committee who come from these parties are less organized and cohesive as a group in committee as well, influencing the manner in which their input and preferences are perceived by their colleagues in the rest of the party. Based on Ringe's (2010) perceived preference coherence model, in order for the European party group to vote cohesively on a report, the members of that same party in the specific committee must also be cohesive as a group. That is why, lack of coordination of party group members in a committee can account for a higher variation between the final results of votes on a report in committee and the final results of votes in the plenary. This also shows that, apart from Ringe's principle of perceived shared preferences, the pattern of vote in committee for the group members, which was in this case inconclusive and pointed towards the existence of diverging views amongst members, plays a role in anticipating the pattern of the final vote in the full chamber.

**Table 3.2: Results of votes in the Regional Development Committee (September 2009 – July 2011)**

<b>Report</b>	<b>Committee Yes</b>	<b>Proportion Yes</b>	<b>Committee No</b>	<b>Proportion No</b>	<b>Committee Abstention</b>	<b>Plenary Yes</b>	<b>Proportion Yes</b>	<b>Plenary No</b>	<b>Proportion No</b>	<b>Plenary Abstention</b>
Contribution of Cohesion policy to the achievement of Lisbon and the EU2020 objectives	40	95%	1	2%	1					
Implementation of the synergies of research and innovation earmarked Funds	39	95%	1	2%	1	559	91%	18	3%	36
Transparency in regional policy and its funding	34	92%	1	3%	2	629	95%	6	1%	26
European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and the role of macro-regions in cohesion policy	43	98%	1	2%	0					
Contribution of EU regional policy towards fighting the financial and economic crisis - Objective 2	42	95%	0	0%	2	609	91%	46	7%	14
Good governance with regards to the EU regional policy	35	100%	0	0%	0					
Achieving real territorial, social and economic cohesion within the EU	38	86%	5	11%	1	491	79%	117	19%	13
Objective 3: a challenge for territorial cooperation	45	98%	1	2%	0					
Report 2010 on the implementation of the cohesion policy programmes for 2007-2013	40	98%	1	2%	0					

Increased effectiveness between the ERDF and other structural funds	43	98%	1	2%	0					
European Urban Agenda and its Future in Cohesion Policy	36	95%	0	0%	2					
Commission's Fifth Cohesion Report and the strategy for post-2013 cohesion policy	31	70%	4	9%	9	506	77%	48	7%	101
Regulation on the ERDF as regards the eligibility of housing interventions	34	89%	3	8%	1	588	89%	57	9%	16
Regulation concerning general provisions on the ERDF, the ESF and the Cohesion Fund	36	88%	4	10%	1	519	82%	33	5%	83
Regulation on EU financial contributions to the International Fund for Ireland (2007-2010)	42	98%	0	0%	1	630	95%	9	1%	25

In the case of the ENVI Committee the situation varies across the vote, especially given the importance of some of the legislation under consideration (Table 3.3). Many of the reports listed in the table were voted in plenary with a simple show of hands procedure, a fact which indicates large consensus in the House, since no request for a roll-call vote was made and therefore no record of opposition was judged necessary. This points to a consensual decision and coheres with the high level of agreement in committee. The reports that were in second reading, like the *Recommendation for a second reading on the Council position at first reading for adopting a directive of the EP and of the Council on industrial emissions (integrated pollution prevention and control)*, by rapporteur Holger Krahmer, saw a lot more division in plenary and variation between the committee votes and the ones in the plenary, as well as a lot more plenary amendments tabled. This proves that a large number of amendments in plenary is indeed indicative of differences in voting in the two stages. Moreover, it indicates that there is a difference in voting patterns in first and second reading. However, reports such as the one on the *Proposal for a regulation of the EP and of the Council on the provision of food information to consumers*, by rapporteur Renate Sommer, have followed in the final vote the pattern set out by committee, even if they have had a large number of plenary amendments (351).

**Table 3.3: Results of votes in the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Committee (September 2009 – July 2011)**

<b>Report</b>	<b>Committee Yes</b>	<b>Proportion Yes</b>	<b>Committee No</b>	<b>Proportion No</b>	<b>Committee Abstention</b>	<b>Plenary Yes</b>	<b>Proportion Yes</b>	<b>Plenary No</b>	<b>Proportion No</b>	<b>Plenary Abstention</b>
Commission White Paper: 'Adapting to climate change: Towards a European framework for action'	49	91%	3	6%	2					
Action plan on Organ Donation and Transplantation (2009-2015)	58	98%	0	0%	1					
Action Against Cancer: European Partnership	56	100%	0	0%	0					
Management of bio-waste in the European Union	55	95%	3	5%	0					
A Community approach on the prevention of natural and man-made disasters	42	84%	6	12%	2					
Implementation of EU legislation for the conservation of biodiversity	55	100%	0	0%	0					

European initiative on Alzheimer's disease and other dementias	48	98%	0	0%	1	646	98%	6	1%	6
Reducing health inequalities in the EU	52	87%	1	2%	7	379	58%	228	35%	49
Evaluation of the management of H1N1 influenza in 2009-2010 in the EU	58	95%	2	3%	1					
Forest protection and information in the EU: preparing forests for climate change	53	90%	6	10%	0					
GDP and beyond – Measuring progress in a changing world	59	97%	1	2%	1					
EU legislation on Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (TSE) and related feed and food controls	56	98%	0	0%	1					
Options to move beyond 20% greenhouse gas emission reductions	44	75%	14	24%	1					
Animal health requirements applicable to the non-commercial movement of pet animals	35	97%	0	0%	1	618	97%	17	3%	5
Importation of certain live animals and their fresh meat	36	100%	0	0%	0	533	96%	9	2%	16
Standards of quality and safety of human organs intended for transplantation	53	98%	0	0%	1	643	96%	16	2%	8

Provision of food information to consumers	33	83%	6	15%	1	559	87%	54	8%	32
Second reading: industrial emissions (integrated pollution prevention and control) (recast)	40	70%	13	23%	4	402	62%	189	29%	54
Prevention of the entry into the legal supply chain of medicinal products which are falsified in relation to their identity, history or source	46	96%	0	0%	2	500	98%	12	2%	
Second reading: obligations of operators who place timber and timber products on the market	49	86%	6	11%	2	465	69%	22	3%	187
Second reading: novel foods	49	91%	2	4%	3	667	96%	16	2%	9
Community procedures for the authorisation and supervision of medicinal products for human and veterinary use and establishing a European Medicines Agency	52	100%	0	0%	0	559	97%	7	1%	12
Community code relating to medicinal products for human use	49	91%	0	0%	5	569	96%	8	1%	15
Restriction of the use of certain hazardous substances in electrical and electronic equipment (recast)	53	98%	0	0%	1	640	98%	3	0%	12
Waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) (recast)	51	93%	1	2%	3	580	91%	37	6%	22
Placing on the market and use of biocidal products	24	67%	3	8%	9	553	84%	20	3%	83

Setting emission performance standards for new light commercial vehicles	35	57%	25	41%	1	520	79%	122	19%	13
Information to the general public on medicinal products for human use subject to medical prescription	51	91%	2	4%	3	564	87%	41	6%	45
Community code relating to medicinal products for human use	46	92%	1	2%	3	558	85%	42	6%	53
Second reading: application of patients' rights in cross-border healthcare	47	94%	2	4%	1	297	52%	120	21%	152
European environmental economic accounts	40	83%	4	8%	4	616	92%	26	4%	24
Provisions for engines placed on the market under the flexibility scheme	51	88%	5	9%	2					
Provisions for tractors placed on the market under the flexibility scheme	45	80%	5	9%	6	402	64%	218	35%	11
Possibility for the Member States to restrict or prohibit the cultivation of GMOs in their territory	34	57%	10	17%	16					
Regulation on the provision of food information to consumers,	57	92%	4	6%	1	606	89%	46	7%	26
Fruit juices and certain similar products intended for human consumption	41	76%	9	17%	4					



For the BUDG and the CULT committee there is an important similarity of the results of votes between the two stages, especially in the case of the latter, where the presence of so many votes cast by the normal procedure - 'show of hands' - indicates a consensual approach and an agreement to the decision reached in the pre-legislative stage (Appendix 5.4 and Table 3.4). Nonetheless, it has to be pointed out that there is a possibility that the interest from MEPs is more limited in acts such as the Maria Badia I Cutchet *Report on key competences for a changing world: implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme*, particularly when it comes to policies where the EU has few or no direct competences.

**Table 3.4: Results of votes in the Culture and Education Committee (September 2009 – July 2011)**

<b>Report</b>	<b>Committee Yes</b>	<b>Proportion Yes</b>	<b>Committee No</b>	<b>Proportion No</b>	<b>Committee abstention</b>	<b>Plenary Yes</b>	<b>Proportion Yes</b>	<b>Plenary No</b>	<b>Proportion No</b>	<b>Plenary abstention</b>
Europeana - the next steps	30	100%	0	0%	0					
University-business dialogue	29	97%	1	3%	0					
An EU Strategy for Youth - Investing and Empowering	31	100%	0	0%	0					
Key competences for a changing world: implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme	26	90%	1	3%	2					
Journalism and new media - creating a public sphere in Europe	24	86%	3	11%	1					
Public service broadcasting in the digital era: the future of the dual system	19	76%	5	20%	1	522	86%	22	4%	62
Early Years Learning in the European Union	27	100%	0	0%	0	506	86%	27	5%	55
Cultural dimensions of the EU's external actions	26	100%	0	0%	0	519	88%	46	8%	25

Unlocking the potential of cultural and creative industries	26	93%	0	0%	2					
Youth on the Move: - a framework for improving Europe's education and training systems	27	93%	0	0%	2					
European Union action for the European Heritage Label	28	100%	0	0%	0	497	89%	18	3%	41

So far, from the test on the committee sample presented above, it becomes clear that there are strong similarities between committee and plenary votes, mirroring each other, while there are differences in the voting pattern depending on first and second reading. Moreover, the vote of the full chamber analysed from the perspective of committee voting results, indicates that MEPs take input from their expert colleagues when establishing their voting choice, but they also rely on the committee proceedings, the results of votes and the level of disagreement between group members at that stage. The last section of the chapter will analyse some of these findings and see how they inform our current image of EP committees.

### **3.4 Conclusions**

This chapter has put forward the main argument of the research that EP has undergone a process where contestation is contained and limited to committees, with the increase in its powers, and a strong committee system has emerged as result of this. Based on what is already known about EP committees, this research shows that these have come to influence the legislative process in the Parliament to a great extent, an aspect which will be illustrated in detail with the help of process tracing throughout the study.

The first section in the chapter has shown how committees have come to play a significant role in the EP, in parallel with the institution's increase in policy competences and out of a need to ensure legislative acts are debated and voted in time. The second section has looked at models used to analyse committees and has

presented the hypotheses that will be used to investigate committees and explain how they can exert influence on plenary decisions. Finally the third section of the chapter has presented the data and methods used by the research and looked at a sample of committees to check for similarities between the committee and plenary votes.

All of the above has indicated that the current activity of committees is a consequence of the increased EP powers and these appear to have become more sophisticated and more decisive in the role they play within the legislative process.

In conclusion, after analysing committee developments within a more powerful EP, as well as the committee studies, theoretical models used to analyse and their success in explaining the activity inside EP committees, this chapter posits that committee decisions impact on the political group activity and on the plenary results. While previous studies place political groups at the centre of the legislative process, this research shows that committees have also come to hold this place. This argument is supported by evidence issued from committee meetings and interactions between MEPs, political groups and committee members throughout passage of a report from draft phase to final decision in the full chamber. In order to stress the validity of this statement, the main hypothesis will be tested throughout the next chapters to show that the pattern of negotiation and agreement is usually reached in the pre-floor stages, either in committee, political group meeting or in rapporteur - shadow rapporteur meetings. This ultimately implies disagreement voiced mainly at committee level. Such findings break with those issued from an important body of research on the EP that has been focused too much on plenary session results, due to quantitative data gathered from roll-call votes, and has put less emphasis on how

committees impact the EP, partly excluding the pre-legislative stage debates, interactions and negotiations from the analysis of the decision-making process.

## **Chapter 4**

### **The Activity of the Parliamentary Committees and Principal Actors**

#### **Involved**

This chapter provides empirical evidence that committees are key internal actors in the EP, in certain instances to a greater extent than political groups or national party delegations. It analyses the work in committees, in particular that of rapporteurs, comparing its results to those of the work in the plenary when the Parliament as a whole votes on the final reports.

Committees in the EP have come into research focus over the past years partly as a consequence of the institutional changes, but also of the importance MEPs attach to the work they carry out there. From a general perspective, they appear to serve only an informational purpose, providing specialised knowledge to the legislature. Studies, such as those done by Whitaker (2011), Høyland (2006), McElroy (2006), Judge and Earnshaw (2010), Ringe (2010) and Benedetto (2005) on the internal activity and the decision making of the institution have tried to establish, by looking at different actors, how the output of committee work influences the legislative process in the Parliament. This has led to a better understanding of the EP's functioning and has emphasised the part played by some of these actors, such as the rapporteurs.

However, it has also raised additional questions regarding the functioning of the institution and the place that committees hold within it, stressing the need for a more in-depth account of the parliamentary committee activity.

The previous chapter has looked at theoretical aspects describing and explaining committees' place within the legislative process inside the EP. In light of the conclusions drawn there, the main argument underpinning this study can be summed up as follows: parliamentary committees play an essential part in the decision-making of this institution, irrespective of any other variables that could be involved at this stage, such as party or policy. Consequently, they are in a position to influence Parliament, which in turn leads to the final vote cast on a report in plenary being directly linked, and ultimately following, the result of votes in committee on that same report. In this respect, this study aims to contribute to a body of work trying to isolate, identify and present the mechanisms through which committee influence can be exerted in plenary. It is based on a core set of three chapters analysing the interactions, the pattern of decision-making and the result of votes in the parliamentary committees and in the plenary session. Each of these three test hypotheses on the interplay between committee and plenary in the EP in order to illustrate how decisions reached at one level – the parliamentary committee – are carried over to the next – the plenary session. The purpose of this analysis is to find an explanation for the significant overlap that exists between committee and plenary decisions on reports in the EP. Within this framework, the chapter focuses on committee workload and the role that different actors, like rapporteurs or group coordinators, play. Respectively chapters 5 and 6 look at the significance of amendments made to reports presented in the committee as opposed to those submitted in plenary during the legislative process and the manner in which group meetings manage to coordinate the work of MEPs and committees with the plenary sessions held every month (chapter 6).



EP committee activity has many different facets and those involve working on drafting reports on Commission proposals, structuring the EP's position on the EU policy perspectives, as well as holding the other two institutions that are part of the decision-making triangle (the European Commission and the Council) accountable for their policy programmes and initiatives. In all these instances various actors, in particular rapporteurs and group coordinators, play a major role in the daily work carried out in this institution. The activity such actors carry out in committees is an essential indication of the importance that the former have within the whole decision making process of the institution. Analysing their work can reveal not only the pattern of organising consensus and solving dissent in committees, but also the way in which the adoption of a decision at this stage can directly impact and ultimately shape the entire legislative process that a report follows inside this legislature. More precisely, this chapter argues that the influence that rapporteurs and group coordinators have upon a report debated in the parliamentary committees is also replicated in the plenary and that this extended influence constitutes the linkage mechanism that explains why results in EP committees pre-empt the final decision of the plenary.

Therefore, this chapter analyses, first of all, the role that rapporteurs play within the debates and negotiations on a report in committee and further on in the plenary and looks at how group coordinators bring their contribution at this stage. The main purpose is to identify the extent to which reports have similar results in committee and plenary and what part rapporteurs might play in achieving this outcome.

Moreover, it has to be established if there is sufficient evidence of any other factors that might account for the overlap between committee and plenary decisions instead of the activity of rapporteurs, the institutional makeup or the group coordinators.

Analysis for this chapter shall rely on fieldwork observations of debates in several committees carried out through process tracing (Checkel, 2005) and accompanied by a series of structured interviews with actors directly involved in these cases. This will then be complimented by a descriptive analysis of data I collected from the EP website and which consists of results of votes on reports in both committee and plenary.

To begin with, the chapter will look at the existing body of work involving parliamentary committees and how the main argument fits in with the findings. It will then go on to present the way in which discussions and negotiations are carried out in committee, aiming to identify how the interactions are then pursued in the plenary sessions.

#### **4.1 Parliamentary committee activity and rapporteurs**

The existing studies on parliamentary committees in the EP are either focused on the level of representation that these have of the legislature (Mamadouh and Raunio, 2003), on the place they occupy and the purpose they serve inside the institution (Whitaker, 2011), or on the amount of influence that party groups might hold over them (Whitaker, 2005). Furthermore, studies researching the role of rapporteurs in committees focus on their importance in representing the EP in the interinstitutional negotiations (Costello and Thomson, 2010), their ability to impact on these negotiations in the trilogue meetings (Yordanova, 2010), their nationality and thus their representativity of the Parliament as a whole (Kaeding, 2004) or on the

correspondence between their political affiliation and that of national parties in government represented in the Council (Høyland, 2006). The literature recognises that both parliamentary committees and rapporteurs are important factors within the make-up of the EP. However, it does so mostly by comparing the legislature's influence on legislative proposals with that of the other institutions – the European Commission and the Council. Indeed, such analysis can offer an image of the place Parliament has in the decision-making triangle but it leaves a gap in terms of understanding the activity inside the legislature and the processes that lead to the formulation and coordination of EP's position. That is why, this chapter analyses the procedures involved in drafting a report in the committees of the EP, in order to illustrate the role of rapporteurs and group coordinators within this process, as well as the impact they might have on the output from committee and on passing the achieved result through to the full session of the House.

So far, research on rapporteurs and their work in EP committees has centred around questions related to the representativity of the institution, the extent to which the parliamentary committees are illustrative of the Parliament as a whole. McElroy's (2006) findings point towards a high degree of representativity, as is the case with Mamadouh and Raunio (2003) but these results can also be explained by the distribution of committee assignments in the EP based on the size of the political groups, which is proportional to the number of MEPs belonging to each group. Consequently, from a political group perspective, each parliamentary committee mirrors the composition of the full EP. This factor can also account for correlations between the size of the party group and the number of rapporteurs these manage to secure, as found by Benedetto (2005). However, the same correlations cannot be

established in regards to the nationality of MEPs that obtain rapporteurships, as Hurka and Kaeding (2012) point out in an analysis of the rapporteurship assignments from 1994 to 2009. Their findings show a significant degree of under-representation of MEPs from the new Member States (Hurka and Kaeding, 2012). The reasons for this might be centred around the size and concentration of national delegations inside the largest party groups in the EP (such as the EPP, S&D and ALDE), knowing that a strong and cohesive national delegation affiliated to one of the main parties can play an important role in securing rapporteurships for their Members; but also around the idea of expertise of the MEPs selected.

While such findings provide more insight into the nature, characteristics and likelihood of an MEP obtaining a rapporteurship, they offer less information in regards to the influence they might have on the legislative process, more precisely, on the intra-institutional process.

As initially stated, the main argument underpinning this study places committees at the centre of the EP, being in a position to influence the entire legislature. Through aggregating opinions and solving dissent at this level, committees reach decisions that are then put forward and taken over by the plenary session in the final votes. Amongst factors influential within this process can also be counted the activity of the rapporteurs. This chapter, in fact, argues that they are instrumental, together with the group coordinators, in ensuring a clear transfer of the committee decision to the plenary stage. Therefore, studies such as those carried out by Costello and Thomson (2010) on the influence of rapporteurs on the EP's opinions can explain in more detail the processes at play.

Costello and Thomson (2010) look at the way in which rapporteurs in the EP can ‘influence policy outcomes’ (2010: 221), using the informational approach to analyse parliamentary committees. This approach looks at committees as an institutional tool meant to provide the plenary with specialised knowledge (Costello and Thomson, 2010: 220). On such basis, they conclude that ‘the delegation of committee tasks to rapporteurs gives these individuals the potential, albeit a constrained potential, to influence decision outcomes in their favour.’ (Costello and Thomson, 2010: 221)

They consider amendments submitted in committee and in plenary a source of constraint to the input that a rapporteur might have on the final position of the Parliament (Costello and Thomson, 2010: 235). Indeed, changes to the report may be introduced at either committee or plenary stage by other MEPs, political groups or parliamentary committees providing their opinion on the proposed text. However, at any point along this process, the MEP charged with drafting the report has different opportunities to seek consensus and aggregate views and even influence the outcome of the amendments submitted initially. He has the option to do so because the institution already has a series of informal processes in place which allow him to call for meetings (so-called shadow-rapporteur meetings) to prepare the report with his counterparts from the other political groups (shadow rapporteurs), but also to discuss possible amendments, to try and establish compromise amendments that fit with the line set up by him in the report and to convince others of the necessity to include or exclude certain changes to its final version. In practice, the rapporteur does not have to be constrained by modifications submitted to the draft of the report he prepares, as long as he aligns the views of his colleagues in committee and builds up consensus from an early stage. Such discussions start in committee with members assigned to

these and the basis for the EP's 'opinion' on a specific matter as expressed in the report is constructed and defined at this stage. Once a vote is passed in committee, the resulting report goes to plenary. Therefore, the rapporteur can be instrumental in ensuring that the agreement obtained at an early stage in committee is respected and followed by the entire plenary of the EP. From this, the hypothesis underlining this chapter can be derived:

*H 1: Starting with the decision reached in the parliamentary committee, the rapporteur influences the final text of a report throughout the entire process up to its adoption by the plenary.*

Existing research has recognised the influence of rapporteurs (Kaeding, 2004; Høyland, 2006; Benedetto, 2005; Costello and Thomson, 2010) and the place they hold within the decision-making process of the EP. Moreover, studies have highlighted their importance in the process of completing early agreements on legislative files under first reading, where EP rapporteurs are key negotiators in the legislative process with the other institutions (Reh *et al.*, 2011; Héritier and Reh, 2012) and where it has also been claimed that they have 'undermined the legislative role of the parliamentary committees' (Yordanova, 2013: 85). They are indeed part of the negotiating teams in trilogues and, together with the shadow rapporteurs and the Chair, have the considerable influence and the ability to impact on the final adoption of a proposal. In this framework, Yordanova argues that rapporteurs benefit from an asymmetry of information with the other committee members and 'leading the informal inter-institutional negotiations gives the rapporteur strong agenda-setting powers' (2013: 89). Such an approach, however, does not account for the existing

interactions taking place between the rapporteur and other committee members who do not take part in the trilogues but are consulted so that their preferences may be considered in view of the successful adoption of the agreement. Consequently, the current study goes further and analyses in detail the level of involvement of rapporteurs and the implications derived from this for the final result in the plenary. More precisely, while looking at the entire process a report follows from committee to plenary, it verifies whether the rapporteurs are the main agents that ensure the transfer of the parliamentary committee decision to the full session of the EP.

Since rapporteurs are key actors in the process that a text has to follow in order to become the common ‘opinion’ of the EP, it is to be expected that they are also in charge of securing plenary’s agreement on a committee decision. This would be a necessity for any MEP responsible for a report and wishing to see it pass at both legislative stages, without too many amendments, in a uniform and cohesive manner. However, if the rapporteur were to have a less significant role in pushing through a report in the EP, then we would expect for the coordination to originate from a different set of actors alongside different premises, actors such as the party groups. These would then have to be more involved in the drafting stages of the report, to frequently discuss reports from their initial phases onwards in order to find the party group position and align the views of all MEPs prior to the parliamentary committee and plenary vote. At the same time, they would have to impose measures of control to ensure that the line they set out is followed. Indeed, finding evidence of greater party involvement would be a pre-requisite to establishing that rapporteurs play a more limited role in aligning the committee and plenary final vote. Moreover, given the nature of the EP and that of its political groups, considerations related to their capacity, resources and overall interests have to be carried out in order to determine

the likelihood of such a control being exercised by them. This is due to the fact that the EP is recognised as being an institution with a high volume of legislative work and weak political groups, formed of MEPs with different constituency interests and agenda priorities depending on every Member State. Apart from that, they group a series of very heterogeneous views from different national parties, an aspect that makes it difficult at times to form a common position on a given policy. This in turn provides additional incentive for key actors, such as rapporteurs, to seek to fill-in the preference coherence gap for their group members and, at the same time, provides committees with an opportunity to impact on the final decision of the House. Under these circumstances, political groups have to dedicate time and resources in order to coordinate and streamline the activity in all parliamentary committees. Therefore, after setting the theory background provided by the existing studies and establishing the hypothesis, the following section of this chapter will focus on the background aspects related to committee work in the EP, on the manner in which rapporteurs can influence it, but also on how political groups organise to follow this activity. This last aspect, however, will be analysed in more detail in chapter 6, which looks at political groups and their impact in EP committees.

#### **4.2 The daily work of parliamentary committees of the EP**

The previous section has set the theoretical basis for the current chapter so as to identify actors who are instrumental in passing the decision reached in the parliamentary committee through to the plenary final vote. The next part of the



chapter will focus on describing the work these carry out and the activity that takes place in EP committees.

Several aspects distinguish committees in the EP from other legislatures, and amongst those is the highly technical nature of most issues they have to assess and provide an opinion on. Ever since the single market, the largest project of the EU, launched in 1992, the EP and its committees have pushed through a great number of proposals for legislation coming from the Commission. In the last two terms, 2004 to 2009 and 2009 onwards, the Parliament has done so mostly after the first reading of the proposals, in an effort to gain legitimacy from the increased legislative output it created. Over time, activity in parliamentary committees has increased and the plenary has had less opportunity and fewer resources to engage in full debates on reports coming from committees. In its stride to increase efficiency, the EP has had to pass more reports through the final legislative stages, the plenary session. In order to do this, EP has resorted more often to early agreements with the other institutions, to be able to make sure that a legislative proposal is completed in first reading.

Parliament figures on EP7 (2009-2014) show that 84% of all legislation during this term has been completed under first reading, with an average duration of 18 months per procedure<sup>7</sup>. In practice, this implies reaching a decision at an earlier stage before that of the final plenary session, so that the report containing the opinion of the EP on a proposal for legislation can be voted in a timely manner instead of being submitted to extensive discussions later on in the full House. As a senior official from the Secretariat of the EP pointed out<sup>8</sup>, the political groups chose to have a ~~plenary~~ dedicated to grand policy debates, which are more likely to raise the interest of the

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<sup>7</sup> Source: Conciliations and Codecision website  
[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/code/about/statistics\\_en.htm](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/code/about/statistics_en.htm)

<sup>8</sup> Interview with an official from the Plenary directorate of the EP, 7 December 2011.

press and that of voters, rather than technical discussions on environment or single market legislation for example. Consequently, members' activity in committees has become increasingly significant to the decision-making inside the institution and has had to be better organised. Such organisation came from the group coordinators, members of political groups assigned to a parliamentary committee who coordinate the activity of all the other members from their party group active in that same committee. Together with the rapporteurs (members responsible for drafting the report containing the view of the EP on a legislative proposal) they are essential figures in driving the committee workload further through their activity.

That is why, it is necessary to analyse in more detail the path taken by an EP "opinion" from committee stage to the final vote in the House and look at the influence exercised upon it by the main actors that can contribute to the alignment of the committee and plenary outcome of votes. Aside from investigating group coordinators and their meetings, this will help establish whether political groups are instrumental in controlling the output of committee or if this is not in fact the role of rapporteurs, seen as agents managing the work in committee and ensuring that the decision taken here is replicated in the plenary. Such an approach differs from the view taken so far in the existing studies on committees, such as Whitaker (2011), in that it does not only see rapporteurs as representatives and enforcers of the choices made by the political group they belong to, but also as agents of change themselves, shaping political group policy and the general EP position on a legislative or non-legislative matter. From this perspective, these studies do not generate a sufficiently in-depth image of the dynamics inside these committees and this is due to a various set of reasons: either they see EP committees as having an informational role to play within the EP decision-making process (McElroy, 2006), as actors central to the

legislature, but focusing less on their ability to influence the result of the final votes, or they are considered a preliminary stage in a process that an act follows before reaching the plenary sessions of the Parliament (Costello and Thomson, 2010). Nonetheless, if such analyses are based on an understanding of the decision-making processes in the institution as following, in many instances, a consensus-based approach, the need for an agent, such as the rapporteur, aggregating consensus in the EP and forming a common opinion based on the median position of the main political groups (the EPP, S&D and ALDE) can be easily justified. Starting from a body of fieldwork carried out in this institution over the course of one year, May 2010 to June 2011, in this section I will analyse some of these statements and shed more light on the processes and interactions that are present in these committees.

EP committees amend proposed legislation that is forwarded by the Commission and they provide a source of specialised knowledge on EU policies. MEPs see them as the most important part of their work and so do the Council and Commission. Based on data from the 2010 MEP Survey, 46% of the respondents considered the principal role of the EP to be that of legislating, a role where committees have a stronghold in the institution. Activity in committees allows MEPs to build up a profile and gain more visibility towards their electorate and the other institutions. The latter usually have delegates attending all committee sessions and reporting on the proceedings. These committees pass all legislation relating to the single market, thus creating the regulatory system for the EU economy, one of the largest in the world, and that implicitly affects the entire world economy. Their importance cannot be overlooked.

There is a total of 20 parliamentary committees that are active in the Parliament at present, as well as two sub committees (Human Rights Committee and Security and Defence Committee) and one special committee (CRIM - Organised crime, corruption and money laundering Committee). Most of these are standing committees, with the exception of the special committee set up in order to deal with recent policy issues, which has been preceded by two former special committees (CRIS - Financial, Economic and Social Crisis Committee and SURE – Policy Challenges Committee) set up as a consequence of the economic crisis and whose work has been completed at the end of July 2011 and June 2011 respectively. EP committees can count up to 76 MEPs, while the smallest ones group only 24 MEPs. They also count substitute members that have the possibility to attend committee meetings and in some cases even become shadow rapporteur, when the rapporteur is chosen from the ranks of another political group (Corbett, Jacobs and Shackleton, 2011: 117). According to Rule 186 ‘the composition of the committees shall, as far as possible, reflect the composition of Parliament’ (Rules of Procedure, 2012) and ‘the proportionality of the distribution of committee seats among political groups must not depart from the nearest appropriate whole number. If a group decides not to take seats on a committee, the seats in question will remain vacant and the committee will be reduced in size by the corresponding number. Exchange of seats between political groups is not allowed’ (Rule 186). Therefore, the allocation of committee assignments is proportionate to the size of the EP group, but it is also influenced by the size of the national delegation in the party group. National delegations in an EP political group are composed of all the MEPs from a political party in a Member State and the leader of the delegation is the one who has the power to distribute assignments of committee membership to its members and coordinate their activity at the European party group

level. They can speak for the delegation and constrain members to follow a specific national party line, if necessary. As it can be seen in Table 4.1, there are certain national delegations that have a strong presence throughout the main political groups in the EP. This is the case for the EPP German national delegation that has 42 MEPs, or the S&D German delegation, with 23 MEPs, or the ALDE British national delegation, counting 12 MEPs and sharing the role of largest national delegation in the ALDE group with the German national delegation. This concentration of MEPs from particular Member States across the main party groups in the Parliament can also be a factor in explaining the high numbers of rapporteurs from one or two countries, like Germany, France or Spain (Hurka and Kaeding, 2012). However, this matter will be analysed in more detail in the next section of the chapter when looking at the influence of the rapporteurs through a number of case studies.

Regarding the EP's political groups, it is also important to point out that the larger the party, the higher the number of available committee seats will be for MEPs interested in securing benefits for their constituents through their committee work. Nonetheless, judging from the high number of members and substitute members present for example in the Foreign Affairs Committee (79), which does not deal with the legislative issues where EP enjoys considerable power, it could be concluded that it is not only practical constituency preferences that influence committee choices of MEPs, but also the apparently prestigious nature of securing membership in a parliamentary committee dealing with world policy matters. All in all, it is difficult to establish if MEPs seek to secure assignments in committees based on preferences of their constituents. The explanation for this is the large number of cross-sector issues that committees deal with and the fact that they touch, at different levels, on all

interests that could be present in a constituency. If we are to take the example of a small maritime region in Spain, the interests of constituents in this area might be covered by the Fisheries committees, but also by the Regional Development Committee, in terms of structural funds, by the Agriculture and Rural Development committee, by the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Committee, or by the Transport and Tourism Committee, in an equal manner. Therefore, an MEP would be faced with a situation where he would have to make a decision on the committee membership most likely to serve the interests of his constituency, but also of his country, in order to ensure his re-election and his presence on the party lists. This would also be coupled with the constraints imposed by the existing assignments within the national delegation, as represented in the party group, as well as with the place that committees hold within the EP as a whole, whether or not they are

	<i>BE</i>	<i>BG</i>	<i>CZ</i>	<i>DK</i>	<i>DE</i>	<i>EE</i>	<i>IE</i>	<i>GR</i>	<i>ES</i>	<i>FR</i>	<i>IT</i>	<i>CY</i>	<i>LV</i>	<i>LT</i>	<i>LU</i>	<i>HU</i>	<i>MT</i>	<i>NL</i>	<i>AT</i>	<i>PL</i>	<i>PT</i>	<i>RO</i>	<i>SI</i>	<i>SK</i>	<i>FI</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>GB</i>
EPP	5	7	2	1	42	1	4	7	25	30	35	2	4	4	3	13	2	5	6	29	10	14	4	6	4	4	5
S&D	5	4	7	4	23	1	3	8	23	11	22	2	1	3	1	4	4	3	5	7	7	11	2	5	2	6	13
ALDE	5	5		3	12	3	4	1	2	6	6		1	2	1			6				5	2	1	4	4	12
Greens /EFA	4			2	14	1		1	2	14			1		1			3	2		1			2	2	4	5
ECR	1		9	1									1	1		1		1		11							26
EFD	1			1						1	10			2				1		4					1		10
GUE /NGL			4	1	8		1	2	1	5		2	1					2			4			1		1	
NI	1	2						3	1	3						3		5	6			3					6
Total	22	18	22	13	99	6	12	22	54	70	73	6	9	12	6	21	6	26	19	51	22	33	8	15	13	20	72

**Table 4.1: Political Groups Composition in the EP according to Member State (May 2012)**

committees mostly responsible for proposals of legislation – legislative committees – or non-legislative committees.

As far as political groups inside parliamentary committees are concerned, their influence may vary and this is due to several reasons, amongst which the lack of strong instruments for discipline once an MEP has received his assignment. Parties and groups have an ex-ante control through assignments but from there onwards their ability to control members' activity in committee is limited. However, there is an MEP designated to act as a whip on behalf of the political group and assume responsibilities as its main representative in committee, and that is the committee group coordinator. In some cases he can impose a level of discipline and ensure that group members in committee have a cohesive line of vote at this level. However, there are no direct consequences, such as penalties or sanctions, for an MEP who defects from the line set out by the party, such as expulsion from the committee, for example. Nonetheless, the committee group coordinator plays a key part in the entire activity of the committee, from the first stages a legislative act or an opinion requests that the parliamentary committee draft a report. As they are chosen to ensure the discipline and cohesion of MEPs from a political group in a specialised committee, they can align the group's position with the help of preparatory meetings organised before each committee session and can ensure that its members follow the same voting indications during the committee votes. They are also the ones that can decide which substitute member can receive shadow rapporteurship or can vote in the place of another member, holding a full assignment in committee. All in all, this is a key position and judged by MEPs as being very valuable, together with that of Chair or Vice-chair of



the committee or rapporteur<sup>9</sup>. The implications and consequences of the influence of these coordinators, or group ‘spokespersons’ (Corbett, Jacobs and Shackleton, 2011: 151) as they have been referred to, will also be analysed in chapter 6 from the perspective of their role and interactions inside the political group structure as a whole.

As part of the daily work, a coordinator attends the monthly coordinators’ meetings held behind closed doors, together with the committee secretariat and the Chair and Vice-Chairs of the committee. He has the ability to decide on the future calendar and committee agenda, the decisions that will be passed, the legislative, non-legislative or own-initiative reports that will be drafted in the coming months. Most importantly, the coordinator is the one who can obtain assignments on reports for the group members, the so-called rapporteurships. These are used to describe the quality of a rapporteur, who is in fact the MEP appointed by the responsible committee to elaborate, coordinate and present the report of the Parliament on a particular proposal from the Commission, an initiative of the EP or any other resolution. It is worth noting that, in the course of EP7, committees have notably increased the number of own-initiative reports they deal with. These do not have a legislative value but can signal the position of the EP to the other institutions on a particular subject (Hurka and Kaeding, 2012: 516). They first need the authorisation of the Conference of Presidents, the highest decision body in the EP, before the parliamentary committees can initiate them. The former is composed of the President of the EP and the chairmen of the political groups and it decides on long term policy, institutional strategy, but

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with the ALDE group coordinator from the Regional Development Committee, 23 June 2010.

also organisational matters, such as the ‘responsibilities and membership of committees and delegations’<sup>10</sup>.

Regarding the distribution of reports, this appears to differ depending on committee, but it is generally done using a points-based system, whereby each coordinator attending the meeting can bid for a report according to the point value initially awarded to it by the committee secretariat (Corbett, Jacobs and Shackleton, 2011: 158). Appendices 4.1 and 4.2 illustrate the way in which points are distributed inside a committee amongst different political groups and give an example of the agenda setting that is done by group coordinators. The distribution is done proportionally according to the number of MEPs each political group has. The tables present the value that is awarded to each legislative act, own-initiative report or opinion dealt with by the committee. This evaluation is usually being performed in relation to the importance of a legislative proposal that is submitted to the committee. The group coordinators decide together the value of a report (Corbett, Jacobs, Shackleton, 2011: 158). For example, rapporteurships on legislative opinions, which hold less significance in terms of the impact they have on the position of the EP as a whole compared to that of a full report, “cost” one point, while the non-legislative opinions “cost” 0.5 points (See Appendices 4.1 and 4.2). To what concerns high-profile legislative packages, the points awarded to these can vary according to the number of “bidders” that wish to fight for them, going up to a maximum of five points (Corbett, Jacobs and Shackleton, 2011: 158), but there are also instances where co-rapporteurships might be established between the largest political groups in the committee, as it was the case with the Report on the proposal for a regulation laying

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<sup>10</sup>Rule 24, Rules of Procedure of the EP, 2012. Source: [www.europarl.europa.eu](http://www.europarl.europa.eu).

down common provisions on the General Regulation.<sup>11</sup> Observations carried out in the course of fieldwork in the Regional Development Committee,<sup>12</sup> during a coordinators meeting that had to decide which group will be awarded rapporteurship of the abovementioned report, revealed that the group coordinators from the main political groups, the EPP and the S&D reached an agreement to receive the co-rapporteurship on this legislative act. In this way, they were counting on ensuring cross-party support for the report, but also on raising the “cost” of this rapporteurship for other smaller groups and diminishing their own “points’ expenses” by having to use fewer points than for a full rapporteurship. In the course of the meeting, the Chair of the committee, EPP Polish MEP and former Commissioner in the 2004-2009 term, Danuta Hubner, informed the group coordinators that co-rapporteurships were treated as exceptions and as such they had to be officially validated by the Conference of Presidents in order for them to be applied. In the end, the co-rapporteurship was accepted and the group coordinators of the largest political groups in committee, Dutch MEP Lambert van Nistelrooij - EPP coordinator - and German MEP Constanze Angela Krehl - S&D coordinator - were named co-rapporteurs on this particular report. This case illustrates how consensual rapporteurship decisions can be seemingly easily reached in committees and these do not have to follow the normal cross-party ideological divide. There is, however, political calculation involved here since both rapporteurs would be actively pursuing a common line across the House

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<sup>11</sup>The General Regulation referred to here was covered by the EP in the Report on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund covered by the Common Strategic Framework and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006. The draft report dating from the 14 May 2012 is available on the EP website, at the following address: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/regi/draft-reports.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Fieldwork observation made in the Regional Development Committee’s group coordinators’ meeting of 9 May 2011.

and would be able to rally the support of their group colleagues at the time of the final vote in plenary.

Furthermore, coming back to the “costs” associated with different acts and procedures dealt with by committees, according to the observations from the group coordinators’ meetings, within the frame of the bargaining procedure, obtaining a *rapporteurship* on an opinion will “cost” the group less than a legislative proposal. In such circumstances, the coordinator is called upon to make the most of the points received for the first two and a half years of the EP term and to try and give the group more prominence in committee by obtaining as many significant reports as possible. The number of points allocated to each group being proportionate to its size would, in certain cases, allow for the main group in the Parliament, such as the EPP for example, to obtain all important dossiers within that committee for a given period of time (see the number of points allocated to each political group as listed in Appendices 4.1 and 4.2). However, fieldwork observations of the coordinators meetings together with the abovementioned case of the General Regulation Report, reveal that in most cases a policy of consensus and negotiation is applied, where the group coordinator from a larger political group works in agreement with the others and tries to distribute dossiers in a balanced manner. Such a practice allows smaller groups, who otherwise would be left out, to also bid successfully for more relevant reports. Moreover, in some cases there are reports or opinions that may sometimes be worth zero points, such as the ‘The European Schools’ system in 2009’ that is listed in Appendix 4.1 with zero points. This allows group coordinators from smaller groups, such as the European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR) or the Confederal

Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) for example, to obtain rapporteurships as well as some added visibility for their members.

Nonetheless, as mentioned before, fieldwork observations show that there are different practices for allocating rapporteurships in EP committees and not all of them are based on this system of bidding points. Some of the appointments are simply done consensually, without any bidding taking place, since an MEP in the committee might be judged as a specialist on the technical matter approached in the report (Corbett, Jacobs and Shackleton, 2011:158); while some of them look at assigning, especially on essential pieces of legislation, MEPs with a high political profile and expertise on the issue.

In addition to the post of rapporteur, each of the group members that are part of the committee can receive from the coordinator the assignment of being shadow rapporteur of a dossier when the group did not manage to secure a rapporteur on the given file (Corbett, Jacobs, Shackleton, 2011: 159). This position offers them the opportunity to coordinate the common line of group members in committee on a specific topic and represent their technical and political views during meetings with the main rapporteur and other group shadows. These are organised in the period of time leading up to the drafting and presentation of the final report. Such assignments can hold a lot of value for MEPs who are part of smaller political groups and have fewer points, as a result of that, and fewer opportunities allowing them to obtain rapporteurships. Even for a group like ALDE, a key actor in the coalition formation partnership inside the EP, but relatively small in size compared to the other two main parties, as can be seen in Table 4.1, and thus with fewer points to make use of, the practice of using shadow rapporteurships is instrumental in ensuring that MEPs from

this group influence the outcome of a report in committee, in spite of not being able to secure rapporteurship. Observations from the ALDE group obtained during fieldwork in the EP, revealed that members in a committee consider these appointments as a means to gain a higher level of specialisation on a particular topic and be recognised as experts by their party colleagues serving on that same committee. Moreover, as it will be explained in more detail in chapter 6, the shadow rapporteurs also intervene in group meetings before the plenary debate to summarise the report, the main issues covered by it and the possible divergent lines that might appear, and to ultimately give voting instructions if necessary. This is how they are able to gain more visibility inside their political group and even have their expertise recognised with time.

Therefore, the prerogative of a group coordinator to distribute rapporteurships and shadow rapporteurships to his members signals the decisive role they play. It also highlights the fact that political groups have limited influence over the decisions these coordinators take in committee. So far, fieldwork observations from committee meetings, meetings with committee members from the ALDE political group, as well as group meetings, have not indicated any control or follow-up on committee decisions being exercised by the group in respect to its coordinators. On the contrary, debates during group meetings before the plenary revealed that the group coordinators, rapporteurs or shadow rapporteurs were the ones guiding the group position based on the committee agreement.

In addition to this, an example taken from fieldwork observation illustrates in more detail the role of group coordinators. For a high profile report<sup>13</sup> in the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Committee, the group coordinator who secured the rapporteurship in the coordinators' meeting decided to go through a rapporteur nomination procedure for his committee group colleagues. This involved several high profile and technically specialised members sending letters of intent and participating in a screening similar to a job interview in view of obtaining the rapporteurship.<sup>14</sup> In spite of some MEPs challenging the results of this rapporteur selection procedure, they had no alternative but to accept to decision of the group coordinator. This is an edifying example of how group coordinators align views of committee members from the group. Nonetheless, they are not the only ones influencing decisions at this stage. The rapporteurs, who are in charge of drafting the report detailing the Parliament's view on a proposal for legislation or on a policy development, also play an important part. While both are in some way meant to represent, through their work, the group they belong to, as it can be seen from the cases presented so far, they often have a high level of specialised knowledge and access to information. Consequently, this allows them to form and delineate the position of their party group on a particular subject. One explanation for that could be the level of technicality of legislative acts that EP has to deal with, especially in areas such as the development and harmonisation of the single market or environment, food safety and consumer protection. Moreover, while the group coordinator has a pivotal role during different stages of activity in the parliamentary committees, the rapporteurs remain those who

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<sup>13</sup>This was the report on the proposal for a regulation of the EP and of the Council amending Regulation (EC) No 648/2004 as regards the use of phosphates and other phosphorus compounds in household laundry detergents. It was voted on 24 June 2011, in first reading, in the EP plenary. Source: [www.europarl.europa.eu](http://www.europarl.europa.eu)

<sup>14</sup>Interview with an MEP, member in the ENVI Committee, 26 October 2010.

guarantee the smooth transition of an act through the House, from committee to plenary, as will be illustrated in one of the sections of this chapter.

So far, it can be concluded that the process through which a proposal is analysed in committee is complex and may be influenced by a variety of different actors at each stage. First of all, the Conference of Presidents of the EP which decides on the committee that will have to analyse the proposal, what is also referred to as the “lead committee” (Corbett, Jacobs and Shackleton, 2011: 153); secondly, the committee secretariat who plays a part in the drafting of the report analysing the legislation, the initial considerations and the legal basis justifying it. Thirdly, group coordinators who bid for the proposal and advance the members with qualifications most appropriate for dealing with such a report, or those who are recognised as experts in the field. Fourthly, the rapporteur who, depending on the degree of specialisation he has acquired and the reputation he enjoys amongst his colleagues in committee, must be able to build consensus and integrate the views of most parties in the final text of the report. The shadow rapporteurs, MEPs and lobby groups also play a part in the entire process (Marshall, 2010). The latter use a significant amount of resources even before a proposal reaches Parliament and they try to obtain here the last concessions that would allow them to steer the report’s conclusion and the provisions of the final legislative act towards their point of interest.<sup>15</sup>

All of these aspects and the cases presented so far, illustrate the manner in which the legislative process is conducted and point towards the existence of an alignment of views and a structured debate taking place in the pre-legislative stage, before any of

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with an interest group advisor following the Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee and the Industry Research and Energy Committee, 22 June 2010.



these reports reach the plenary. More precisely, they show that the existence of an all deciding plenary cannot be supported, given that most of the preliminary stages of any report in the EP appear to be constructed in a continuous set of interactions, negotiations and alignment of positions of groups, making it difficult to state that the decision-making process is expressed in the final vote of the House. This is the basis for the main argument of this entire study, which stresses the key role played by EP committees in forecasting and ultimately deciding the results of the votes in the plenary. Apart from being central to this legislature, committees also steer the decision through plenary. Three main factors are crucial to the parliamentary activity of these committees and to underpinning this argument. They are: the rapporteurs, the amendments submitted to reports in the parliamentary committee and in the plenary, and the political group negotiations on reports. These are all intertwined and play their part in each of the steps in the committee activity. The significance of amendments and that of political group negotiations will be analysed in greater detail in the next two chapters and that of rapporteurs in the following paragraphs.

MEPs designated as rapporteurs are very involved in committee negotiations and the scholarly literature has identified their important role from the beginning (Mamadouh and Raunio, 2003; Kaeding, 2004; Kreppel, 2004; Høyland, 2006; Benedetto, 2005; Costello and Thomson, 2010; Jensen and Winzen, 2011; Kaeding, 2012). They gather consensus and help establish the position of the House on a legislative act or a policy opinion. They carry out negotiations that are decisive for the swift passage of legislation through the EP. In addition to that, when a rapporteur is able to control the decision-making process very early in the pre-legislative stage, as we will see in the case studies from the next section of the chapter, the report benefits greatly and is

more likely to see a great majority vote in committee and a vote with few or no amendments in the plenary session. Equally important, they are directly involved in decision-making with the other institutions as part of the negotiating team on early agreements for legislative proposals in first reading and can steer negotiations.

Moving on in tracing the procedure of the report through committee, once a rapporteur has been nominated, the committee secretariat together with the MEP assigned begins drafting the text of the report. Depending on the circumstances, fieldwork observations have shown that, especially on own-initiative reports (where the EP decides to signal its position to the other institutions on a non-legislative matter), MEPs are often interested in drafting the content of the report and therefore work in close contact with the secretariat and the policy advisor of the group.<sup>16</sup>

However, it can also be that MEPs choose, especially on more legislative and highly technical acts<sup>17</sup>, to let the secretariat draft the report and contribute only to the explanatory statement accompanying it. Under such circumstances it can be more difficult for MEPs to have a direct influence on the first text that is submitted for debate in the parliamentary committee, during what is referred to as a first expression of views.<sup>18</sup> Another aspect that differs is the amount of negotiation done on the basis of a report and that also depends on the will and the interest of the rapporteur in creating consensus and ensuring that the draft report will receive a limited amount of

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<sup>16</sup>This was the case, for example, with the Regional Development Committee's own-initiative report on 'good governance with regards to the EU regional policy: procedures of assistance and control by the European Commission', as well as with the Culture and Education Committee's own-initiative report on 'unlocking the potential of cultural and creative industries'.

<sup>17</sup>This was the case with the Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee and the report on 'Consumer Rights Directive'.

<sup>18</sup>When first putting a report for debate in the parliamentary committee, the secretariat of the committee refers to it in the agenda meeting documents as a "first expression of views".

amendments, keeping the text to as short a form as possible. This will be illustrated in more detail in the case studies of the next section.

Furthermore, the rapporteur exerts his influence through several means: calling shadow-rapporteur meetings even before the discussions reach the amendment phase in committee (this can lead to a small number of amendments being tabled if all of the shadow rapporteurs' views can be accommodated in the draft version of the report); leading an articulated and well structured debate in the working group and political group meetings; maintaining a link with the shadow rapporteurs all throughout the process with the help of or having as intermediaries the policy advisors in charge (Corbett, Jacobs and Shackleton, 2011: 153).

Nonetheless, it is difficult to establish with accuracy if the strength of a *rapporteur* and his activity in committee has been the only factor that led to a clear result carried through to plenary. It could be the result of the will of political groups in the EP to speed up the decision-making process of a legislative proposal, or that the report was so accommodating of all existing views amongst different members that it received the same vote in the two legislative stages. Even when involved in negotiations for early agreements, rapporteurs are part of a team also formed of Chair or Vice-Chair and shadows. Consequently, the next section of the chapter will analyse a number of cases where sensitive reports have been passed through committee and the plenary session. In order to test if there are significant differences between the decision-making process followed in legislative and non-legislative committees, one of the cases from a legislative committee has been selected, such as the Consumer Rights Directive from the Internal Market, as well as one from a non-legislative committee,

such as the report on unlocking the potential of cultural and creative industries from the Culture and Education Committee, and one from a committee which often groups both legislative and non-legislative characteristics, like the report on the Commission Fifth Cohesion Report from the Regional Development Committee. This will also allow for a closer look at the role of rapporteurs and group coordinators through different stages of the legislative procedure in the EP.

### **4.3 Getting reports successfully through plenary – three case studies**

The previous section of the chapter has presented in detail the process followed by a report in the EP parliamentary committees and the main actors who can influence this process. Amongst these are the rapporteurs, whose activity shall be analysed with the help of three case studies. Different perspectives of two of these cases - that of the Commission's Fifth Cohesion Report and the strategy for post-2013 cohesion policy and the Cultural and creative industries report - will also be presented in the next two chapters that focus on amendments and political group meetings related to parliamentary committee work. The case studies have been selected from committees where I have followed closely, over the course of one year, the parliamentary work and these particular reports have been analysed using the method of process tracing from the first time they were assigned to the responsible committee to the moment they were voted in plenary. Most of the data relating to meetings, debates and negotiations on these reports comes from fieldwork observations in the EP, as well as from interviews with the MEPs involved, their staff, and the political group and committee staff. All three of these cases have to be significant due to the specific

nature of the intra-committee and intra-party group debate that they have caused among the ALDE group members from the committees concerned.

#### 4. 3.1 Consumer rights directive

While preparing the text of a report the rapporteur is responsible for taking a series of steps to facilitate negotiation and allow for consensus to be built inside the EP, as was the case with the EP's position on the Commission proposal for a directive on consumer rights<sup>19</sup> discussed in the Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee. The designated lead rapporteur was Andreas Schwab, German MEP from the European People's Party (EPP) group. The Legal Affairs committee also served as associated committee for this report, having Diana Wallis, British MEP from the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), as rapporteur for the opinion. Since this proposal fell under the jurisdiction of several committees, the Conference of Presidents, acting on a recommendation from the Conference of Committee Chairs, decided which committees would be involved in the procedure (Rule 50 of the EP Rules of Procedure, 2012). As a result, one was designated lead committee - the Internal Market committee - while the associated committee had to provide an opinion (Rule 188). The consumer rights directive was also subject to an early agreement between institutions, which led to its conclusion under first reading after more than two years of debate. This brings additional relevance to the study of this case for the purpose of analysing a rapporteur's influence and that of the committee on the

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<sup>19</sup>Directive 2011/83/EU of the EP and of the Council of 25 October 2011 on consumer rights, amending Council Directive 93/13/EEC and Directive 1999/44/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council and repealing Council Directive 85/577/EEC and Directive 97/7/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, 25 October 2011.

adoption of an act as an early agreement. Early agreements have become increasingly common in recent years (Reh *et al.*, 2011, Héritier and Reh, 2012; de Ruiter and Neuhold, 2012; Reh, 2014).

From the beginning this report was considered by MEPs to be a high profile one, as one interest group representative pointed out.<sup>20</sup> In his view, MEPs who were not members of the Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee, the lead committee, did not understand the purpose of the proposed Directive: to regroup four separate existing Directives, touching on different aspects related to consumer rights, under one single legislative text. Consequently, the proposed act received a significant amount of amendments from all MEPs wanting to modify the initial text, either due to interest group lobbying, or because of important constituents' interests, or simply to put their contribution forward on what they deemed to be an important piece of legislation. As a result, 1600 amendments were initially tabled in committee and the rapporteur had to find compromise with different amendment authors so as to limit the number of modifications brought to the text; but also to form a median line that could be voted in the parliamentary committee with the compromise amendments. In such cases amendments on the same paragraphs are redrafted into a compromise amendment with a view to sum up most changes requested by authors based on the rapporteur and shadow rapporteurs' preferences and those of committee members, as expressed during meetings. The entire text was amended, discussed and debated throughout 2010 and voted in plenary, first time in March and then in June 2011. The first vote concerned amendments put forward by committee and the second one, usually the final vote, sanctioned the legislative resolution. Such practice of

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<sup>20</sup>Interview with an interest group representative following the Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee, 16 March 2011.

postponing the final vote after deciding on amendments is meant to give EP negotiators a basis to start building compromise on with the other institutions. Because Parliament took a different approach, to limit the scope of the proposal foreseen by the Commission and yet not as conservative as that of the Council, the rapporteur, shadow rapporteurs and rapporteur for opinion together with Council, openly called for negotiations to continue on this file.<sup>21</sup> During the debate in March 2011, the Presidency in office representing Council remarked that:

"... tomorrow's vote on the proposed draft amendments will be so important. If the European Parliament decides in tomorrow's plenary sitting to refer the dossier back to the Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection, the Hungarian Presidency will endeavour to ensure with great commitment that an agreement is reached at first reading. We are prepared to make every effort necessary to this end. Naturally, a very great deal will depend on what kind of amendments Parliament proposes."<sup>22</sup>

Andreas Schwab could not limit any further the number of modifications brought to the proposal either and there were 265 amendments submitted to plenary. On some of these, the Commission expressed views of complete disagreement<sup>23</sup> but also support. It is important to note here that the referral was made specifically for the purpose of allowing more time to negotiate with the intention to conclude the file in first reading. So, following a request from the rapporteur, the report was referred back to committee under Rule 57, paragraph 2 of the Rules of Procedure, which stipulates that in the case where the Commission 'declares that it is not prepared to accept all the amendments adopted by the committee, then the committee may postpone the final vote'.

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<sup>21</sup>Consumer rights directive debate, 23 March 2011.

<sup>22</sup>Enikő Győri, President-in-Office of the Council, intervention in the EP debate on consumer rights directive, 23 March 2011.

<sup>23</sup>Viviane Reding speaking on behalf of the Commission stated in her speech to plenary her disagreement with amendment 14, foreseeing the obligation of 'distance traders to supply goods and deliver services in any other Member States'. She expressed support for amendment 122, 'which ensures that consumers will not be charged for sending back goods after a withdrawal if they are worth more than EUR 40'. (EP Consumer rights debate, 23 March 2011)

In an interview, a policy advisor in charge of following the files related to this proposal highlighted the existence of an extensive series of informal contacts and exchange of ideas. Prior to discussions in committee, the rapporteur organised meetings with MEPs from other political groups assigned to follow the proposal, the shadow rapporteurs, where he sought to reach a common agreement to limit the number of amendments submitted at committee stage.<sup>24</sup> At times, these would be organised weekly in order to allow for consensus to be constructed. As the policy advisor explained, Andreas Schwab attempted to bring together several text modifications into single compromise amendments, in order to have more impact on the final version of the text agreed by the committee, but also for practical reasons. Such informal processes, which are part of the legislative procedure of adopting an EP position, explain how the rapporteurs have the means to not only steer the decision reached in committee on a Commission proposal, but also pass it through the full session of Parliament. During these discussions, the actors involved, mainly shadow rapporteurs and the rapporteur go through a process of building a common line in negotiations with a view to passing the report, first through committee and then to plenary. Records of the debate on the 23 March 2011 are evidence of that and of the prevailing consensus. In addition to this, in the case of the consumer rights directive, MEPs wanted to adopt the legislative act in first reading and were ready to go into an early agreement, which can be interpreted as an added incentive to drive compromise and produce the expected output to render Parliament more efficient in the eyes of its citizens and of the other European institutions involved - the Council and Commission. The high number of acts voted in the Parliament under first reading in

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<sup>24</sup> Interview with an MEP political advisor in charge of the Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee, 21 June 2011.



the past years points to a clear trend<sup>25</sup> that has become more prevalent during EP7, since 2009. It can be argued that going into negotiations under early agreement, with a restricted number of actors involved at this level, limits the impact a committee has on the adoption of the proposal, while increasing ‘the agenda-setting powers of the actors negotiating on behalf of the EP’ (Yordanova, 2013: 85). However, evidence from speeches in plenary during the abovementioned debate points to the existence of a committee line, a consensus which became part of the final compromise, a fact which does not exclude committee influence altogether. The key actors part of the negotiating team under early agreement (rapporteur, shadow rapporteurs, committee Chair) act on the basis of a decision reached in committee and which is contained in the amendments previously voted in plenary. Contrary to what is argued elsewhere, they do not ‘undermine the legislative role of committees’ (Yordanova, 2013: 85), but rather further it, since they are intrinsically linked to the decision-making process in committee during all phases of a report, including during the process of concluding early agreements. Moreover, the compromise in this case, once struck, was discussed in committee prior to being brought before the House for a final vote. This bears proof of the important role played by the rapporteur in securing the adoption of a committee decision in plenary, but also to the position occupied by committees within these negotiations. So instead of seeing the adoption of a consolidated text resulting from an early agreement as a significant modification of a committee report, I argue that it is another stage in the process of a committee passing a proposal through plenary. It is however important to note that the negotiation process in an early agreement is less transparent and, in spite of efforts made to keep all committee members up to speed

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<sup>25</sup>According to data available on the EP website, only in 2010, out of a total of 106 legislative procedures voted in plenary (excluding from this total the budgetary procedures, which fall under a different set of rules), 79 were passed in first reading in plenary. In regards to 2011, out of a total 103 (again, excluding budgetary procedures and other procedures), 82 were voted in first reading. Source: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sed/statistics.do>

with developments, this can be judged as a more technocratic results-driven exercise rather than a political one.

Furthermore, looking at the group meetings during which the report was discussed before the vote in plenary, fieldwork observations carried out in the ALDE group revealed that committee members, together with the group coordinator and the shadow rapporteur were those who presented the political group with the conclusions reached on the proposal and the compromises agreed. Given the significant number of negotiations held prior to these stages, MEPs involved were keen to secure the backing of their colleagues for the line of consensus that had already been built.

Therefore, this illustrates a case where there was less ex-ante control exercised by the group and more of a prevailing perception from MEPs in the group that colleagues involved in the negotiations represented their preferences and had sufficient technical expertise to that purpose. Such findings can be explained by the process of ‘perceived preference coherence’, as defined by Ringe (2010) to account for the increased group cohesion in this situation and, more generally, in the EP as a whole. Nonetheless, the high degree of technicality of the report can also account for MEPs’ decision to follow the line established by their colleagues in committee and entrust them with delineating the group’s position.

Finally, the report first reached plenary with 210 amendments resulted from committee debates. Out of those 210, 203 were adopted by plenary, while political groups submitted only 14 separate amendments at this stage. As a result, the majority of committee amendments were adopted in plenary without roll-call vote, by simple show of hands, a fact which points to an uncontroversial consensual vote. On this

basis the early agreement could be reached and voted in plenary with a significant majority<sup>26</sup>. Similarly, the result of the final vote was cast with a large majority in favour of the report – 615 in favour, 16 against and 21 abstentions – a more consensual vote than in committee (22 in favour, 16 against and 1 abstention), where the Socialists and the Greens voted against the report. The results indicate that, in this case, divisions were solved in committee. Despite the early agreement, the divisions did not resurface before the final vote. The outcome supports the main argument which places committees in the first line of EP decision-making process, defining them as a space where divisions can be settled before plenary. Moreover, the initial hypothesis stressing the important role played by rapporteurs in this process finds sufficient evidence in the interactions and negotiations that were carried out by the rapporteur in this case throughout the entire process of passing this report in plenary.

#### 4. 3.2 The Commission Fifth Cohesion Report

The EP report on the Commission's Fifth Cohesion Report<sup>27</sup> is another instance where significant divisions present in the committee for regional development were solved before the plenary stage. In the case of this report, fieldwork observations were also carried out from the initial stages of the procedure.

Unlike the previous example of the consumer rights directive, this was an own-initiative resolution, of a non-legislative nature. Therefore, since the procedure does

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<sup>26</sup>Result of votes of 23 June 2011, Item 19. Source: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/plenary/en/minutes.html>

<sup>27</sup>Report on the Commission's Fifth Cohesion Report and the strategy for post-2013 cohesion policy, 2011/2035(INI), June 2011.

not result in a legislative act applicable to all Member States in the EU and thus requiring a broad consensus across political groups in the EP to legitimise its decision, the findings should indicate less coordination between the committee view and the results in plenary. The rapporteur, under these circumstances, would be expected to represent a more personal, committee-specific line, since this is an initiative that relies on a committee decision to draft a report that would be necessary from a policy perspective.

First discussions on this report were focused around the issue of creating the intermediate regions category as part of the cohesion policy after 2013. These would be regions with a GDP between 75% and 90% of the EU's GDP and those from countries such as Germany, United Kingdom, Spain, Italy, Belgium, would be affected by such provisions. The rapporteur on this report was Markus Pieper, German MEP from the biggest political group in Parliament, the EPP. In the initial stages of the process, Markus Pieper organised meetings with the shadow-rapporteurs to discuss the line that he would like the report to follow and the priority matters he would deal with. After a first presentation in committee, the members submitted a total of 569 amendments to the first text. Subsequently, the rapporteur chose to work together with the other shadows to ensure the high amount of amendments would be limited to fewer compromise amendments that had a coherent line and formed a common position to be voted at this stage. Finally, the report passed the first vote with 31 in favour, 4 against and 9 abstentions. From the evidence collected, it can be said here that the high number of modifications to the text corresponds to the initial expectations that the report would represent to a lesser extent the median of the preferences of members in committee and the rapporteur's opinion more specifically.

However, it would also be correct in this case to expect that the text would be amended even further in plenary. Again, this did not happen since the text resulting from committee had only ten amendments submitted in plenary. There are several explanations for this. The first one stems from the characteristics of the own-initiative report. According to Rule 48<sup>28</sup> regarding own-initiative reports, ‘Amendments to such motions for resolutions shall only be admissible for consideration in plenary if tabled by the rapporteur to take account of new information or by at least one-tenth of the Members of Parliament’. In practice, this entails a significant effort from MEPs who wish to introduce a modification to the text in plenary and require a mobilisation of the political group. This may explain the limited number of amendments submitted in plenary to own-initiative reports. Nonetheless, the rule also signals the significant role that is given to the rapporteur in such instances, since he is the only MEP who can table additional modifications to the text without any constraints being provided for this in the rules. The second explanation would be the work carried out by the rapporteur after the vote in committee, in order to include all the views of MEPs and ensure, through meetings and negotiations, the support of shadow-rapporteurs. For this particular report, Markus Pieper was indeed involved in extensive discussions before the plenary session. Fieldwork observations from the ALDE group meeting that looked at this report before the final vote revealed that the group shadow had regularly met with the rapporteur and other shadows and was interested in having the consensus accepted by all colleagues. A full account of this meeting will be presented in the sixth chapter, but it is important to note here that following the group debate, ALDE MEPs voted in plenary according to instructions from the shadow and group coordinator. The only exceptions were one Finnish MEP who voted against the report

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<sup>28</sup> The numbers of the Rules used in the thesis are those which were in effect in EP7.

and three others who chose to abstain. Finally, the report was passed in plenary with a large majority – 506 in favour, 48 votes against and 101 abstentions.

Consequently, in spite of expectations to find more division in the plenary vote on the own-initiative report, the current case illustrates not only the linking mechanisms ensured by the rapporteur to pass the final report through plenary, but also the high level of correlation between committee vote and the plenary one. It also proves that the members in committee are responsible for advancing an already defined common line and agreed consensus coming out of committee. In this instance, as in the previous case, the political group position was not imposed on the shadow-rapporteur, the group coordinator and committee members, but was rather forged by them based on negotiations carried out in the pre-legislative stage.

#### 4. 3.3 The report on unlocking the potential of cultural and creative industries

The third case in this chapter analyses another own-initiative report from the Culture and Education committee in the EP. The issues covered by this resolution were not considered politically sensitive, except for the provisions on intellectual property rights that referred to cultural and creative industries. The rapporteur, Marie Therese Sanchez-Schmid, French MEP from the EPP group, initiated discussions with the other shadow-rapporteurs as soon as the text was available in an attempt to verify if there was enough support in committee for her view on how the matter should be approached. This did not, however, prevent the report from receiving 182 amendments at this stage, which she tried to bring together into common amendments

of compromise between the main political groups in committee, the EPP, the S&D and ALDE. As a result, the text passed with a large majority in committee, 26 votes in favour and only 2 abstentions. However, in this particular case, even if the compromise in committee appeared to have been forged, the members in committee, in particular the shadow-rapporteur had to ensure that the other group colleagues follow it. The ALDE group, where most of the fieldwork observations were done, had divergent views in regards to intellectual property rights. The only way they could be aligned was through the intervention of an ALDE MEP, member in the Legal Affairs committee, who had prepared the committee opinion for this particular report. Her colleagues, including the shadow-rapporteur, unanimously accepted her expertise on intellectual property rights and technical knowledge of the subject. The decision was taken to follow the voting instructions based on the committee voting-list for the report. At the same time, the rapporteur Sanchez-Schmid, secured the swift passage of the report in plenary by consulting shadow-rapporteurs on the position they would take on last minute amendments tabled to the text in plenary. In spite of the fact that as rapporteur of an own-initiative report she had an advantageous position provided by the rules to refuse or accept modifications to the final text, she chose instead to seek consensus through consultation with the shadow rapporteurs from the other political groups until the last stages.<sup>29</sup> As a result, the report was voted through the show of hands procedure, mainly used when a large majority has been achieved and a broad consensus has been reached before the plenary, preventing political groups from requesting a roll-call vote.

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<sup>29</sup>Interview with MEP from the Culture and Education Committee, shadow-rapporteur on the report, 15 March 2011.

This case, together with the two previous ones, reveals the existing interactions that connect the decisions taken in committee on reports with those in plenary. They all provide evidence of a more intricate network of negotiations that are carried out on reports than previously thought, while they also highlight the significant role played by committee members in defining the position of a political group. More precisely, the findings indicate that, in these cases, the members in committee were those who informed the view of the political group, rather than the group imposing a policy line to their MEPs. Moreover, the evidence gathered from fieldwork observations highlights the role of the rapporteur as a key actor, instrumental not only in gathering consensus, but also in ensuring that committee decisions are followed in plenary. This is in accordance with the hypothesis of this chapter and it explains why there is an overlap between voting results in committee and in plenary.

The current section of the chapter has presented three case studies detailing the activity of rapporteurs in committees, as well as the negotiations and debates they organise in an effort to reach consensus at both legislative stages. So far, when looking at the results, there appears to be a clear coordination between the votes in committee and plenary. Therefore, the next section will verify if this is supported by data from committees.

#### **4.4 Analysis of data on committee and plenary votes**

The previous section of the chapter has tested the hypothesis and provided evidence, not only in support of the important role rapporteurs play in the decision-making



process, but also of the relevance of the decision reached by committees for the result of the final vote in the plenary. However, in order to complete the analysis, this section will present results from data on committee and plenary votes in order to establish if indeed the plenary of the full EP follows the decision reached in committee. This will be done using correlations between the votes in favour, against and abstentions cast in the parliamentary committees and those cast in the plenary on the same reports.

The dataset that has been used for this study relies on data gathered from the website of the EP. It records votes, over a period of time ranging from the beginning of EP7 – September 2009 – until July 2011 in all of the standing committees of the EP and in two of the special committees whose work was completed last year. The time frame for the data was chosen to account for the latest developments in Parliament, as well as for the increase in powers brought about by the Lisbon Treaty and the way in which these have affected committee activity. For every committee, the result of votes was recorded on each report based on data collected from the Legislative Observatory website<sup>30</sup> of the EP and then correlated with results of votes in plenary on the same report, also listed on this portal. For the purpose of this research, I have chosen to collect only data on reports drafted by committees, excepting opinions or recommendations, since the main part of the activity of EP committees is expressed through these reports. Moreover, unlike opinions drafted at the request of or to serve a report in a lead committee, they receive a final vote in plenary, which can then be correlated with the one cast in committee in order to see if there are any similarities between them. The choice operated on the sample of reports was also made in respect

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<sup>30</sup>Source: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil>

to the procedures that they cover. These are the ordinary legislative procedure, the budgetary procedure and the own-initiative procedure. This selection will allow for a comparison between the voting behaviour of committees depending on the nature of the procedure (the first two abovementioned procedures are legislative, while the last one is non-legislative), be it legislative or non-legislative. It will also give the opportunity to analyse whether committees that consider mainly legislative, and thus sometimes more technical texts, display an outlier's voting pattern compared to that of the plenary and in opposition to the non-legislative committees that receive fewer proposals for legislation. This aspect plays a significant part in answering one of the initial questions identified by this study when the sample of committees to be analysed through fieldwork observations was chosen: whether or not there are differences between legislative and non-legislative committees in relation to the voting behaviour on their reports in plenary. More precisely, considering the perceived preference coherence principle of MEPs, the data should reveal if MEPs perceive some committees as being more representative of the EP median line as opposed to others and thus they are more likely to follow their position. Furthermore, this would allow testing whether the decision reached by some committees is more often accepted and followed in plenary for matters relating to their highly specialised nature or the perception that MEPs have of their expertise.

The data are comprised of a total of 545 reports drafted in committee and voted on in plenary from September 2009 until July 2011. They were gathered from all standing committees, including the special committees who ended their activity in June 2011 and July 2011, respectively. However, due to the fact that a significant number of texts were voted in plenary with a simple show of hands and no record of the voting

results, a choice had to be operated to only use those where plenary voting had been done by roll-call vote and electronic vote and is available. This has led to a total of 266 to be observed from a more limited array of committees that could be analysed, since there was not sufficient relevance of the data resulted from votes in some committees due to the limited number of reports voted under roll-call. Moreover, correlations for the Petitions Committee, Financial Economic and Social Crisis Committee and the Policy Challenges Committee were only based on results from between two and five reports in total, since the rest were voted with a show of hands procedure. For this reason they cannot be judged sufficiently relevant to be considered for analysis here and have been left out of the table.

**Table 4.2: Correlations between the parliamentary committee votes and the plenary session final votes**

<b>Parliamentary Committee</b>	<b>Correlation of proportions plenary/committee yes</b>
Regional Development (REGI)	0.82
Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO)	0.51
Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI)	0.44
Culture and Education (CULT)	0.52
Foreign Affairs (AFET)	0.79
Development (DEVE)	0.29
International Trade (INTA)	0.27
Budgetary Control (CONT)	0.43
Economic and Monetary Affairs (ECON)	0.75
Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL)	0.75
Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE)	0.83
Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI)	0.79
Fisheries (PECH)	0.71
Legal Affairs (JURI)	0.79
Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE)	0.10
Constitutional Affairs (AFCO)	0.90
Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM)	0.60
Budgets (BUDG)	0.98

Nonetheless, the reports from the 18 remaining committees provide sufficient data. Table 4.2 displays the results of the correlation between the proportion of votes in favour cast in committee on a report and the same proportion of votes cast in plenary. The first significant aspect that can be observed from the correlations in the committees listed in the table below is the strong correlations that have resulted between the votes cast in committee and those in plenary. Many of the parliamentary committees display a correlation factor above 0.7, giving an indication of a level of influence resulting from committee, as this thesis argues. Still, such findings could also be explained by a strong discipline of political groups at both legislative stages, causing voting behaviour of MEPs to be similar. But the information resulted from fieldwork observations and interviews shows that this was not necessarily the case since there was not sufficient proof of political group control in the daily work of committees.

However, the result of the correlations is significant for the hypothesis of the chapter and of the study as a whole, because it reveals a clear overlap between the vote results at both stages and some variation between different committees, some legislative and some non-legislative. This is the case for the following committees: International Trade, Development, Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs and also for the Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee. All of these, apart from the Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Committee, have fewer legislative acts to consider. The lower correlation between their votes and the rest of the plenary cannot be explained by the technical nature of the texts, but rather by a possible specialisation of the committee, which renders it less representative of the EP median line. Also, another aspect that can be considered is the fact that these committees deal

more often with matters related to international policies, global affairs, under the consultation procedure, where MEPs are more likely to have an opinion and a set of preferences that are already established and do not require the same level of expertise and specialised knowledge as the others that are strictly related to EU policies do.

Nonetheless, the Civil Liberties Committee has a set of characteristics that differentiate it from the other ones in that it deals mainly with proposals for legislation in the area of freedom, security and justice. It legislates on technical judicial aspects, requiring a considerable amount of expertise. Thus the lower correlation of proportions compared to the rest of committees cannot be explained by the same factors that account for the variation in the others previously mentioned. Still, the nature of the EU policy that it covers might provide more insight. This is a policy whose acts, after the provisions introduced by the Lisbon Treaty, have been drafted under the ordinary legislative procedure. Before these changes, it belonged to an area of competencies held by the Council and therefore falling mainly under the control of Member States' governments. According to the EU Treaties, Parliament was only consulted on the matters decided by Council and in general there was less integration and harmonisation in the EU in this field. As a result of modifications brought about by the Lisbon Treaty, this committee now covers some issues where integration has not yet been fully achieved. MEPs are likely to take a less pro-integrationist stance in regards to matters they still consider as having national specificities and over which they display national preferences. However, a close look at the topics and debates on the reports where the plenary result of votes is different than the one in the committee does not support this explanation.

**Table 4.3: Sample of reports in the Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Committee (September 2009 – July 2011)**

<b>Report</b>	<b>Committee yes</b>	<b>Proportion Yes</b>	<b>Committee no</b>	<b>Proportion No</b>	<b>Committee abstention</b>	<b>Plenary yes</b>	<b>Proportion Yes</b>	<b>Plenary no</b>	<b>Proportion No</b>	<b>Plenary abstention</b>
Confidentiality of Europol information	40	95%	2	5%	0	31	5%	605	94%	7
Europol's relations with partners, including the exchange of personal data and classified information	39	95%	2	5%	0	13	2%	628	97%	9
List of third States and organisations with which Europol shall conclude agreements	42	95%	2	5%	0	17	3%	633	96%	7
Rules for Europol analysis work files	39	95%	2	5%	0	12	2%	640	97%	10
Setting up a European Crime Prevention Network (EUCPN) and repealing Decision 2001/427/JHA	41	95%	2	5%	0	10	2%	642	97%	9
Council framework decision on accreditation of forensic laboratory activities	38	95%	2	5%	0	9	1%	651	98%	7

What it shows is that the committee voted on a report deciding to reject a draft Council decision under the consultation procedure, while the plenary voted according to committee indications and rejected the proposal for a decision.

Between September 2009 and July 2011, six of the reports in this committee fall under this category and they are all drafted under the consultation procedure.

Amongst them were: the Report on the draft Council decision determining the list of third States and organisations with which Europol shall conclude agreements, the Report on the draft Council decision adopting the rules on the confidentiality of Europol information, the Report on the initiative of the Kingdom of Sweden and the Kingdom of Spain for adoption of a Council framework decision on accreditation of forensic laboratory activities and the Report on the draft Council decision adopting the implementing rules for Europol analysis work files. In all these reports the committee proposed the rejection of the draft Council decision and in all instances plenary followed its instructions and voted by a large majority against the draft Council decisions (see table 4.3). An important factor that contributed to these results was also the fact that the rapporteurs on most of the reports were MEPs whose expertise was recognised by their colleagues and who had a professional background related to justice and home affairs matters. This was the case with the Spanish MEP Diaz de Mera Garcia Consuegra from the EPP group, former Director-General of the Spanish Police. Furthermore, a rapporteur on two of the reports regarding Europol, Timothy Kirkhope, a British Conservative from the smaller, European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR) set up at the beginning of EP7, was able to secure a similar political result in regards to the draft Council decision as he did in committee. Such an instance where a rapporteur from a small political group on the right side of



the political spectrum in the EP, with an anti-integrationist stance, has managed to instrument the passing of a committee decision through plenary, illustrates that the influence of political groups in gathering consensus in these cases is not sufficient to account for the result and that rapporteurs are indeed key actors that are pivotal in the process that links up the committee decision to the plenary one. Had this not been the case, in order to account for such voting results based solely on the control and disciplining of the political groups, then it would be expected for rapporteurs to come from the largest political groups in the EP. Therefore, based on the analysis of the data, the information gathered from debates, fieldwork observations and interviews, it is evident that the decision in committee is adopted in most instances in plenary and that rapporteurs are instrumental in achieving this result. They control the final voting result on a report at an early stage in the legislative process and the influence of political groups is secondary here. The hypothesis of the chapter is verified and the findings provide more evidence in support of the main argument of this thesis, which places parliamentary committees in the EP in the front line of the decision-making process, guiding the position of the House.

#### **4.5 Conclusions**

This current chapter has presented the different aspects linked to the activity of the committees in the EP. It has explored the different stages linked to the adoption of a report in order to identify the key actors who could influence the results of votes both in committee and in plenary. Furthermore, it has presented several case studies from different committees in order to map the interactions, detail the negotiation process

and the debates that are part of the work on a report. It has analysed the data on votes on reports in all committees in order to test if there are significant correlations between the result of the plenary final vote and the committee one. By looking at legislative acts displaying a variation between the voting results at both stages, it investigated whether those are influenced by the procedure ruling the text, by the rapporteur's background or level of expertise, or by the political group of the rapporteur. This analysis was performed in order to establish if the hypothesis of the chapter can be verified and if so, to what extent it can contribute to the thesis.

From the evidence presented in the chapter through the case studies, it is clear that rapporteurs are central to the path that any act has to follow in the EP. This aspect is supported by findings that have already been detailed in the existing body of literature on this subject. However, this chapter builds on the previous knowledge and identifies rapporteurs as actors that can influence the opinion of the EP, as it is expressed in a report, at an early stage of the legislative process in the institution, including early agreement negotiations under first reading. They are instrumental in constructing consensus in the House, thus ensuring that committee-based decisions are followed by the full plenary session and they impact negotiations with the other institutions of the decision-making triangle. But in order to achieve this outcome, they rely on a complex, well organised and institutionalised process of interactions, negotiations and debates with actors from the other political groups - like the shadow rapporteurs – also from other institutions involved in the EU decision-making, as well as with other members in committee, other MEPs and representatives of interest groups and of the civil society. It is these interactions that provide evidence in support of the main argument of the thesis that committees influence the decisions reached by the EP and,

in the absence of strong political group incentives, they take centre stage. The informal negotiation processes and meetings set up in the EP lead towards this outcome and are put in place to settle divisions in a relatively smaller, more restricted and specialised setting that is formed by committees, in order to ultimately ‘give more time to the plenary to concentrate on grand policy and political debates. The political groups have the plenary that they have wanted and asked for.’<sup>31</sup>

The case study of the consumer rights directive has illustrated this aspect very clearly. The significant number of amendments coming from committee was almost entirely (203 out of 210) accepted by plenary. Also, even with a referral back to committee and the postponement of the final vote on the report to facilitate continuing negotiations under early agreement, the file was not rejected and the legislative proposal was voted under first reading, passing with a larger majority (615 votes in favour, 16 against and 21 abstentions) in plenary than in committee (22 votes in favour, 16 against and 1 abstention). The evidence in this case points towards a resolution of divisions before the plenary phase, inside the committee.

The case study of the report on the Commission Fifth Cohesion Report, investigated whether the type of procedure ruling the report, in this situation the own-initiative procedure, affects the process of decision-making. Findings have indicated that the role played by the rapporteur is just as important as in the case of the other procedure, while the process remains defined by the same set of interactions and negotiations. Moreover, they have also revealed that MEPs involved in a report (as shadow

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<sup>31</sup>Interview with senior official from the EP plenary services, 20 March 2012.

rapporteurs for example) play a pivotal part in delineating the political group's position and this is done on the basis of the agreement reached in committee. Finally, the case study of the Report on unlocking the potential of cultural and creative industries illustrates another aspect of how members in committee can inform the political group's view, whether they are directly involved in the report (being rapporteur or shadow-rapporteur) or they have only provided a specialised opinion in relation to it, as was the case here.

All of the cases have provided evidence of the central place the activity of the rapporteur has in the entire process linked to reaching consensus in committee. It is this activity that allows him to delineate the EP position in advance of the final vote. Moreover, fieldwork observations and interviews did not bring any substantive evidence in these three cases that could support the idea of a control exercised by the political group in committee. The quantitative analysis of the voting results in committee supports the main argument, in that it reveals a strong correlation between the parliamentary committee votes and the plenary ones. It also shows that the type of procedure of the report does not influence the strength of the correlation in most cases; nor does the party affiliation of the rapporteur or the political group size. In addition to that, findings point to some differences in the strength of the correlation amongst legislative and non-legislative committees. However, the large majority of committees, including those that were initially part of our sample, display a significant level of correlation.

To conclude, it can be said that the findings in the current chapter point towards a significant influence of committees and of rapporteurs. The latter are amongst the key

actors that make-up the link inside the decision-making process that allows for a committee decision to be replicated in the plenary.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Amendments - Indicators of Dynamics in EP Decision-Making**

#### **Process**

This chapter contributes to the main argument of the analysis and investigates one of the instruments indicating committee influence over the EP legislative process. Based on the approach presented in chapter 3, emphasising committee strength and the impact these have on decision-making in the institution, this chapter analyses amendments introduced, discussed and voted at committee and plenary level in the EP. It makes an observation and an assessment of existing correlations between the initial number of amendments tabled in committee, that of amendments tabled in plenary and the result of votes in plenary on a report. This is done with a view to establishing whether a link between amendment number and report success in plenary exists. The chapter investigates what amendment numbers can reveal about the legislative process in Parliament and identifies at which stage the decision on a report is reached. Unlike previous research on amendments (Kreppel, 1999) which has focused on determining the EP's influence on the Council and the Commission by establishing amendment success rate and their acceptance by these institutions, the current chapter analyses amendments tabled in committee and those submitted in plenary to establish whether conflict reaches plenary or is resolved in committee. In this context, the principal understanding is that if amendments in plenary are numerous then they indicate strong disagreement with the committee position, thus confirming the existence of an EP

decision-making process, which relies on the result of the plenary debate and final vote.

However, findings from data gathered on amendment numbers signal that there are consistently fewer amendments submitted in plenary than in committee, in spite of the fact that the approval and final vote on a legislative act take place in plenary. This fact underlines that different positions on a legislative act and existing disagreements are resolved in committee and later sanctioned in plenary. It adds to and confirms the main argument of the thesis by emphasising committees' important role in EP decision making and supports the argument that the EP has developed a strong system of committees to serve its desire for increased legislative output and efficiency.

In this framework, the first section of the chapter presents the contribution of amendment analysis to the entire thesis and section 2 introduces the existing studies on this subject. Section 3 presents the hypotheses of the chapter, which are then tested based on the evidence detailed in section 4. Section 5 examines the conclusions derived from the findings of the previous section.

### **5.1 Why amendments?**

This section introduces the purpose and aim of the chapter in the context of the study and the data analysed in chapters 4 and 6. It presents the findings from the other two chapters and illustrates how amendment number analysis can complement and add to the validity of the main argument.

Amendments are essential components of decision-making in any legislature and even more so in the EP. They are amongst the main tools an MEP has at his disposal to influence policy outcomes on legislative and non-legislative packages in Parliament. Amendments are an indicator of an MEP's activity,<sup>32</sup> involvement and willingness to contribute in a policy debate. As part of this study on committee influence over the EP legislative process, I have analysed, in the previous chapter, the activity of rapporteurs and how it secures the transferral of committee agreements and decisions to the final stage of the full chamber vote. Chapter 4 has illustrated the way in which a rapporteur with his expertise and negotiation impacts upon the process and leads to the transferral in plenary of a committee decision. It has analysed the role an MEP holding a rapporteurship (quality of being a rapporteur – an MEP in charge of an EP dossier) on a specific legislative or non-legislative proposal plays in carrying a report forward to plenary in the same format and with a similar vote ratio as set out in committee. Based on data from committee meetings, as well as results of votes in committee and plenary, findings in chapter 4 have revealed the essential input and participation of rapporteurs, which ensures a committee decision is carried forward and adopted by Parliament. In addition, chapter 6 investigates political group meetings as another instrument that contributes to the linking mechanism of committee decision with the final position adopted by Parliament on a report. Viewing group meetings as arenas where group policy positions are aggregated, allowing for group cohesion to be established, the findings in chapter 6 reveal that committee members are instrumental in transferring committee decisions to plenary, while also structuring and delineating the group line. It is committee members that

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<sup>32</sup>Interview with ALDE MEP assistant, 21 June 2011.



cause the group to internalise committee agreements and vote accordingly in the final vote of the full chamber. Therefore, on the basis of the theoretical aspects presented in chapter 3 and the findings from the empirical chapters, the main argument of this study maintains that committees influence the legislative process in the EP and agreements reached here are carried forward and approved by the full chamber in plenary sessions. Such influence points to the existence of a strong committee system, resulting from Parliament's continuous preoccupation with ensuring institutional legitimacy through increased legislative output. I argue that this strong committee system and developments in Parliament's powers and structure, following the Maastricht and Lisbon Treaty provisions, have rendered the EP somewhat depoliticised and technocratic. Focused on passing legislation and agenda-setting in relation to the other two institutions, the Council and the Commission, on concluding early agreements under first reading, Parliament has had to rely on committees and agreements obtained here to facilitate cohesive group voting in the plenary sessions.

In this context, amendments tabled in committee, as well as those submitted in plenary, are an indicator of a committee's ability to solve conflict and reach agreements that are later approved in plenary. The underlying assumption in this chapter is that the number of amendments a report receives in committee points to the level of dissent that is present at this stage and the extent to which it has been resolved before the final vote in plenary. More precisely, the chapter argues that a report's path through Parliament is discernable from committee stage based on the number of amendments tabled to the initial text. This implies that a report with a significant number of amendments in committee receives fewer amendments in plenary because the conflict has been resolved before the final vote and the agreement has been

reached. As mentioned previously, amendments are viewed as indicators of diverging policy and ideological views at both committee and plenary level. At committee stage they signal disagreement, while at plenary stage they indicate, through their limited or increased number compared to committee numbers, if an agreement has been reached in committee and the chamber's ability to follow it and take over the decision adopted here. Analysing modifications and discrepancies in committee amendment numbers as opposed to plenary ones contributes to a broader understanding of the EP decision-making process and helps establish whether the decision on a report has been reached in committee (a significant number of amendments have been integrated in the text that is submitted in plenary, thus policy and ideological differences have found a common denominator in committee) and then approved by the full chamber (fewer amendments are tabled at plenary level due to an acceptance of prior committee agreement).

However, amendments are not the only instruments that signal and explain the approval of a committee decision by plenary. Once an agreement has been consolidated in committee it is ensured adoption in plenary through the activity of the rapporteur, group coordinator and committee members and the alignment of political group views in group meetings that take place before a final vote in plenary. That is why this study investigates in the empirical chapters each of the three different channels that indicate and explain how committee decisions are carried forward by plenary: the rapporteurs and their activity (chapter 4), the amendment numbers in committee and plenary (chapter 5) and political group meetings (chapter 6). In each of these cases the interactions present in committee and plenary between rapporteurs,

group coordinators, committee members and colleague MEPs portray a more accurate view of the EP legislative process.

Consequently, in this chapter I investigate amendment numbers on reports in committee and plenary to establish what they can reveal about decision-making in the EP. To do so, I shall first present what is already known about EP amendments, as well as the procedural matters related to tabling amendments in committee and plenary. These aspects are then tested with the help of information gathered from amendment numbers to reports, as well as fieldwork observations from committee meetings, rapporteur and shadows meetings and semi-structured interviews with members of the political group staff, MEPs' staff and EP secretariat staff. The data on amendment numbers in this chapter are drawn from publicly available records that I have gathered from the EP website of the Legislative Observatory for reports that were discussed and voted during the period of September 2009 to July 2011. They consist of the number of amendments tabled to a report in committee and in plenary and are complemented by results of vote in committee and plenary. For a more accurate analysis of specific proposals for legislation and reports of a non-legislative nature where EP signals its position to the other institutions, such as the own-initiative reports, I have focused the analysis on a sample of committees, where I observed monthly committee meetings, as well as meetings linked to the daily activity of an MEP working inside them. These have been preparatory meetings of the committee group coordinator with other committee members, as well as political group meetings aligning group views before a plenary vote. The fieldwork observation has been carried over the course of one year – May 2010 to June 2011 – and it complements

the quantitative data in order to reveal interactions inside parliamentary committees that lead to adoption in plenary of a committee decision.

In the observed committees - Regional Development (REGI), Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO), Budgets (BUDG), Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) and Culture and Education (CULT) – roll-call data and committee votes have been analysed from September 2009 until July 2011. The sample has been selected to account for both legislative (Internal Market, Budgets and Environment committees) and mainly non-legislative committees, such as the Culture and Education Committee, although this also covers legislative files. The first category of committees normally works on proposals in policy areas where EU has extended competence and where EP decides under the ordinary legislative procedure. The second covers areas where competence resides solely with the Member States and, as such, the EP can at best make recommendations on policies and the way in which Member States should coordinate them. The Regional Development Committee is situated in-between these two categories, its work comprising both the analysis of full legislative proposals, as well as non-legislative decisions.

Therefore, based on a total of 169 reports discussed in the sampled committees with more than 12,000 amendments introduced in the pre-legislative stage and over 2,700 amendments tabled at plenary stage, this chapter investigates differences in amendment numbers in committee and plenary and within different parliamentary committees. Moreover, it focuses on reports debated under the ordinary legislative procedure (OLP – referred to as co-decision – COD – before the Lisbon Treaty provisions were introduced), the budgetary procedure and the own-initiative

procedure. The first two are legislative, although the budgetary procedure is significantly different from the ordinary legislative one and specific to budget proposals in the EP, and the last one is mostly of non-legislative nature. The focus on these different procedures allows for a comparison to be made in terms of amendment numbers and report development across the sampled committees, establishing if Parliament is more likely to seek consensus when dealing with legislative reports or when faced with non-legislative resolutions.

For the analysis of the data the chapter relies on calculating correlations between amendments tabled in committee and amendments tabled in plenary. The results are complemented by fieldwork observations from committee meetings analysed using the method of process-tracing (Box-Steffensmeier, Brady and Collier, 2008: 703; Checkel, 2005). Drawing on discrepancies in amendment numbers, this chapter identifies factors that structure the legislative and non-legislative workflow of a report between committee and plenary. These are all supported by fieldwork observations from committee meetings.

Following this presentation of the aim and the contribution of chapter 5 to this study, the next section will introduce the existing literature on amendments and the principal arguments it puts forward.

## **5.2 Amendments in committees and in plenary**

This section analyses the studies on amendments, their relevance for this chapter and study in general and whether they explain the data issued from the correlations of committee tabled amendments and plenary ones.

In recent years, a growing number of studies on the subject of EU institutions have focused on the EP as a result of provisions introduced by the latest Treaties in the organisation and the competencies of this body. Scholars have analysed the initial stages in the development of this institution (Rittberger, 2005), the activity of MEPs (Hix and Lord, 1997; Hix, 2005), the activity of EP groups (Kreppel, 2002) and the balance of influence between groups and national parties in the EP (Hix, Noury and Roland, 2007). Furthermore, they focused on the mechanisms that are part of decision-making in this institution, such as the activity of parliamentary committees (Kreppel, 1999; Settembri and Neuhold, 2009; Whitaker, 2005, 2011; Yoshinaka, McElroy and Bowler, 2010; Yordanova, 2010; Yordanova, 2013) or that of the EP plenary sessions (Proksch and Slapin, 2009).

However, the underlying argument in most of these studies relies on the centrality of political groups in the EP legislative process. Groups are the main factor that can explain the outcome of decision-making and decision taking in the Parliament.

Indeed, political groups play an important role in the EP and impact on the position of the institution. Still, there are other indicators that have an impact, namely the make-up and functioning of this institution, which influences the results and the interplay between actors inside it. Internal structures, rules, organised meetings and exchanges of views also play a very important role in the processes that constitute the activity in the EP, where parliamentary committees are central. How committees are structured

and carry out their activity impacts on the legislative output of Parliament. Moreover, since the main argument of the thesis implies that indications issued by committees constitute the basis for a final decision taken in the full chamber, it becomes necessary to investigate how committee decisions are shaped and thus if amendment numbers play a part in their development and structure.

Amendments are just one of the tools in this legislative process but they are an important component of decision-making in the EP. The legislative process consists of a number of stages that lead to a proposal or a resolution being adopted in plenary, but not before it is modified and adjusted to fit MEPs' policy preferences through amendments.

The literature on this subject has focused on the results and final adoption of a text with its amendments in the EP (Kreppel, 1999; Kreppel, 2002b). It has analysed EP success in passing its amendments by the other institutions of the decision-making triangle, the Commission and the Council, since all three have a part to play in the adoption of legislation at EU level. Less emphasis has been placed on aspects related to the drafting of reports, amendment tabling and the dynamic part of the decision process. In procedural terms, amendments constitute the end result of discussions on a proposal passed through Parliament and present the opinion of the institution on a Commission proposal. However, less is known about how they account for results of votes on reports in committee and plenary and what they can reveal about the internal activity of committees.

Amie Kreppel (1999) seeks to determine the extent to which Parliament, through its amendments, changes Commission proposals or simply clarifies their text. She also analyses the rate of approval of amendments by the other two institutional actors (Kreppel, 1999) and points out that, it is not sufficient to account for the number of EP adopted amendments by the other two institutions without investigating the type of proposed changes. Her overall analysis of approximately 500 amendments concludes that Parliament is a key legislative actor of the EU institutions, bringing substantial changes to legislative proposals not only of a technical but also of a political nature. However, Kreppel (1999) notes that such influence varies from case to case, an aspect that could be explained by the different policies covering the proposals or the degree of unity that Parliament portrays when voting these amendments (Kreppel, 1999: 534).

Kreppel later confirmed these initial findings in another research, focusing on a larger sample of 1,000 amendments (Kreppel, 2002b). In this second case she investigated whether different parliamentary procedures – co-decision or cooperation – constituted the sole explanation for the approval rate of an EP amendment by the other institutions or if there were other variables that could account for it. Her analysis revealed that ‘regardless of procedure, the EP is a significant actor in the legislative game of the EU’ (Kreppel, 2002b: 810), but also that ‘the absence of internal unity within the EP was shown to have a significant impact on eventual EP amendment success. A unified EP might signal that an issue is not controversial, or it may be representative of an EP that realizes that internal compromises and a united front are more likely to increase its influence vis-à-vis the other institutions’ (Kreppel, 2002b: 810).



Fieldwork observation of committee meetings in this study confirms these findings in the daily activity of Parliament, in the internal discussions and plenary debates.

Moreover, the EP's understanding of the necessity to portray strong internal political consensus vis-à-vis the other institutional actors, as Kreppel (2002b) indicates, constitutes an explanation for the limited variance that exists between the results of vote in committee and plenary, as presented in chapter 4. Indeed, political groups may not always be interested in tabling new amendments at the plenary final vote once a version of the report has already been debated and voted in the specialised committee, if this means jeopardising the agreements reached here. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that with the EP voting on a significant number of new legislation, the strong proportionality of vote results, as seen in chapter 4, is not only explained by EP's concern to portray a united front, but also by the willingness of the full chamber to approve decisions taken by committees.

Kreppel's findings offer an image of an active Parliament, aware of the part it plays in the legislative process and concerned with influencing the decisions of the other institutions in the early stages of the process. However, they do not offer many details regarding the activity that takes place internally before these amendments are adopted and come to represent EP's opinion on a Commission proposal. Moreover, if studies such as Burns and Carter (2009), Clift (2009) and Judge and Earnshaw (2010) analyse the track of a legislative proposal through Parliament, including the process of amending it, they also fail to present a full picture of how amendments impact on the EP internal decision-making, how they are generally regarded by MEPs, how they become negotiated and adopted in committee and how they come to be tabled or re-

tabled in plenary. Similarly, Yordanova (2010) analyses amendments tabled in committee and the impact agreements reached by EP with the Council have on them (Yordanova, 2010: 29). She argues that ‘it is not uncommon to see all the committee amendments rejected or lapsed in plenary and instead an alternative set of amendments adopted in its entirety’ (Yordanova, 2010: 29). Moreover, ‘where an early agreement has already been reached before the committee vote, the report proposed by the rapporteur is composed solely of amendments drawn from that agreement’ (Yordanova, 2013: 89). This leads in turn to a situation where ‘the legislative influence of committees is significantly diminished when an informal legislative agreement is reached with the Council of Ministers after the committee stage’ (2013: 107). Indeed, with the developments in the EP, where 85% of legislation was decided in first reading during EP7 (2009-2014),<sup>33</sup> the instances where the process reaches the trilogue phase and negotiation with the Council have become more common. However, when discussing amendments under early agreements it is important to note that the first set of amendments from committee voted in plenary constitutes a basis for negotiation, while the amendments containing the compromise with the Council, the alternative set Yordanova refers to, are in fact first accepted by committee before being tabled in plenary and replacing the initial committee amendments. This means that these are not competing amendments, but simply different outputs from committee debates and then from EP negotiations with Council in view of an early agreement. The EP Rules of Procedure, namely Rule 70 and Rule 70a, provide for a clear framework for negotiations with the other institutions and require the negotiating team to report to committee in order to ensure all members are informed on the matter. At the same time, there are interactions between the

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<sup>33</sup>EP Statistics from Conciliations and Codecision website: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/code/about/statistics\\_en.htm](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/code/about/statistics_en.htm). Source accessed May 2014.

negotiating team members and other MEPs to secure the adoption of the agreement, as they do not act in disregard of committee preferences and its opinion on a file. Therefore, it is clear that the committee is involved in its entirety and represented by the negotiating team throughout all stages in this process and it is difficult to argue, as a consequence, that its role is undermined. Furthermore, Yordanova's analysis focuses less on the process of amending texts in committee and its results in plenary, and more on the Parliament – Council early agreements and how amendments fit into this process. Like other studies, it investigates committee and plenary amendments in individual cases or in relation to what their acceptance can reveal about the EP's negotiation with the other institution, instead of analysing the place these amendments hold within the overall legislative process. Therefore, a more in-depth understanding on this topic is essential for an analysis of committee activity, since a significant part of the work here involves debating, compromising or voting off amendments to reports.

After a presentation of the existing studies that have analysed amendments in EP committees, as well as those tabled in plenary, the next section will illustrate the process of amending Commission proposals and resolutions in committees.

### **5.3 The Scope and reach of parliamentary amendments**

In order to analyse their impact, it is important to first establish how amendments are tabled in practice, both in committee and plenary. Therefore, this section will begin by mapping the process of drafting and amending reports in committee, providing

examples of reports discussed in the sampled committees. It will then formulate the hypotheses underpinning this chapter, drawing on data from these reports.

Initial fieldwork observations in committees<sup>34</sup> have revealed that the number of amendments on reports can also constitute an indicator of consensus in committee, the quality of negotiations and the level of group cohesion on a particular topic.

Amendments in the EP, as in any other legislature, consist of modifications brought to the text of a proposal and vary in importance according to their political or technical nature or the stage at which they are being analysed. In the case of a legislative proposal, the Parliament Rules of procedure allow for a first series of amendments to be introduced at committee stage. Here, all MEPs have the possibility to put forward their own suggestions so as to modify the initial proposal, even if they are or not members of the committee responsible for the policy covered by the proposal. Once debates are concluded, a committee vote is cast on the amendments and the report prepared by the rapporteur. The file is then referred to the final vote in plenary. At this point, another stage in the procedure intervenes, whereby amendments that have not passed the first vote in committee or additional separate amendments may be introduced by a political group, 40 MEPs or by 76 MEPs in the case of own-initiative reports. Such amendments are part of the analysis in this chapter because they help establish if their overall increase or decrease in number at the final legislative stage is an indication of conflict resolution at committee level rather than plenary level. This is an important factor in the study of committee activity because it points to an early agreement and a decision reached in committee, which, if it does not receive

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<sup>34</sup>Regional Development Committee meeting, 02 June 2010, 21 June 2010  
Culture and Education Committee meeting, 01 June 2010, 23 June 2010

significant or substantial amendments in plenary, is then carried forward by the full chamber and becomes the official EP position.

Observations from the fieldwork carried out in the sampled committees indicate that there is a broad understanding inside the Parliament of how important it is to show a united front when amending and voting decisive packages in plenary, as Kreppel (1999) suggested. For example, in a debate in plenary on 23 June 2011 on the Commission's Fifth Cohesion Report and the strategy for post-2013 cohesion policy, with rapporteur MEP Markus Pieper, the leaders of the main political groups, intervened in plenary and requested that a vote be cast on this particular report in order to make an important point to Council and show that the EP, with a large majority, did not agree with some of the provisions put forward in the next cohesion policy strategy.<sup>35</sup> Also motivated by this need to portray unity, MEPs, even at committee level, try to vote reports and amendments with large majorities when an important piece of legislation or a resolution is debated and they wish to send a strong signal to Council. The case of the Commission Fifth Cohesion Report has also been analysed the previous chapter and in chapter 6 and its findings confirm the significant decrease in numbers between committee amendments and plenary amendments (Appendix 5.2).

Moreover, in one of the interviews conducted, an advisor in charge of the Internal Market committee pointed out that, in many cases, when legislative packages are being discussed in both committee and plenary, the general consensus is to have the

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<sup>35</sup> Brussels plenary debate, 23 June 2011.

text and amendments adopted *en bloc* with significant majorities.<sup>36</sup> According to him, such a clear result may discourage Council from attempting to shift Parliament's view and cause the text to enter a second reading. This is confirmed by data in Appendix 5.1 detailing the result of votes in committee and plenary on the reports analysed. Here, it is clear that in most cases, especially in committees which hold legislative powers, such as Internal Market committee, the results of votes at both committee and plenary stages display significant majorities.

A similar result is confirmed in the case of the Environment Committee, with a particular mention that, for the result of votes of most texts in second reading the Parliament appears to be split: there are very large abstentions, as is the case for the *Recommendation for second reading on the application of patients' rights in cross-border healthcare*, having as rapporteur Françoise Grossetête, with 120 votes against, 152 abstentions and 297 votes in favour. This is in line with Yordanova (2010: 29) and exemplifies the discrepancies, not only in vote results, but also in amendment numbers in plenary between reports in first and second reading. However, for the time frame analysed in this study, there are clear indications that the majority of texts in Parliament are now voted in first reading.<sup>37</sup> This fact points out that voting under second reading has become an exception, explaining why there are also significant differences between committee and plenary results of votes and amendments in this legislative phase. Furthermore, such evidence emphasises the need to investigate more closely the data coming from committees, since they are the first actors to influence the legislative process in the EP.

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<sup>36</sup> Interview with an MEP Advisor, 15 March 2011.

<sup>37</sup> According to publicly available data on voting statistics from the EP website. Source: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sed/statistics.do>

Indeed, the need to portray unity in the EP provides an explanation for the similarity of vote results in committee and plenary on reports from the sampled committees. Nonetheless, this is just one of the factors that can influence the decision-making process, to the same degree that the number of amendments in committee and plenary can be an indicator of the convergence of results at both levels.

Fieldwork observations of EP internal processes based on the activity in the sampled committees reveal that, in cases where the rapporteur and the shadow rapporteurs have carried out conclusive work supported by formal and informal meetings to streamline the position of the committee, (as was the case with reports presented in Appendix 5.1) a small number of amendments end up being tabled in committee and even fewer in plenary. I refer here to committee and plenary amendments separately because there is an important distinction made in the EP Rules of procedure between committee and plenary amendments; namely, Rule 45 refers to the procedure in committee for legislative reports, stating that:

‘The committee's report shall comprise:

(a) amendments, if any, to the proposal, accompanied, if appropriate, by short justifications which shall be the responsibility of the rapporteur and shall not be put to the vote;’ (Rule 45, Rules of procedure, 2012)

Regarding the process of amending a text, before a rapporteur presents a draft report and his amendments to Parliament, all committee members have the possibility to table their own amendments to the draft report. These amendments are the first ones to be analysed in this study and their numbers are verified against those tabled in plenary.

Concerning plenary amendments, these are more difficult to put forward since, according to the EP Rules of procedure, they require a set number of MEPs or a political group to support them:

‘Amendments for consideration in Parliament may be tabled by the committee responsible, a political group or at least 40 Members. Amendments shall be tabled in writing and signed by their authors.’ (Rule 156, Rules of procedure, 2012).

Consequently, when a political group does not agree with the amendments tabled by the responsible committee and has not been able to influence the report outcome in committee, it can choose to table amendments in plenary. The same is valid for a group of 40 MEPs or more, who want to change the text of a report. Procedurally, however, it is more difficult to amend at this stage, unless there is strong support from the group of an MEP’s view and policy position. Nonetheless, the rules foresee that in a situation where a group is in full disagreement with a report drafted in the specialised committee, it can table an alternative motion for resolution that is then voted in plenary alongside the initial report and the amendments tabled by committee.

Relying on the information presented and what appears to be the established decision-making pattern in committee, the first of the two hypotheses in this chapter can be drawn.

*H2a: A large number of amendments tabled in committee leads to a report receiving fewer amendments in plenary.*

According to committee procedure, a draft report can be amended by any of the MEPs who are members of the respective committee or substitute members (MEPs assigned



to the committee but, unlike ‘full members’, they are only allowed to vote in committee if a ‘full member’ from their political group is absent). Nonetheless, other MEPs from different committees, who take an interest in the subject, can also amend at this stage. As summarised by an ALDE policy advisor<sup>38</sup> and confirmed by data in Appendix 5.2 and report analysis, it can be concluded that draft reports receiving a large number of amendments at committee stage can be indicative of three things: a controversial issue; a conflict in terms of policy or ideology inside the committee; a report that has not been accurately drafted. Therefore, according to H2a an analysis of reports and the numbers of amendments should first indicate that there is a strong relation between amendment numbers on reports in committee and those in plenary. Secondly, it should help establish if amendment numbers are indicative of dissent in committee and, subsequently, if fewer amendments in plenary constitute a proof of its resolution. In other words, this hypothesis tests the relationship between committee amendment numbers and plenary amendment numbers. It verifies the likelihood of a report getting fewer amendments in plenary if it has already received a significant number in committee. It establishes whether or not amendments are indicators of committee agreement and plenary follow-up of committee decision.

Consequently, if a decrease in amendment numbers from committee to plenary stage is found, then it can be concluded that MEPs from the political group also accept the amendments submitted in committee. This implies that other MEPs, who are not members of the respective committee (also referred to as the *lead* committee in the EP), follow the line set by their colleagues. It would also mean that the political group view is not different from the one established by their members in committee, because

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<sup>38</sup>Interview with ALDE Policy advisor, 9 February 2011

groups are less likely to table new amendments in plenary or alternative resolutions to the reports submitted by committees. If H2a is confirmed, then I expect to see potential conflicts and final decisions on proposals being established in committee and then adopted in the session of the full chamber.

On the contrary, if H2a is not confirmed, then there should be less correlation between committee and plenary amendments, with more amendments tabled in plenary than in committee. If amendment numbers in plenary are significantly higher than those in committee then it can be concluded that decisions reached in committee are not viewed as representative of the full chamber position. Consequently, an increase in amendment numbers should be a characteristic of plenary sessions, as well as the presence of alternative resolutions.

In addition to this, since the procedure ruling the debate on a specific proposal may influence the type of amendments tabled, explanations for their limited or significant number can vary accordingly. Therefore, it is important to verify the distinctions in amendment results under different procedures: ordinary legislative procedure, budgetary procedure and own-initiative procedure. Own-initiative reports could have more amendments in committee because the EP is only signalling its position to the other institutions, has fewer procedural constraints than in the case of a legislative proposal and is, thus, less consensus-oriented. The reasoning underpinning this assumption is linked to the observation that the number of amendments on an own-initiative report of the EP can indicate the level of acceptance of the actual position of the rapporteur inside the committee. According to one of the MEPs interviewed, this is the case with most of the own-initiative reports that are being drafted in the

Regional Development Committee, where, if the rapporteur is able to consolidate the views of all members, be it in the first text or through the proposed compromise amendments, he/she will only be confronted with a small number of modifications to the draft report.<sup>39</sup>

Amendment results on reports that fall under the ordinary legislative procedure or budgetary procedure, however, require legal justification when they are introduced and are more restrictive in content and scope. Findings resulted from the analysis of amendments belonging to reports issued from the sampled committee, indicate that in most legislative committees, like the Internal Market committee, the majority of amendments are of a technical nature and always require this legal *justification*. The latter is a short text that accompanies an amendment and presents the rationale and the utility that stand at the basis of the legislative modification. This specificity of amendments in the legislative committees is a factor that can impact on the final number of modifications that are brought forward by Parliament to one of the proposals of the Commission.

Amendment analysis and fieldwork observation<sup>40</sup> reveal that less technical, politically motivated amendments are more difficult to table and pass at plenary level. These findings confirm Kreppel's (2002b) conclusions in regards to the rate of success of EP amendments vis-à-vis the other two institutional actors. Even when tabling amendments at committee level, MEPs are aware that technical changes are more readily accepted.<sup>41</sup> The explanation for this could be that ultimately, the EP remains

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<sup>39</sup>Interview with an MEP from the Regional Development Committee, 24 November 2010.

<sup>40</sup>Internal Market committee meeting, 2 June 2010, 23 June 2010, 12 July 2010

<sup>41</sup>Interview with ALDE MEP, 9 February 2011.

an institution eager to prove its efficiency and its output is aimed at solving the single market issues for EU citizens.

The case of amendments on the IMCO reports, such as the *Report on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on textile names and related labelling of textile products*, having as rapporteur Toine Manders, illustrates this clearly. Here, the main focus of MEPs with extended knowledge on the subject was to ensure that technical aspects comprised in the regulation do not damage the interests of the industry or those of European consumers.<sup>42</sup> Parliament seized the opportunity to add to the regulation references to consumer protection and labelling of textile products. It tabled amendments which passed in plenary and later on in the process, under second reading, the references to these same issues were accepted by Council and deemed adopted.<sup>43</sup>

Moreover, in the framework of internal parliamentary debate, another aspect that can exercise a notable influence is the extent to which the Commission is prepared to accept proposed amendments. Namely, there has to be a statement issued by the Commission stating if it is in agreement with the modifications brought by MEPs. This concerns all ordinary legislative procedure reports and even if such statements are usually issued after the vote in the full chamber, during committee debates<sup>44</sup> preparing the final EP vote, representatives of the responsible Commission Directorates General are already in a position to indicate whether or not their institution is likely to support the modifications introduced by the legislature.

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<sup>42</sup> Internal Market Committee meeting, 16 March 2010.

<sup>43</sup> EP debate on 'Textile names and related labelling of textile products', 10 May 2011.

<sup>44</sup> Internal Market Committee meetings: 16 March 2010, 7 April 2010, 2 June 2010, 23 June 2010, 12 July 2010.

Consequently, based on all aspects presented above, it can be concluded that a report with a significant number of amendments tabled in committee has already integrated and resolved possible conflicts or diverging positions of political groups before reaching the plenary. Variations depending on the type of procedure are expected.

Following from here, if H2a is verified, then a more comprehensive H2b can be formulated to test the extent to which plenary can follow committee decisions, as illustrated by the amendment numbers.

*H2b: The number of committee amendments tabled to a report signals plenary voting behaviour and the extent to which it will follow a committee decision.*

This argument helps to identify the point where conflict is resolved and offers an explanation to the correlation of results of votes and amendments in the two legislative phases. This hypothesis tests the link between amendment numbers in committee and result of votes in plenary. That is to say, it verifies whether the number of committee amendments is linked to a vote result characterised by significant majorities and strong support. The hypothesis tests whether dissent, as expressed in amendment numbers in committee, is resolved in plenary and reflected in the results of votes. In other words, will a report with a lot of amendments in committee be passed with a large majority in plenary because a consensus was reached in committee?

Therefore, if consensus is built in committee then the full chamber should follow the indications and, as a consequence, reports with a large number of amendments, where diverging views might have already been exposed and solved in committee, should be characterised by a strong correlation between committee and plenary vote. The underlying argument in this case is that once the discussion has covered the principal lines of dissent and, with the help of amendments and through negotiations the rapporteur in charge has managed to accommodate all different views in his report before submitting it to the plenary, a strong consensus is consolidated and MEPs are more likely to vote according to their committee colleagues' preferences. This implies that a large number of amendments indicating the many views held by the members in committee bring the debate to a quick resolution and lead to the adoption of the report in the full chamber.

An important factor that accounts for such a development and provides such a result is the principle of *perceived preference coherence* (Ringe, 2010). According to it, MEPs choose to follow the opinion that they perceive to be closest to their preferences and in this case it is the one of their political group colleagues from the respective committee.

Nonetheless, the number of amendments to a report in committee can also be the result of a badly drafted report or an unsuccessful rapporteur. For this to be the case, there should be as many amendments in plenary and no correlation with the final result of the votes. At the same time, the few changes submitted at committee and plenary level can indicate the absence of conflict inside Parliament on a specific issue. That is why, in an attempt to establish the underpinnings of the existing process inside

the EP, this study has carried an in-depth analysis of MEP activity during committee meetings, supported by an account of political group meetings in chapter 6.

In this chapter both H2a and H2b are first tested based on an analysis of the data.

Firstly, I calculate the correlation between the number of tabled amendments in committee and plenary. This will indicate if there are consistently fewer amendments tabled in plenary than in committee. The reports and committees selected will illustrate if there are any variations based on the procedure of the report or on the type of committee leading the work on the proposal. Furthermore, an analysis of individual cases supported by fieldwork observations will map the process of amending a report and establish if there is a link between amendments and plenary results of vote. The method I use is that of process tracing (Checkel, 2005), complimented by accounts from the fieldwork observation.

Therefore, the following section of this chapter will analyse the reports debated in the sampled committees and test hypotheses H2a and H2b against quantitative and qualitative data.

**Table 5.1: Correlation of committee and plenary amendments**

<i>Committee</i>	<i>Regional Development</i>	<i>Internal Market</i>	<i>Environment</i>	<i>Culture and Education</i>	<i>Budgets</i>	<i>All</i>
<b>Correlation committee to plenary AMs</b>	<b>0.16</b>	<b>0.78</b>	<b>0.64</b>	<b>-0.01</b>	<b>0.64</b>	<b>0.65</b>



#### 5. 4.1 Amendment numbers in committee and plenary – correlations

This part of section 4 investigates the results obtained from the data on amendments in committee and plenary for the specific committees selected, as well as the overall data on amendments for all the committees of the institution.

Table 5.1 presents these data, which are based on the number of amendments that each of the 169 reports analysed, debated in the period of September 2009 to July 2011, has received in the following parliamentary committees: Regional Development, Internal Market, Environment, Culture and Education and Budgets.

Section 5 of the Appendix lists the descriptive statistics from each committee that the data in the table are based on.

In order to interpret these data and establish if there is a valid relationship between the amendment numbers on reports in committee and plenary, I have correlated the number of amendments on each report in committee with the number of amendments tabled in plenary to verify the strength of the argument. As seen in each of the five cases, the results vary. Correlations are strong, with the exception of the Regional Development Committee and the Culture and Education Committee. Procedurally, both of these committees deal more often with own-initiative reports and non-legislative acts, compared to the other three legislative committees in this table. As a consequence, they tend to receive amendments only in committee and not in plenary, where it is only the rapporteur who can introduce additional amendments at that stage. This explains why there is a negative correlation for the Culture and education committee, where there are mostly amendments submitted in committee and almost none in plenary. For the Internal Market, Environment and Budgets committees the

correlation between the number of amendments in committee and plenary is significant, demonstrating that the relationship between the two arrays of numbers in this case is consistent. It is also in agreement with the overall committee correlation of 0.65. The overall committee correlation is based on amendment numbers recorded for a total of 545 reports from all EP committees, for the same period September 2009 to July 2011.

Therefore, the results from the data support the argument that there is a correlation between the two amendment numbers, particularly in the case of legislative committees. They validate the two hypotheses and emphasise that amendments in committee and their overall higher numbers compared to plenary are an indication that conflict is resolved at committee level and any policy or ideological differences are resolved before the plenary session debates and votes.

Following an analysis of the quantitative data, the second part of this section will investigate individual reports in the sampled committees.

#### 5. 4.2 Committee-Plenary cohesion illustrated by amendments

The second part of this section analyses reports in each committee and maps the process of amendment negotiation and voting based on the fieldwork observation from committee meetings and plenary sessions.

## Internal Market Committee

The Internal Market committee displays a great discrepancy between the number of amendments submitted on reports in committee and plenary.

The report *on delivering a single market to consumers and citizens*, for example, voted in May 2010, had 236 amendments tabled in committee but no additional amendments tabled in plenary. This was the result of the rapporteur incorporating most of the amendments tabled in committee in the final text submitted before plenary. The amendments were mostly uncontroversial and consensual. They referred to strengthening the single market (amendment 34), increasing consumer protection (amendment 40), while also focusing on achieving a single market capable of creating jobs within a green economy (amendment 35).<sup>45</sup> This explains why no additional amendments were tabled in plenary and accounts for the large majority vote on this report. The report *on completing the internal market for e-commerce* (166 amendments in committee) falls into the same category, as does the *Report on the future of European standardization* (with 118 initial amendments and only three additional amendments to committee ones tabled in plenary. These three amendments were all tabled by the rapporteur and were meant to clarify the text).<sup>46</sup> Own-initiative reports (INI), such as the three mentioned before, receive significant modifications at committee level and almost no amendments in plenary. This is in accordance with a previous statement from an interviewee,<sup>47</sup> namely that in such instances, MEPs in charge of the report try to accommodate all diverging views on the subject in order to avoid more changes being submitted in plenary. This view is also expressed in

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<sup>45</sup> Amendments tabled in committee to the report on delivering a single market to consumers and citizens, 21 April 2010.

<sup>46</sup> Results of votes, 21 October 2010. Source: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/plenary/en/minutes.html>.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with an MEP from the Regional Development Committee, 26 November 2010.

committee debates by the rapporteur and shadow rapporteurs, who ask members to bring their contribution to the text and suggest any changes they may like to put forward, so that the committee may be able to produce a complete and comprehensive report.<sup>48</sup> Rapporteurs can be ensured in this way that when their report is presented to the full chamber in plenary, there are no additional views that need to be accommodated to secure the swift adoption of the report. Moreover, an analysis of the content of INI reports in this committee reveals that they are seldom of a highly technical nature, thus allowing non-committee Members to bring their contribution to the text if they so wish.

This is not the case, however, for the *Report on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on textile names and related labelling of textile products*, which received 100 amendments tabled in committee and 72 in plenary, the *Report on the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on combating late payment in commercial transactions*, with 210 amendments in committee and 48 in plenary, or the *Report on the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on consumer rights*, with 673 amendments in committee and 267 in plenary. This last report is a relevant case for analysis because the work carried out when it was drafted has followed a very sinuous path across the institution.

The initial proposal for a directive of the EP and of the Council on consumer rights was meant to subsume four previous directives on consumer rights. From the beginning, this has been a text followed in great detail by lobby groups, industry

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<sup>48</sup>Internal Market Committee meetings: 16 March 2010, 07 April 2010, 02 June 2010, 23 June 2010, 12 July 2010.

associations and consumer associations that continued to lobby the Parliament at committee stage to ensure the representation of their interests,<sup>49</sup> after having previously lobbied the Commission in regards to the provisions contained in the initial draft phase of the proposal. As a result, many MEPs had a vested interest in amending this proposal in committee and almost 1,600 amendments were initially tabled. The rapporteur on this report was forced to limit the number of proposed changes that could be voted in the Internal Market Committee and resorted to compromise amendments that would resume and aggregate individual amendments, which could then be passed in committee. This meant that on amendments which concerned the same paragraph and shared a similar scope, a common phrase was sought by the rapporteur, in agreement with the shadows and amendment authors, to include most of the changes suggested by each amendment author, so far as possible. Consequently, 673 amendments were voted at this point and 267 were entered, in total, for a vote in plenary. This illustrates how a disputed legislative proposal, touching on many policy aspects, that are still significantly different across Member States, was after all defined in committee and not in the plenary.

Moreover, looking at the text of amendments, a predominant line can be traced: contrary to the Commission proposal, MEPs did not wish to harmonise consumer rights to the extent where it was no longer possible for Member States to keep or introduce stricter measures of consumer protection (amendments 234, 235, 236).<sup>50</sup> The same is valid for amendments meant to exclude financial services and health services from the scope of this directive (amendments 219, 242, 244, 503). These

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<sup>49</sup> Interview with a Policy Officer from one of the leading industry associations in the field of E-commerce, 17 March 2010.

<sup>50</sup> Amendments tabled in committee to the report on consumer rights, 25 October 2010.

aspects are all included in the amendments contained in the report tabled for consideration by plenary, as well as in the final compromise resulting after early agreement negotiations. They indicate that in spite of opposing views in committee, members were able to isolate the main issues of interest and consolidate a committee line from which they could enter into negotiations with the other institutions. Here rapporteurs and shadow rapporteurs played a key role in consolidating this position and solving dissent. As a result, many of the amendments to the proposal which were initially put forward to plenary were included in the final agreement. Aspects such as a mixed approach for harmonisation of consumer rights, the scope of the directive, the provision of information to consumers, the right of withdrawal of a consumer from a contract, which appeared in the committee report first tabled to plenary, were confirmed after the trilogue and were included in the final text adopted in the plenary. At the same time, provisions decided in committee regarding off-premise contracts, namely to exclude these from the scope of the directive if the payment made by the consumer does not exceed 40 euro, were modified after the agreement to a value not exceeding 50 euro. Also, regarding the provisions on delivery of goods, in particular the failure of the trader to deliver the goods at the time agreed upon, the initial report in committee offered the possibility for the consumer to terminate the contract if the trader failed to deliver the goods within a new period as indicated by the consumer. But, in the agreement adopted, the consumer's options are constrained by the circumstances, as is the contract termination in such instances. These examples offer a glimpse into the outcome of the negotiations and the battles fought between the Commission, the EP and the Council. Nonetheless, the final agreement reached in the case of this directive does not depart significantly, in terms of content, scope and purpose from the report initially adopted in committee. Although it could be argued

that the initial viewpoint of the EP on this proposal was closer to that of the Council, thus explaining the result of the agreement, it must be pointed out that there were significant divisions committee and in spite of this, the agreement did not overturn the committee line. Such findings show that even in the case of early agreements committees continue to play an important part in the decision-making process and they prove that, unlike what Yordanova (2013) argues, the amendments contained in the agreement with the other institutions do not replace committee amendments as submitted first to plenary. In terms of content, in the case of this directive, they either replicate or modify them, confirming the influence of the committee.

To sum up, the findings indicate that, depending on the procedure (own-initiative or ordinary legislative procedure) and the nature of a report, the number of amendments in plenary can increase or decrease. However, plenary amendments are still fewer than in committee because the latter can form a common position and pass it through plenary. Therefore, it seems that H2a is verified.

Regarding H2b, for all reports in the Internal market committee, the final results of vote are similar to the initial ones in committee and a significant number of amendments on particular reports signals the similarity between the two vote results. In some cases, for the own-initiative reports there was a significant number of tabled amendments in committee, compared to a smaller number in plenary and the vote in the full chamber was carried by show of hands. This implies that consensus had already been reached on this report across political groups and the report was expected to gather a large majority, otherwise there would have been a request for roll-call vote to signal different voting options amongst political groups and control

how members voted. The same situation was repeated in the case of the *report on completing the internal market for e-commerce* for example, of the *report on the future of European standardisation*, of the *report on the impact of advertising on consumer behaviour* and in the case of the *report on the implementation of the Services Directive 2006/123/EC*.

Findings show that the Internal Market committee is setting the basis for the final decision taken on a report in Parliament and the amendments to Commission proposals that the committee adopts are carried forward and adopted in the plenary as well.

#### Environment Public Health and Food Safety Committee

The Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Committee (ENVI), is, like the Internal Market committee, one of the main EP legislative committees, debating and passing regulations and directives essential for the functioning of the single market. Given its nature, it votes most of its acts under the ordinary legislative procedure (former co-decision – COD). From the sample of analysed reports for this study, it results that the number of amendments usually tabled on reports in this committee is more significant than in the case of the other four committees.

Appendix 5.3 indicates that reports leaving this committee are faced with a higher number of amendments in plenary and that is usually the case with those that fall under the ordinary legislative procedure. Own-initiative reports, on the other hand,



such as the *report on the implementation of EU legislation aiming at the conservation of biodiversity*, the *report on reducing health inequalities in the EU* or the *report on the analysis of options to move beyond 20% greenhouse gas emission reductions and assessing the risk of carbon leakage*, receive amendments in committee, but almost none in plenary. As stated before, this is the result of the procedure governing the work on the report and, as a consequence, on reports under the ordinary legislative procedure the difference between committee and plenary tabled amendments is significant. For example, the following reports have all received a large number of amendments in both committee and plenary: the *report on the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending, as regards pharmacovigilance, Directive 2001/83/EC on the Community code relating to medicinal products for human use*, the *report on the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the restriction of the use of certain hazardous substances in electrical and electronic equipment* or the *report on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council setting emission performance standards for new light commercial vehicles as part of the Community's integrated approach to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from light-duty vehicles*. It is, nonetheless, true that there have been fewer changes submitted to the proposals in plenary and this finding follows the line of H2a and of the amendment correlations in Table 5.1.

There are also specific cases, such as the one of the *report on the provision of food information to consumers*, where the numbers are striking in comparison to the rest of the reports: 575 amendments submitted in the first stage and 351 reaching the plenary. These are indeed a reflection of the multiple debates and the discussions that took

place in the Environment Committee<sup>51</sup> at the time this report was on the agenda. Bearing in mind that this was a legislative proposal for a regulation - which is automatically applied in all Member States once it has been voted at the EU level, without having to be transferred into national legislation (as is the case with Directives) - it was viewed as extremely important for all parties and beneficiaries involved. MEPs were again increasingly lobbied, a fact that resulted in such a high number of amendments being tabled. Moreover, this report went into second reading and at this phase the Council text received 402 amendments in committee and only 135 were tabled for plenary. At both stages, most amendments address a set of issues where there seems to be an overall consensus from the committee side towards the Council and Commission. In this case amendments<sup>52</sup> concerned issues related to origin labelling, minimum font size for the nutritional information on the packaging, imitation foods and nutrient profiles.<sup>53</sup> These were eventually included in the compromise with the Council and were accepted by the Commission as well. In spite of the significant number of amendments at both first and second reading in committee and plenary, the report shows a close similarity between the results of vote in committee and that in plenary under first reading, with a final roll-call vote gathering a large majority in the plenary session of the full chamber. These findings indicate that MEPs have not only followed the decision in the lead committee but they have also portrayed an image of unity and consensus to the other institutions, accepting the compromise and the amendments tabled by the committee to Council's position in second reading.

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<sup>51</sup> Environment Committee meeting, 15 March 2010.

<sup>52</sup> Amendments tabled in committee to the report on food information to consumers, 22 December 2009 and 23 March 2011.

<sup>53</sup> EP debate on 'Food information to consumers', 15 June 2010 and 5 July 2011.

## Regional Development Committee

In the Regional Development Committee the reports analysed for this study are covered by the own-initiative and the ordinary legislative procedure, with a preponderance of own-initiative reports. As a consequence, results reveal that most of the amendments are tabled in committee and very few additional ones are submitted in plenary.

Fieldwork observations from <sup>54</sup> in this committee point to a constant interest from the rapporteurs' side in streamlining the view of committee members and accommodating diverging opinions. The regular rapporteur and shadow rapporteur meetings that take place during the preparation of a report and the debates in committee are part of this effort. During committee meetings, MEPs are encouraged to put forward changes and proposals to the text of the draft report and, before the vote, amendments and compromise amendments are negotiated at length. These aspects account for the reduced number of amendments tabled in plenary.

Furthermore, even in the case of reports such as the *report on the Commission's Fifth Cohesion Report and the strategy for post-2013 cohesion policy*, discussed in chapters 4 and 6, which had 569 amendments tabled in committee, the number of amendments tabled in plenary was limited to 10. Here, following a significant number of tabled committee amendments, the rapporteur, Markus Pieper, held several meetings with the shadow rapporteurs from the other political groups to ensure the representation of all views in the final draft of the report submitted to the full chamber in the plenary

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<sup>54</sup>Regional Development Committee meetings: 2 June 2010, 21 June 2010, 12 July 2010, 27 September 2010, 4 October 2010, 14 February 2011.

session. Amendments for this report dealt with various aspects linked to cohesion policy and future priorities, to the new programming period, to financing options and reducing administration.<sup>55</sup> As a result, the report was voted with a large majority, very few votes against but with an important number of abstentions (528 votes in favour, 18 against and 108 abstentions). Still, this vote was in accordance with the result of vote in committee, where out of 44 MEPs, 31 voted in favour, 4 against and 9 abstained. Therefore, the findings from this committee illustrate that the number of amendments tabled decreases significantly in plenary and the initially high number of committee amendments eventually lead to a cohesive vote in the full chamber similar to the one in committee.

#### Culture and Education Committee

In the case of the Culture and Education committee, an EP non-legislative committee, the results are in line with what one would expect to find based on the hypotheses of this chapter. Since most reports are own-initiative ones (INI), as is the case with non-legislative committees, a significant number of amendments are tabled in committee and almost none in plenary. Moreover, the few amendments that are put forward in plenary (Appendix 5.4) are tabled on the few reports covered by the ordinary legislative procedure (COD).

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<sup>55</sup>Amendments tabled in committee to the report on Commission's Fifth Cohesion Report and the strategy for post-2013 cohesion policy, 20 April 2011.

Based on observations from committee debates,<sup>56</sup> findings reveal that these are usually focused on reaching the outcome most favourable to all political groups. This accounts for the voting in the plenary on Culture and Education committee reports, which are usually voted by simple show of hands, a fact in itself indicative of consensus, and are carried with large majorities. One of the MEPs member in this committee explained that, when there are indications of strong diverging views on a particular issue from the members of the main political groups, the rapporteur organises meetings with the other shadow rapporteurs in order to negotiate a common line as early as possible in the process.<sup>57</sup> The rapporteur also has the option to draft and negotiate the different amendments individually before the vote. Consequently, the findings indicate that, due to the limited legislative nature of the committee itself, the decisions in Culture and Education are mostly based on consensus, a fact also reflected in the large majority of votes expressed in the plenary on reports from this committee.

## Budgets Committee

The following committee on Budgets is amongst the most important in the EP, since the budgetary powers are at the core of this institution. Most of the reports here fall under the budgetary procedure, which stipulates that Parliament is the responsible institution, in charge of defining the budgetary lines after having consulted the other institutions. The Budgets committee also counts own-initiative reports amongst its

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<sup>56</sup>Culture and Education Committee meetings: 3 March 2011, 16 March 2011, 11 April 2011.

<sup>57</sup>Interview with a MEP from the Culture and Education Committee, June 2010

texts and, as in all other committees, these receive most of their amendments in the first stage.

Regarding reports under the budgetary procedure, the findings show that they tend to see changes added in plenary more often than reports in other committees, but the trend points to fewer amendments being tabled in plenary. In respect of modifications on the draft budget, the findings in the field have underlined that MEPs are likely to negotiate more in order to have their amendments passed in the Budgets committee, than they are in the other studied committees. This is due to the budgetary subject and the immediate impact on voters that it engenders. Moreover, they are more inclined to attempt and exhaust all options provided in the EP Rules of Procedure in order for their amendments to pass and that includes tabling them in the plenary. In spite of this, results from votes cast in plenary remain similar to those from committee. This implies that, regardless of the MEPs' wish to override an unfavourable result in the Budgets committee, the plenary session of the full chamber still follows the initial committee decision. One of the reasons to explain this is the perception that MEPs have of the committee.<sup>58</sup> The Budgets committee is seen as highly technical and many MEPs simply rely on the help from political group staff when drafting amendments to be tabled here. At the same time, the perceived preference coherence model from Ringe (2010), mentioned in the first section of this chapter, can, in part, account for the committee decision being carried forward to the plenary in such cases.

Therefore, all of the abovementioned findings for the committees analysed so far validate the two hypotheses and indicate that the legislative activity on all proposals

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<sup>58</sup>Interview with Regional Development Committee MEP, November 2010.

that reach Parliament is based in the specialised committees. The different amendments introduced at committee level serve to structure the future debate in plenary and set its main lines. They signal the resolution of the conflict and the building of consensus as early in the process as committee stage, an aspect which validates the hypotheses of this chapter and supports the main argument of the thesis that, within the internal legislative process of the EP, the main decisions are reached in committee and then sanctioned in the plenary sessions. Such a finding has significant implications for the way the work inside this institution is viewed and these shall be developed in the conclusions section of this chapter.

## **5.5 Conclusions**

The previous section of this chapter has tested the hypotheses against descriptive data from amendment numbers in the five committees and vote results. It has analysed individual cases of reports in each committee based on fieldwork observation and committee meeting debates. The conclusions section of this chapter will analyse the findings and their implications for the main argument of the study.

Throughout the past years, research on the EP has developed to become more comprehensive. So far, this institution has been analysed in relation to the other two European bodies that play an essential part in passing EU legislation: the Commission and the Council. The current understanding of its internal processes, activity, procedures and informal rules is more thorough and has provided the possibility to trace the development of all the legislative procedures at different stages in

Parliament. Consequently, more attention has been paid to the work of EP committees and its implications for the final decisions on the proposals sanctioned by the legislature.

As part of this research, this chapter has analysed Parliament's activity in committees, namely the amendments tabled here, in an effort to identify the implications that this has for the overall activity and decisions reached in plenary. It has focused on a section of the committee's decision-making process by analysing amendments tabled at this stage - their numbers, their nature and their intrinsic value – and by comparing them with the ones introduced in plenary. This was first done through an investigation of what the actual numbers can reveal about amendments tabled on a set of reports from a sample of five committees, and then by checking these findings against the observations and interviews gathered from the fieldwork. The hypotheses put forward in the chapter have been used to test if there is sufficient evidence indicating an increased role of committees and a follow up of the results of vote cast here in the plenary sessions of the chamber.

The findings reveal that the initial position taken by a committee on a proposal is mirrored in the result of votes in plenary. The amendments introduced to the text of the proposed legislation, or to the text of a report at committee and plenary stage, can indicate this. Their decrease in number in plenary proves that, from the first steps of the decision-making process, the institution tries to find a solution to the possible conflicts and diverging views through negotiation. As illustrated by the findings on most of the reports presented in this chapter, a consensual solution is usually identified. The validation of H2a and H2b by the results of correlations of committee



and plenary amendments, as well as by the committee fieldwork observations, is a strong indication that conflict and ideological differences are internalised by committees and resolved at this stage rather than in plenary. The small or large number of amendments in committee signals the existence of divisive issues in committees, particularly in cases where the results of votes and the few plenary amendments might lead one to believe there was an a priori broad consensus in Parliament. Moreover, the role played by committees in finding not only a common committee line, but also an EP position, underlines their importance and their influence over the entire chamber. In this respect, they serve more than an informational role (Krehbiel, 1990) and they may sometimes overcome partisan influence (Cox and McCubbins, 2007) with the help of consensus-based policy, which still dominates committee activity, and due to the perceived preference coherence that MEPs who are not committee members retain. Committees influence the decision-making process because of their efficiency in reaching agreement in an institution concerned with legitimising itself through an increased legislative output. Having analysed amendments, additional evidence can now be put forward to illustrate the influence committees have over the EP and the strength they acquired during EP7 (2009-2014). If committees constitute the arena where different views on Commission proposals or EP reports collide, it is clear then why they have the ability to structure and delineate a Parliament opinion, which is then adopted by the full chamber.

Furthermore, the sample of legislative and non-legislative committees investigated has revealed a clear pattern of similarity of results of vote in committee and plenary, as well as a tendency to see most changes to the text being proposed in committee. However, variations have been identified depending on the type of procedure

governing the report – own-initiative (INI) or ordinary legislative procedure – with a preponderance of own-initiative reports having most, if not all, of their amendments tabled in committee. This argument has been supported by the observations from all of the five committees and it leads to the conclusion that consensus and representativity of the full chamber can be more easily coordinated and achieved under this procedure.

In the case of the proposals for legislation covered by the budgetary and the ordinary legislative procedure, the results indicate that plenary has, for the most part, not only taken note of the decision put forward by the specialised committees, but also followed it. Also, if under an early agreement in first reading studies until now saw committee amendments being overturned in plenary (Yordanova, 2010), this chapter has highlighted that amendments at this stage cannot be seen as competing with committee ones but rather as a different stage in the negotiation of the compromise with the other institutions. Nor does this point to a lack of committee influence in the case of files under an early agreement procedure (Yordanova, 2013), since the committee and its members continue to be involved all throughout the process.

Moreover, if in these cases under the legislative procedure it was initially expected to find more dissent and conflict in plenary, as well as a higher number of amendments tabled as a result of diverging views, the facts did not validate this argument, since the other MEPs appeared to endorse the initial committee decision in their final vote in plenary. Indeed, this aspect could be partly explained either by the perceived preference coherence of Ringe (2010) or by a high degree of representativity in committees of the entire House, as suggested by McElroy (2006). However, both of these explanations applied to the daily practice in committees fail to address the issue

of how the committee to plenary alignment is reached. Surely there are instances when group views differ from committee ones, just as there are instances when MEPs, in spite of the trust they might invest in the colleagues who are committee members, might be lobbied to take a different stance. I argue that in such cases it is the complex series of interactions that take place in committee meetings, in the meetings of political groups, as well as in informal meetings held by group members, which ensures that a committee agreement is accepted and adopted by the full chamber.

Nonetheless, on extremely salient reports as those mentioned for the sampled committees, figures show that there tend to be more amendments introduced in plenary, which could indicate a higher level of disagreement on the subject that cannot be entirely solved at committee stage and eventually surfaces in plenary. At the same time, it can be argued that this is a result of the increased lobbying by interested parties, as it was the case with the *report on consumer rights*, and not necessarily of a lack of representativity of committees.

For the most part, the findings presented in this chapter which indicate that the number of amendments put forward in the plenary is significantly lower than in the committee, reveal that there are important negotiations taking part in committees, and that these structure and influence the entire course of a proposal in Parliament. This leads to the conclusion that committees play a central role for the EP. The interviews with the MEPs, Parliament's civil servants and representatives of the lobby groups, show that all the actors involved are very aware of the essential part they play in the legislative process. That is also why most MEPs consider their work in the specialised committees as one of the most important parts of their activities, as it results from the

2010 MEP Survey. Similarly, representatives of the industry associations focus all their attention on lobbying MEPs at this stage.

Moreover, these findings appear to describe a procedural reality that is the functional result of all processes, activities and constraints that are present in the EP. As such, it seems predictable that, given the large number of proposals that Parliament has to deal with, especially after the extension of its powers with the Lisbon Treaty, and the limited amount of time that it meets in plenary in order to vote (once a month, for three days in Strasbourg and one day in Brussels during the part sessions), it would be looking to ensure, as much as possible, the consensus and a final decision in the pre-legislative stage, rather than in plenary. This renders the entire process more efficient and allows the House to pass the necessary legislation more quickly. This is a matter of fact situation for most of those working within EU institutions, which has been overlooked due to lack of sufficient data and a continuous focus on the interpretation of roll-call votes in the plenary.

Still, the question remains if these committees could eventually reduce the votes in plenary to a mere exercise on a decision already taken. This seems unlikely at the moment, especially given the important part political groups and national parties play in the decisions taken in this institution. In the future it could be that more attention will be paid in following the debates and the views expressed by their MEPs in these committees.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Who matters most? – Parliamentary committee activity in the EP and political group interactions**

This chapter focuses on political group interactions linked to the activity of parliamentary committees in the EP. It analyses the way in which decisions on reports are made inside a political group after a committee vote and prior to a final vote in plenary. Based on the main argument of this research emphasising the important role played by committees in the EP decision-making process, this chapter illustrates the process through which political groups accept and integrate, during their group meetings, the agreements reached by their members in committee. It answers the question of how committees influence the EP legislative process and evaluates whether committees or the political groups have more impact on the overall decision-making process. In this respect, it argues that group meetings facilitate the cohesion of the political group for the final vote and are another one of the instruments that allow for the decision in committee to be transferred through to plenary. To begin with, this first section of this chapter will introduce the aim and purpose of the chapter within this thesis and the approach it takes in analysing political group meetings. The chapter then presents the existing studies on EP groups, while in the next section it focuses on internal organisation of the political groups and on the group structure covering committee workload in section four. Section three provides empirical evidence for the analysis of political group meetings prior to the final vote in plenary and the last section discusses the findings of the chapter.

This section situates the current chapter within the framework of the study based on the main argument of the thesis. It summarises the hypotheses and findings of the other two empirical chapters and sets out the lines along which each section will be developed.

Political groups in the EP form the basic structure of the legislature. They group MEPs according to their national parties' political affiliations and they are at the core of the Parliament. In their meetings they discuss and align the position of the group before each plenary session, but the substance of legislative matters in the institution is still mainly discussed in committees.

So far, as part of this study on EP committees, their strength and central place in an institution eager to legitimise itself through legislative output, I have analysed in chapter 4 the aspects related to rapporteurs and their work on a report, which indicate that a direct influence on the decision-making process is being exerted from committee to plenary stage. This has been illustrated through an analysis of reports and debates held in committee and plenary, as well as of the data issued from results of votes. Viewing rapporteurs as the main actors who can ensure that a committee agreement and subsequent decision can be followed in the plenary, the findings in chapter 4 showed that rapporteurs constitute one of the instruments in the linking mechanism that ensures the transferral of decision from committee to plenary. They can push through agreements from committee and up to plenary. Subsequently, chapter 5 has analysed the number of amendments tabled in committee as opposed to that of amendments tabled in plenary, in order to investigate if their decreasing number at the plenary stage is an indication of a definitive decision on a Parliament

report being reached before the session of the full chamber. Findings issued from the data on amendment numbers in committee and plenary reveal that reports have consistently fewer amendments tabled in plenary, a factor which indicates an agreement at committee level and a decision reached before the final vote. In both these chapters the existence of early agreement in first reading was also analysed, as a possible indication of committee loss of power. The example investigated, the Consumer rights directive, has shown that in spite of a smaller number of actors being involved in these negotiations and an apparent overturn of committee amendments by the consolidated amendment containing the compromise, committee influence cannot be ruled out since the actors involved are committee members and the final compromise is still sanctioned by the responsible committee before the plenary final vote. Moreover, committee amendments in these cases are not overturned by plenary but replaced by the compromise text resulted from negotiations with the other institutions and subsequently agreed in committee. Therefore, based on the theoretical approach presented in chapter 3 and the findings from the two previous empirical chapters, the main argument underlying this research can be formulated as follows: without any prejudice to the variety of processes, interactions and different interests that exist in the EP - be it interactions between different services in the Parliament, between representatives of other institutions, between the interests of national parties, European transnational parties and EP political groups, which can sometimes be in conflict with one another – committees play a central part in decision-making in the EP. They predict and exert influence upon the final vote cast in plenary. This increased role for committees is the result of EP's relentless institutional policy of gaining more powers and ensuring legitimacy through an increased legislative output. In a system of separation of powers where there is limited scope for political group

discipline and where MEPs seek career advancement in their national parties and governments rather than at EU level, the EP relies on a regular basis on building consensus to ensure it can prevail as a legislator, offering a more technical image throughout its committee system.

Within this setting, discussions and negotiations inside political groups make-up a significant part of the legislative process and analysing these can reveal how an EP group position is aligned from committee debates to plenary final vote. The principal hypothesis of this chapter is that political groups in the EP, being subject to constraints imposed by a federal system, a divided government, the separation of powers, as well as their trans-national nature, internal structure and system of organisation, are less likely to impose a position to their members in committee than they are to follow a line previously set by them. More precisely, this chapter argues that MEPs assigned to their committees can ensure through their activity that the political group in the final vote of the full chamber follows agreements reached in committee. With the help of political group meetings that take place twice a month and the debates held here, members can work towards establishing the group line on a topic previously dealt with by their assigned specialised committee in the EP. Such work is carried out starting with a presentation of reports discussed or already voted in committee and set on the next agenda of the plenary. It is based on the expression of views of group members on any topic from the EP committee or plenary agenda that might be considered sensitive for the group policy line and is characterised by the fact that MEPs active in the specialised committee responsible for the given policy enjoy the recognition of their expertise by their group colleagues. From observations in the political group meetings, correlated with results of votes in committee and



plenary of reports discussed there and after an analysis of the number of amendments, it becomes clear that committee members influence and structure the group position along the committee line during political group meetings. These meetings constitute, along with rapporteurs' activity and the number of amendments, the third channel through which committees impact the EP legislative process.

Consequently, in this chapter, I investigate how discussions and negotiations inside political groups can lead to MEPs in plenary voting along the same lines as in committees. To do so, I will first look at the internal organisation of EP groups, how their meetings are structured, how positions are expressed here and who the main actors present at this stage are. The chapter will then assess the involvement of political groups in committee activity and the group internal structure covering committee workload. Finally, it will investigate the internal group decision-making process linked to a plenary vote and the existing frameworks at group level for ensuring cohesion between committee and plenary vote. The main data in this chapter are based on fieldwork observations conducted over the course of one year (May 2010 to June 2011) in the EP. They consist of qualitative data gathered from the group meetings of one of the three largest EP groups, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), as well as from interviews with MEPs from this group.

Using process tracing (Box-Steffensmeier, Brady and Collier, 2008: 703) to illustrate the 'how-we-come-to-know nuts and bolts for mechanism-based accounts of social change' (Checkel, 2005: 5) and trace the sequence of interactions, the chapter reveals the linkage mechanisms of voting alignment between committee and plenary stage

inside political groups and presents the results of these observations. Looking at three different cases where debates on prior agreements in committees were held in political group meetings, this method helps to verify if there are established patterns of interactions in group meetings that explain how the decision-making process here links the committee stage and plenary stage voting results. The three cases have been selected because of the divisions present in the group on the issues covered by the reports, thus making it possible, for the purpose of this study, to distinguish the line of committee members from that of their colleagues and establish to what extent the debate in the group influenced their position. The divisive issues were: the bailout funds (the Greek crisis case), the distribution of funds in cohesion policy (the report on the Commission's Fifth Cohesion Report) and copyright enforcement (the report on cultural and creative industries). With the presentation of the decision-making process in these three cases, the chapter will offer a detailed, descriptive account of the activity inside an EP group.

## **6.1 Political groups in the EP**

This section of the chapter will look at the existing literature on political groups in the EP and establish the position that the current work holds within that body of research.

So far, studies of the political groups in the EP have been either descriptive or informative in regards to the daily activities that these groups have had since the creation of the institution (Costa, 2001) or have tried to explain the causal link between the activity of the MEPs and the influence of political groups, in particular

the indications that the former might receive from national parties or European parties (Hix and Lord, 1997). In a very comprehensive account of the work and mechanisms of decision-making inside the EP, Olivier Costa (2001) argues that MEPs stand to gain more from their affiliation to a political group than from being independent, since this “association” can offer them access to logistical, informational and institutional facilities that are available to groups. Apart from access to resources, however, there is also the ideological dimension, which accounts for MEPs choosing one political group over another in the EP. Moreover, Maurer *et al.* (2008), in an article aiming to identify the reasons behind political group membership in the EP, examine the case of the British Conservatives in 2006, who attempted to leave the EPP group they were part of at the time, and conclude that: ‘national parties acting in unitary fashion tend to belong to the party group that maximizes their opportunity to realize office and policy goals in the Parliament’ (Maurer *et al.* 2008: 259). They believe that ‘in most cases this is best achieved by joining the largest possible group which shares the delegation’s socioeconomic (and, to a far lesser degree, EU integration-related) policy preferences’ (Maurer, *et al.* 2008: 259). This is to say that apart from resources, ideological or socio-economic preferences, there are also strong office seeking and policy goals that account for the political group membership in the EP.

Consequently, the political groups play an important role within the different layers of the decision making process of this institution (Costa, 2001) and they form the tissue that connects the institutional activities. It would be difficult, if not almost impossible, for an independent MEP, part of the non-attached members of the EP to obtain a rapporteurship in the Parliament or a chairmanship in any of the committees. They

have to belong to a political formation if they hope to advance their careers in any way in the EP. Lindberg (2008), in a paper analysing the rapporteur appointment for the Services Directive, finds evidence of the importance of political group influence in the case of rapporteur selection and concludes that ‘it could not be clearly determined whether the involvement of the party group leadership or the national party delegation was more decisive in the appointment process’ (Lindberg, 2008: 1200). Indeed, in the EP, a constant interplay between the national delegations’ policy preferences and the group’s preferences continues to prevail and this characterises most debates that take place during the group meetings.

Still, such aspects linked to membership of a political group are pivotal for an MEP mostly when it comes to matters related to the organisation of daily activities and less when it comes to political and technical decisions at committee stage. More precisely, I argue that in such instances MEPs in committee are more likely to be the ones setting out the guidelines for the group position, rather than just actors in a process responding to a certain request for vote and respecting the partisan line imposed.

The ability of political groups to influence votes of MEPs, as opposed to the national party instructions, has been questioned for obvious reasons linked to the existing electoral systems and the selection of candidates for the European elections (Hix, 2005; Hix, Raunio and Scully, 1999; Hix, 2005). The main argument is that when votes with great implications at domestic level are on the agenda in the EP, national parties tend to issue voting indications, and these will more frequently be followed than the EP group ones (Hix and Lord, 1996). Indeed, domestic parties hold a number of important resources that allow them to ensure members’ loyalty, the essential one being the monopoly they hold over the re-election of the MEPs and their presence on

the party lists on an eligible position. The episode of the nomination of Jacques Santer as President of the European Commission illustrates the extent of this influence as Hix and Lord point out. After an analysis of the parliamentary sessions, their research concluded that MEPs had followed the voting instructions of their national parties to the detriment of the EP group line (Hix and Lord, 1997:60).

Furthermore, the existing body of research has looked at political groups either in the framework of establishing where the preferences of an MEP lie – with the EP group or the domestic party – or in an attempt to isolate the position of the MEPs at the centre of this triangle (Raunio, 2000). At the same time, the internal cohesiveness of EP groups has been analysed and explained by the strict discipline imposed, with the help of roll-call votes (individual recorded votes of MEPs), and the resources that the groups hold to advance the individual careers of members, such as nomination as chair of a committee, awarding them rapporteurships on important pieces of legislation or key position within the internal structure of the group (Hix, 2005: 189). Nonetheless, there are alternative compelling explanations to the existing party discipline in the EP groups, apart from the use of roll-call votes and the promise of important offices in the legislature for MEPs. This is the case with the ‘perceived preference coherence’ principle (Ringe, 2010) arguing that MEPs across committees judge the preferences of their political group colleagues, members in other committees, to be the closest to their own policy preferences. This perception explains why they accept and follow the position of a colleague – or the decisions taken by a committee – when there is a group debate or a vote in the plenary session. Ringe (2010) even stresses that most of the MEPs, responding in a survey carried out as part of his study, speak about ‘trust’ (Ringe, 2010) in another colleague’s opinion or

indication of vote as long as he is member in the responsible committee or he is recognised as a specialist in a particular field by the rest of the group. His main argument is that within the confines of such specialised institutional work, MEPs have to acknowledge that they cannot have a full grasp of the implications of every legislative proposal that Parliament has to vote on and this explains why they consider the view held by one of their group colleagues, member in the respective committee, to be the one closest to their preferences. Consequently, when the report comes up for a final vote in plenary, most members follow their colleagues from the responsible committee and the voting list established by the rapporteur of their group. This explanation accounts for the high degree of cohesion inside the group and it reveals the pattern of influence of the committee decision over the plenary. However, it does not fully grasp the entire spectrum of interactions that exists between the two stages: committee and plenary. Indeed, an MEP is very likely to follow at the final vote in plenary the agreements reached by his group colleagues if he considers their policy preferences to be closest to his, but this aspect is only the result of a series of interactions based on exchanges of information through debates in group meetings, where committee members define the group line. The same committee members can be considered to perform a so-called lobbying activity by their group colleagues in support of committee agreements, pushing through a committee decision in the group policy position. The distinctive difference to Ringe's model here is that, under these circumstances, the 'perceived preference coherence' model only serves to explain the end result in a process of transferral of information from committee members to the group members, who subsequently come to perceive their preferences as being similar to those of their committee colleagues after a sequence of interactions between the group and committee members.

Within this framework, group debates and negotiations help to express and justify different views of MEPs on a particular subject or report, for the purpose of streamlining them into a common group position before the plenary vote. This is what makes their analysis important for this study, since it can explain how decisions taken by group members in the specialised parliamentary committees are transferred at the plenary stage.

However, there is a need to give a clearer account of the actual functioning of these groups in practice, to analyse the results from their meetings and debates and the way in which they affect the activity of the Parliament as a whole, since the focus so far has been more on the political group and how it can ensure representativity throughout the Parliament's legislative process.

Therefore, the next section of this chapter takes a first look at the political groups within the institution and then presents in detail the organisation of the group chosen for study: the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE).

## **6.2 Internal organisation of a European political group**

This section presents the structure of political groups currently active in the EP and the main components that form the basis of their internal organisation and working procedures: the Vice-presidents, the Bureau and the Secretariat of the political group.

There are two different types of party structures at European level, the EP political groups being one of them and the European transnational parties being the other. The national parties that were represented in the institution in the beginning have established the EP groups, which have since evolved into organisations with complex structures, rules, designated offices and permanent staff (Hix, 2005:186). The 7<sup>th</sup> EP counted seven political groups and each of these groups had a structure of organisation that allowed it to coordinate and supervise, in as far as possible, the activity of its members. They were: the group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) (EPP), the group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament (S&D), the group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), the group of European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR), the group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, the Confederal Group of the European United Left – Nordic Green Left (GUE), the group Europe for Freedom and Democracy (EFD). Apart from these, there are also MEPs that do not belong to any of the groups in the EP and they are referred to as non-attached Members.

The transnational parties make up the other party structure at European level and they are umbrella organisations that group various parties at national level according to their ideologies and affiliations. The EU Regulation number 2004 dating from 2003 (OJ 2003 L 297) sets out the main requirements for establishing a trans-national party and the ways in which they can be funded.<sup>59</sup> An important condition mentioned in the Regulation is that such a party 'must be represented, in at least one quarter of Member States, by Members of the European Parliament or in the national Parliaments or regional Parliaments or in the regional assemblies, or it must have received, in at least

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<sup>59</sup>Regulation (EC) No. 2004/2003 of the EP and of the Council of the European Union of 4 November 2003 on the regulations governing political parties at European level and the rules regarding their funding.



one quarter of the Member States, at least three per cent of the votes cast in each of those Member States at the most recent European Parliament elections' (OJ 2003 L 297). Hix explains that transnational parties are in close connection with the political groups in the EP and that after 1993, 'instead of being simple transnational umbrella organisations for fighting EP elections, the new Euro-parties began to develop as extra-parliamentary organisations at the European level, much like the extra-parliamentary central offices and central committees of parties in the domestic arena' (Hix, 2005: 187).

Both these European party structures have been partly created out of necessity, out of a need to coordinate and ensure representation, and have developed alongside the EP. Their internal organisation, whilst maintaining its particularities from one group to another, follows mainly the same lines for all EP political groups. The structure comprises a president, supported by a number of vice-presidents of the group and the activity is coordinated through a set of general group meetings and working groups that analyse the work in parliamentary committees. There is also an internal structure that groups the leaders of the national delegations inside the group, as is the case with the Bureau of the ALDE group. In addition, there are policy advisers that offer assistance to MEPs during the drafting of reports and in their daily committee work. There is no specific cross-party account of the duties and general tasks that policy advisers must have since such aspects are usually foreseen in the internal rules of procedure of each political group. However, from observations carried out during the fieldwork and interviews, it is clear that the advisers ensure MEPs responsible for drafting a report, a resolution or an opinion are familiar with and aware of the political group policy on a particular subject. They also constitute a first point of

contact for any member wishing to obtain more information on the committee or on the latest parliamentary initiatives in a particular field. Subsequently, all of the staff involved in the daily running of a political group, as well as in the management of the resources, is part of the Secretariat of the group.

The three main EP groups – the EPP, the S&D and the ALDE – have more organised working procedures and accountable structures, with a clear set of internal duties for each administrative staff and an appointed number of policy advisers for each of the specialised committees in the EP. The same cannot be said about other groups, such as the GUE/NGL group or the EFD group. Due to what may be a lack of human or financial resources, their organisation structures are reduced, sometimes lacking the advisory staff, leaving the MEP that holds the membership in the parliamentary committee to coordinate the representation of the group views with the help of his staff.<sup>60</sup> This can be explained, to a certain degree, by the small number of MEPs that are part of these groups, 34 in the case of GUE/NGL and 27 in the case of EFD, compared to the 264 members from the EPP or the 185 Members of the S&D (figures which were valid in November 2011). Also, for the non-attached members that do not have stable group structures, there is, however, a Secretariat General that represents them at EP internal meetings and the Conference of Presidents. This minimal form of organisation is imperative in order for the independent MEPs to be able to exert their functions within the institution.

So far, the first section of the chapter has provided an overview of the political groups in the Parliament. In terms of the organisation, they seem to follow the same pattern

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<sup>58</sup>Interview with MEP Assistant from the Confederal Group of the European United Left – Nordic Green Left, 23 September 2010.

and internal working procedures that can be found in any political party. There are indeed variations in the structure of the groups across the political spectrum in the EP, but these appear to be mostly a consequence of the limited resources some have at their disposal in order to manage their activity in the legislature.

However, in order to be able to account for the results from the group meetings and the involvement of political groups in committee decisions, I shall present in the following section an account of the debates inside one of these groups: the ALDE. The choice for this specific EP group is, in part, motivated by its position in the institution during EP7, as one of the three largest political groups, and by its potential to become a coalition partner of one of the other two: the EPP and the S&D.

Observations carried out for this study indicate that this particular feature of ALDE, of being able to vote with either one or the other of the largest groups in the EP has led, in turn, to dynamic series of group meetings, where the expressed views are very heterogeneous. Furthermore, for the entire duration of the fieldwork, this was the political group that allowed me to attend its group meetings and working groups. For the other groups I have looked at the data regarding their internal structure that is publicly available or I have obtained additional information from interviews carried out with members of the group staff or assistants.

### **6.3 Organisation of political group internal structure covering committee workload**

EP political groups each have an internal form of organisation that is created to manage the flow of activity related to the legislative process inside the institution. For

the three largest groups in the 7<sup>th</sup> EP, the EPP, the S&D and the ALDE this appears to be similar.

The EPP, which groups 271 members (situation in November 2011), has as its main political organ the Bureau. This consists of ‘the Presidency, the heads of national delegations, the President, Vice-Presidents and Quaestors of Parliament that are members of the group, the chairmen of parliamentary committees, the coordinators in the parliamentary committees, the chairman and the Secretary-General of the European People's Party if they are Members of the European Parliament, as well as one co-opted Member for every 10 Members of a national delegation’.<sup>61</sup> In addition to this, there are four working groups, which are each divided according to policy areas and are chaired by Vice-Presidents of the group. They ‘coordinate the members’ parliamentary work in the 20 committees’ and as a result, ‘their conclusions are made known to the Group, which then decides what position to adopt in plenary sessions of the European Parliament.’<sup>62</sup> Consequently, the meetings of the working groups are the first arenas where the group discusses the activities, negotiations and decisions reached in committee.

There is also the Secretariat of the party. The latter is formed of group staff, such as policy advisers, and has as its main responsibility that of assisting MEPs in their daily parliamentary work.

As mentioned previously, the internal organisation follows the same pattern with the other political groups. Therefore, in the case of the S&D group, the organisation is

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<sup>61</sup>Group structure of the European People’s Party, source: [www.eppgroup.eu](http://www.eppgroup.eu).

<sup>62</sup>Group structure of the European People’s Party, source: [www.eppgroup.eu](http://www.eppgroup.eu).

also made up of a Presidency, a Bureau and a Secretariat of the EP political group.<sup>63</sup> There is also a coordination of policies through the working groups and their meetings, one difference being that the S&D have five working groups. However, the principles behind their functioning remain the same, each group dealing with a set of committees, organised horizontally across a policy area. This is the case, for example, with one of the working groups that follow matters related to the Foreign Affairs, Security and Defence, Development, International Trade and Human Rights committees, all of which are analysing and deciding on matters of EU external policy. One, possibly two, of the group Vice-Presidents chairs the working groups. Again, it is clear that the legislative process within the EP has had an impact on the way political groups have decided to set up their internal framework and coordination, since it is becoming increasingly evident that there are clear similarities amongst them.

The ALDE political group is the third largest group in the EP, after the EPP and the S&D. The group has 85 Members in total and its structure is formed of a presidency, a Bureau and the Secretariat of the group. As part of the ALDE Presidency, the President, together with the other six Vice-Presidents, manages the organisation of the group and the Bureau. They also chair the ALDE group meetings and the working groups of the political group. The Bureau is formed of the Vice-Presidents along with the leaders of each national delegation present in the EP. The party line is established during group meetings, in general, and working group meetings (where policy is discussed), in particular. The political group meetings take place before each plenary session of the EP.

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<sup>63</sup> Interview with a MEP Assistant from the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, 13 January 2011.

One interesting fact that can be observed here, just from the scheduling perspective, is that such meetings are always planned before the plenary sessions of the full chamber, a fact that is also valid for the other two political groups previously mentioned.

In regards to the follow-up of committee workload, the ALDE Working Groups, three in total (simply referred to as Working Group A, B and C and covering the work of six to seven committees each) are divided by policy areas and committees and they meet to discuss reports that are on the agenda. Here, the rapporteurs (MEPs in charge of drafting the Parliament's position on a commission proposal, a resolution or a consultative act), the shadow rapporteurs (the representative of the political group responsible for following the report in question, as well as with seeking compromise within the committee on behalf of the group) or the group coordinators present the results of their activity in their respective committee. The group coordinators play a particularly important part in the political group policy coordination. While Rule 192 of the EP Rules of procedure states that 'coordinators prepare decisions to be taken by the committee, in particular decisions on procedure and the appointment of rapporteurs',<sup>64</sup> the ALDE Rules of Procedure seem to provide a clearer explanation of the essential role these play in committee activities. As such, coordinators 'shall provide a political steer for the entire Group through the range of policies that will be dealt with by the particular committee, according to the policy line taken by the Group. They will advise the Bureau on policy matters. [...] The coordinators shall, in particular, co-ordinate the activities of the Members of their committee and shall ensure that the Group is both coherent and well represented in the respective fields of

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<sup>62</sup>Rules of procedure of the European Parliament, EP7, September 2011.

competence of their committees'<sup>65</sup>. From here it could be concluded that the group is in effect monitoring the activity of its members in committees and ensuring cohesion with the help of the group coordinator. Moreover, according to the EP Rules of procedure<sup>66</sup>, committee members are first nominated by political groups following the decision of the Conference of Presidents, the highest decision making body in the Parliament, they are validated by the full chamber through a vote cast in the plenary session. Since political groups appear to be pivotal in deciding which MEPs will be appointed to the most influential committees, usually those working consistently on EU legislative acts, there is scope for acknowledging the existence of an ex-ante control from groups towards their members resulting in a significant impact on decisions taken in committees. Groups can rely on group coordinators to exercise control over members' committee activity and continue to have an impact after the assignments have been secured. However, their potential influence is constrained by the actual working procedures, by the existence of a common understanding and shared preferences between committee members from the same group and their coordinator, while at the same time it has to be stressed that the coordination of the decision-making process at this stage is more complex.

In practice, reports discussed in the Parliament are put on the agenda of the group, either Working Groups or general group meetings, should the rapporteur or the shadow rapporteur consider there are contentious issues that would need to be discussed before the final vote takes place. This might also be done following a suggestion from the policy adviser responsible or the group coordinator. If the report

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<sup>65</sup>Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Rules of Procedure, 4 February 2009, available at: [www.alde.eu/alde-group/alde-rules-procedure/](http://www.alde.eu/alde-group/alde-rules-procedure/).

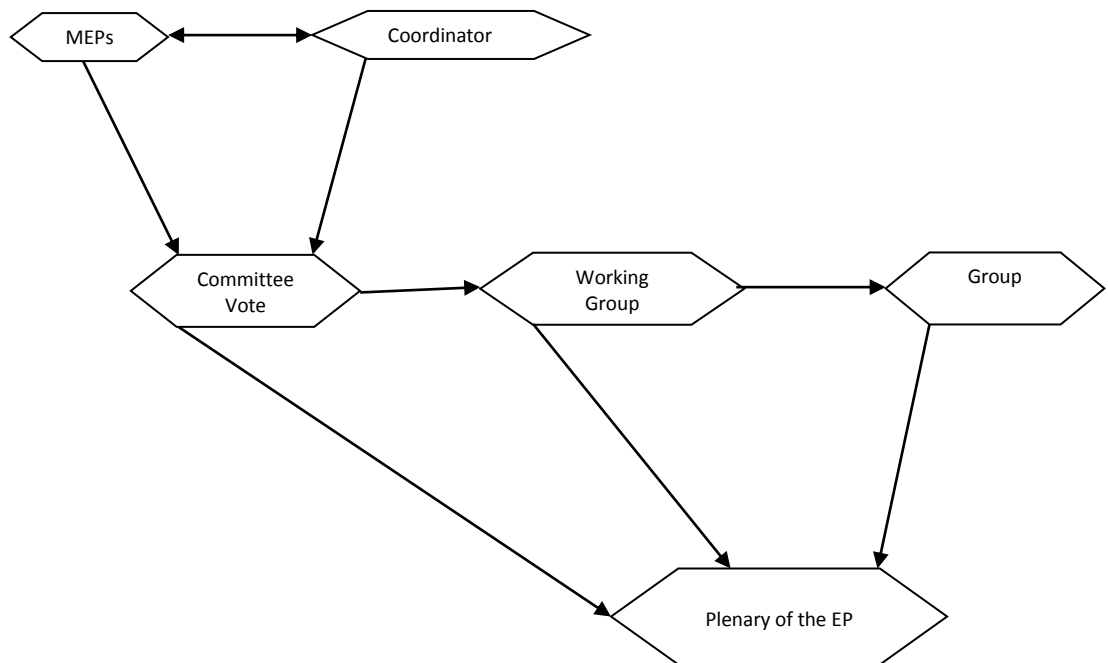
<sup>66</sup>Rule 186: Composition of Committees, Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament, 2012.

in question has met no objections from the other members active in committee, if the vote cast at this stage has been unanimous, then the group will have no need to discuss it further. The observations gathered from the ALDE group meetings in the second half of 2010 and first half of 2011 have indicated that, unless there are particular issues, the report might simply be flagged as another resolution that will be voted in plenary. At the same time, the Working Group A, B or C, after hearing the comments from the members of the specialised committee may decide to consider a debate on a report closed, not requiring further discussion inside the group. This also implies that voting instructions, which are usually presented in a 'voting list', remain the same as those established at the time the voting took place in committee, only to be reviewed to accommodate additional instructions in the event there are amendments tabled in plenary.

Implications of internal group procedures, as the abovementioned one, bear evidence for the fact that group meetings and their decisions rely on the expertise, accounts, preferences and perceptions of members (either rapporteurs, shadow rapporteurs or group coordinators) in the committee that is in charge of the respective policy. The flow chart below illustrates the internal decision-making process for the three political groups in question. It tracks the steps that a decision on a report follows from committee stage, where MEPs and the group coordinator discuss, amend and negotiate Parliament's position on a Commission proposal, up to the stage where this is voted in committee. If the file is a sensitive one, the rapporteur or the coordinator of the group, after the vote in committee, brings it to the attention of the responsible working group at its next meeting, where it is discussed and where the group position on the final vote in plenary is decided. If, however, no decision is reached at this



point, then the working group chair can send the file for debate in the political group meeting prior to the final vote in plenary. This is the last step in this process at which the group has the chance to align the views of its members. Here, the group rapporteur and coordinator play an essential role in the debate. From this point onwards, any last minute changes and plenary amendments that might be requested to the report by other groups prior to the vote, but after the discussion in the group meeting, remain at the discretion of the rapporteur, with the assistance of the policy advisor.



**Figure 6.1: The decision-making process from committee vote to plenary vote**

Therefore, the political group relies and may ultimately follow the preferences of committee members, a factor which explains the high level of voting cohesion in plenary and the likelihood of a reduced degree of variance, as presented in chapter 5,

between the votes in committee and the final votes in the House. From here the hypothesis of this chapter and third hypothesis of the thesis can be derived:

*H3: Through their activity, appointed group members ensure committee majority decisions are supported and followed by their political group in the plenary session.*

This implies that committee members are not just simple representatives of the political group that appointed them, but rather that, through a set of interactions in group debates and internal negotiations, members bring expertise from the committee policy area to inform the opinion of the group. In addition to this, they have the possibility to steer the group position to a line that is in agreement with the decisions already reached in committee. In practice, this involves committee members' ability to agenda-set, thus gathering support from their colleagues by informally 'coercing' them to back agreements already achieved in committee. Members do more than just disseminate information (Krehbiel, 1990) and establish their position as experts colleagues can 'trust' (Ringe, 2010). They impact on their non-member group colleagues' policy preferences during these group meetings. From the field observations and case studies it is clear that committee members and national delegation leaders are the ones that take the floor during these meetings. This entire practice is justified to a lesser extent by an informational rationale, but more significantly by a need to ensure coherence of the political group line in both committee and plenary. The result is that members in the plenary vote the same as their colleagues in committee not because there is overall agreement in the group (although this might sometimes be the case with files that do not touch on group

divisive issues), not because of coincidence (the data on the results of votes in committees, as presented in Chapter 4 indicates that there is a significant correlation between the results of the two votes), but because committee members, are able to guide the group towards the common line initially established by them in committee. However, should the hypothesis not be verified, then evidence should be found of a position and preferences of MEPs in committee differing from those of the group as a whole. Also, as a result of that, there may not be much similarity between results of votes in committee and plenary, since committees and their MEPs would be acting as outliers.

The analysis of groups' internal organisation in the EP has shown that the structures of the three largest political groups resemble each other to a great extent. This appears to be the direct result of developments related to the organisation of legislative activity inside the institution and, in turn, influences the way in which negotiations are carried out and decisions are taken within the EP. But, most importantly, it has illustrated how an EP 'opinion' on a Commission proposal is formulated and delineated at committee stage and subsequently adopted by the House with minor or no changes. This particular point is where committee members and group coordinators bring their contribution to the alignment of plenary and committee vote, since they are the main actors able to align the position of the group in regards to a proposal through the internal mechanisms based on the meetings and negotiations that have been presented in the case of the three political groups.

Therefore, the following section of this chapter will present a sample of different debates in group meetings, using as reference the reports included in chapter 4 and

chapter 5. This will help test the hypothesis and identify the role that groups and their internal negotiations play within the process as a whole. Moreover, the analysis will shed light on the question of whether or not committee decisions are replicated in the final votes of the plenary.

#### **6.4 Existing frameworks at party group level ensuring cohesion between committee and plenary**

The previous section has presented the framework based on which a position reached in committee may be consolidated inside the group, with the influence of the group rapporteur and the coordinator. The next section concentrates on three key debates inside the ALDE group in order to see how the process is implemented. Moreover, with the help of this analysis, the hypothesis will be tested and the results will be verified against the data on the votes on reports in committee and plenary from the previous two chapters.

To begin with, the ALDE group in the EP enjoys a very advantageous position in terms of policy bargaining and coalition formation, since it constitutes the main viable coalition partner for any of the other two big groups. Simon Hix analyses the coalition formation in the EP between the main party groups during the 1999 – 2001 period and points to a pattern of coalition that he refers to as the ‘grand coalition’ (Hix, 2002: 96), between the EPP and the Party of European Socialists – PES – (the previous name held by the group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats – S&D). Hix argues that this coalition is the result of specific voting rules of the

legislature that uses either simple majority or absolute majority. He notes that ‘with the growing use of a simple majority in most rounds of the legislative process, and with further consolidation of the size of the PES and EPP compared with the smaller groups, there is more scope for competition between these two groups.’ (Hix, 2002: 99). In such cases, the Liberals gain more power and become the decisive actor at the centre of coalition formation and the passing of a piece of legislation (Hix, 2001). Moreover, in an article investigating differences in voting behaviour of political groups in EP5 (1999 – 2004) and first part of EP6 (2004 – 2006) Hix and Noury (2009) discover differences in the ALDE voting behaviour. If in EP5 ‘the Liberals voted approximately the same amount of time with the Socialists as they did with the Conservatives’ (Hix and Noury, 2009:172), during the first two years of EP6 ‘the Liberals voted significantly more often with the Conservatives than with the Socialists’ (Hix and Noury, 2009:172). In EP7 beginning in 2009, there was a greater chance that ALDE sides with either one of the two largest groups, rather than the two forming a grand coalition. This can be the result of the increased number of own-initiative reports, which require simple majority to pass, in comparison to the legislative reports that have been drafted by the Parliament, during EP7, and which require absolute majority. Consequently, a report<sup>67</sup> from Votewatch, an organisation monitoring the votes of MEPs in the EP, trying to identify the most influential political groups in this institution, pointed out that ALDE was, most of the times, a winner in terms of bargaining and coalition formation. ALDE appears to be the group that manages to have its interests best represented in the EP. In spite of all this, the national delegations (formed by MEPs from the same national party in a specific country) that are part of the group share different views and find themselves in almost

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<sup>67</sup> Votewatch Report ‘*Voting in the 2009-2014 European Parliament: Who Holds the Power?*’, July 2011. Source: [www.votewatch.eu](http://www.votewatch.eu).

constant opposition to each other. This statement is the result of observations obtained from group meetings over the course of several months with the ALDE group and out of these, three particular cases have appeared to be more prominent.

**Table 6.1: Case studies**

<b>Case</b>	<b>Committee responsible on this topic</b>	<b>Divisive issues in the group</b>
Greek crisis and use of EU funds	Economic and Monetary Affairs Budgets	Use of EU funds for bailout
Commission's Fifth Cohesion Report	Regional Development	Expenditure and increase in EU structural funds for the next programming period
Unlocking the potential of cultural and creative industries	Culture and Education	Copyright enforcement in the case of cultural and creative industries

The same three case studies have been analysed from the perspective of the rapporteurs involved and the number of amendments in chapters 4 and 5 respectively. As previously mentioned, the selection has been based on the intra-party divisive nature of some of the issues they dealt with (bailout funds, structural funds, copyright enforcement) and the debates that took place in committee. Moreover, in all three cases I have been able to map the decision-making with the help of process tracing from the initial stages of the draft report until the final vote in plenary.

#### 6. 4.1 The Greek Crisis and use of EU funds

The first of the abovementioned group debates<sup>68</sup> focused on the Greek crisis, future measures of financial control and sanctioning of Member States, as well as management of EU funds. The discussion in the group was meant to establish the ALDE line before the debate that would take place, the next day, in plenary on the subject of the Conclusions of the European Council meeting of 17 June 2010. At this group meeting, the observer could witness at least five different points of view put forward by national delegations: the German delegation was of the view that immediate control and sanctioning measures must be implemented at EU level in order to stop EU funding from going, in the future, to any Member State that does not follow the provisions of the stability and growth pact and does not limit its deficit levels; the Italian delegation was of the opinion that control measures could be implemented but that the sanctioning should not involve any reduction or stop in EU funding, for fear this might damage the already slim premises for economic growth; the Finnish delegation was supportive of a mechanism that would allow for a limitation in the budget destined for EU funds for countries that were not keeping to the provisions of the stability and growth pact, in order to avoid a situation where EU money would be spent on a member state economy that is already failing.

Furthermore, MEPs from new Member States, such as Bulgaria and Romania, were of the opinion that more should be done in terms of funding, regardless of the financial discipline of the countries involved, in order to offer support to EU states that were less secure, compared to others, in their economic position and dependent on funds from the European Union to try and bridge the economic gap. Finally, the Swedish

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<sup>68</sup> ALDE Group Meeting, 22 June 2010.

delegation saw the need for more fiscal discipline as extremely important to the EU economic recovery and argued that funds should not be stopped for countries with high levels of public debt but their distribution should be subject to them fulfilling the provisions of the stability and growth pact. At the same time, the committee members, mainly group coordinators, from the Budgets, Budgetary Control and Economic and monetary affairs committees, were of the opinion that in order to be able to control and impose a financial discipline on Member States failing to respect the stability and growth pact, an independent supervisory authority had to be established. This view was in line with that of the Commission and the Report of the High-Level Group on financial supervision in the EU<sup>69</sup> (European Commission, 2009) and it was based on technical debates that had previously taken place in committee meetings.<sup>70</sup> In his speech in plenary the next day, the leader of the ALDE, Guy Verhofstadt, integrated the views of committee members in the group line he presented and, instead of focusing on the sanctioning aspects, aspects which were clearly divisive for the group, he stressed the importance of an independent control authority with potential sanctioning attributions. He was careful not to expose the differences of opinion voiced in group meetings by members and chose to debate a more neutral aspect, that of the independent control authority, which was not as contentious as the topic of sanctions itself.

‘It is an evidence that the Member States of the Union have to play an important role, a vital role I should say, in the economic strategy of the Union and of the Eurozone in the next years. But the most important question is another. The most important question today is who will do the control and who shall do the sanctioning if some of the Member States are not fulfilling the conditions? That is the key question. Will the

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<sup>69</sup>*Report of the High-Level Group on financial supervision in the EU*, chaired by Jacques de Larosière, European Commission, Brussels, 25 February 2009.

<sup>70</sup>Economic and Monetary Affairs committee meetings: 22 February 2010, 22 March 2010 and 14 April 2010; Budgets committee meetings: 7 April 2010 and 27 April 2010; Budgetary Control committee meetings: 26 April 2010.

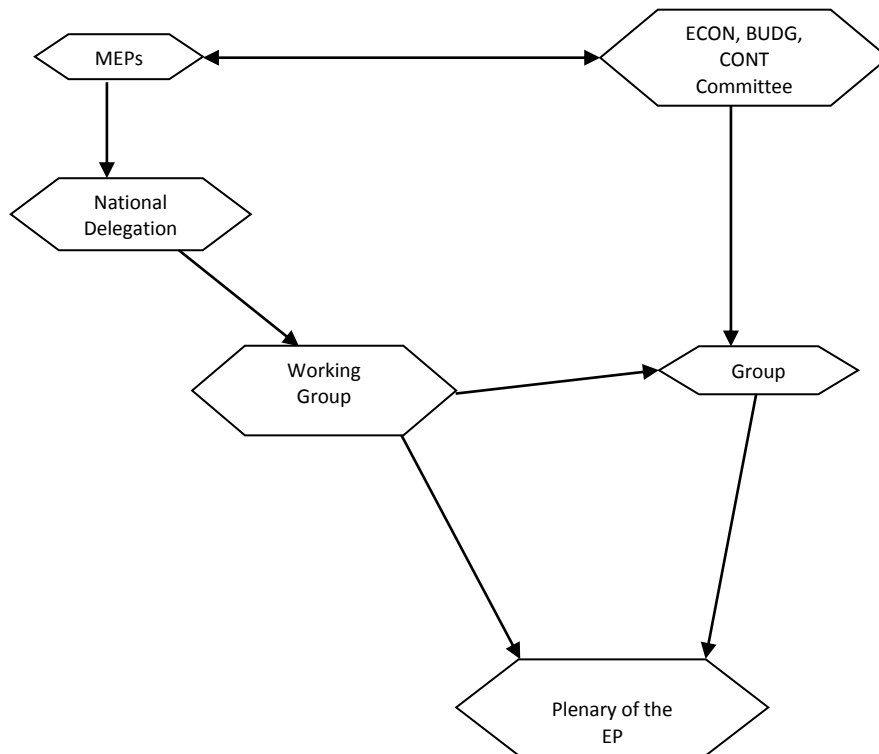


control be in the hands of the Member States themselves, of the Council, and will the Member States sanction themselves? Or will it be an independent institution, a communitarian institution of the European Union? That is the key question of today and I have to tell you: I don't think that there is anybody here in this House who believes that the Member States shall sanction themselves. They did not do it in the past, why should they do it in the future?' (Guy Verhofstadt, speech in the plenary session of the EP, 23 June 2010)

He went on to stress the importance of an independent body ensuring fiscal control at EU level:

'The national supervision did not work in the crisis. There was not one national supervisor who alarmed the politicians at the moment of the financial crisis. And now they are explaining that's a good system, that they have simply to coordinate themselves. So what we need in the Council now is that there is pressure from the Member States on themselves to go in the direction of a European supervision authority based on the proposal of the Commission.' (Guy Verhofstadt, speech in the plenary session of the EP, 23 June 2010)

The account of these different views inside the group and the process through which a group line came to be constructed (Chart 6.2) and finally expressed in the speech of the group leader is edifying. It shows how diverging opinions can co-exist inside an EP group and it illustrates the multitude of interests that each national delegation represents, while also being an intrinsic part of an EP group. In this case, it was the personality of the group leader, Guy Verhofstadt, his experience and strong views together with the expertise of prominent committee members calling for the creation of an independent supervisory authority, which account for the construction of the group line. The interventions made in the group meeting by group coordinators were influential here in moving MEPs preferences towards a common line.



**Figure 6.2: Decision-making process in the case of the Greek crisis debate**

Still, voting records, for example those gathered by Votewatch for each plenary session,<sup>71</sup> as well as research on the voting of MEPs, have all stressed the important levels of cohesion present the group votes (Attina, 1990; Brzinski, 1995; Hix, 2005: 187). This implies that diverging views are ultimately structured towards a common group line. Therefore, it remains an issue to establish if indeed, the group discipline imposed by calling for a record of individual votes of MEPs, can account for such voting cohesion. I argue that this type of explanation only offers an answer to a part of the question, while the rest can be accounted for with the help of the link that group

<sup>71</sup> Votewatch is a website set up to collect data from the voting lists, attendance lists and activity of MEPs, taken from the European Parliament's website after each plenary session. Source: [www.votewatch.eu](http://www.votewatch.eu)

activity has with the committee activity through its appointed members. More precisely, even in the case of the debate presented above, the majority of speakers taking the floor during the meeting were members from parliamentary committees with policy areas relevant to the subject. It was their opinion on the necessity to create an independent control authority that was voiced by the group leader in his speech and then integrated by other group members. Such patterns of negotiations and alignment of views, as presented in this case, describe a set of interactions taking place within the policy space situated between committee and group policy preference areas. Within this space, MEPs from specialised parliamentary committees, also members that are group coordinators, mediate a link between the group, its decisions and the position of the committee.

#### 6. 4.2 The Commission's Fifth Cohesion Report and the strategy for post-2013 cohesion policy

Another important debate that took place in the ALDE group was focused on the Report on the Commission's Fifth Cohesion Report and the strategy for post-2013 cohesion policy. The rapporteur Markus Pieper, an MEP from the EPP group, had a difficult task in the main committee leading this report, the Regional Development Committee<sup>72</sup>. As mentioned in chapter 5, the initial draft of this report received 569 amendments proposed by all members in committee from different political groups. These amendments were centred around the idea that future projects and programmes should be focused on bringing European added value and targeted on areas where an

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<sup>72</sup>Regional Development Committee meeting on 12 April 2011.

integrated European approach would be necessary to ensure economic growth and development. Amendments<sup>73</sup> tabled by S&D, Greens and GUE/NGL members stressed the importance of a social dimension of cohesion policy (amendments 75 and 77) where the involvement of social and economic actors, together with local and regional stakeholders, in partnerships would be mandatory. Amendments co-signed by the rapporteur, the EPP group coordinator in committee and the ECR shadow, stressed the importance of the subsidiarity principle in cohesion policy and called for additional responsibility to be taken by the actors involved ‘by introducing detailed binding provisions in a Territorial Pact to be decided in each Member State’ (amendment 78). So, as is usually the case with own-initiative reports in the EP, this report received amendments covering a wide variety of issues, be they social, economical, regional or financial and, while the views expressed had a common core, they differed in terms of the emphasis they placed on strengthening certain aspects of the future cohesion policy. Prior to the final vote in plenary, the main ALDE group meeting<sup>74</sup> had the task of looking at the proposed report and aligning the position of the group. One of the main aspects dealt with in the text was also the subject of creating a new category of intermediate regions for those regions that have a GDP between 75% and 90% of the Union’s GDP. According to this, Member States and some of their 40 regions could benefit from significant investments from funds distributed through the future EU cohesion policy. Countries such as France, Spain, Italy, the United Kingdom, Germany and Belgium were the ones that stood to gain most from the creation of this new category. The rapporteur from the EPP, as well as the shadow rapporteur from the ALDE group, opposed the creation of an additional

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<sup>73</sup>Amendments tabled in committee to the report on Commission’s Fifth Cohesion Report and the strategy for post-2013 cohesion policy, 20 April 2011.

<sup>74</sup>ALDE Group Meeting, 22 June 2011.

category but, in order to reach a compromise in committee,<sup>75</sup> they agreed to only mention in the text of the report that there was concern about this initiative. These are regions such as the Bavaria region or Lower Saxony region in Germany or the Basilicata region in Italy, which might transition from a higher level of finance due to a low GDP per capita, to a new less financed category of regions for the following financial programming period post 2013.

Finally, negotiations in committee<sup>76</sup> reached a consensus and certain thresholds were established for the definition of intermediate categories that regions could belong to.<sup>77</sup>

The committee passed the report with 31 votes in favour, 4 votes against and 9 abstentions. Furthermore, in one of the interviews with a Liberal MEP from the Regional Development Committee, the MEP mentioned that the members who chose to vote against or abstain were not colleagues from his group, since on the day they all voted according to the voting instructions issued by the shadow rapporteur.<sup>78</sup>

Subsequently, the ALDE shadow rapporteur, together with the group coordinator from the Regional Development Committee presented the conclusions of the report to the group. In the course of the meeting, the German, Swedish and Finnish delegations expressed their views and called for funding that is part of cohesion policy to also be focused on supporting intermediate regions, thus limiting the amount of investment for the other categories. They did not see a need for Parliament's report on the Commission's proposal to express concern about the initiative of creating an intermediate category in its final text. The interventions from the shadow rapporteur, explaining the negotiation process and results attained in the parliamentary

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<sup>75</sup> Regional Development Committee meeting of the 26 April 2011.

<sup>76</sup> Regional Development Committee meeting, 26 April 2011.

<sup>77</sup> Interview with MEP policy adviser in the Regional Development Committee, March 2011.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with ALDE MEP from the Regional Development Committee, 24 May 2011.

committee, as well as that of the group coordinator, were essential at this point. The statement made by the group coordinator in which she assured the group that the conclusion reached in the pre-legislative stage was in fact in accordance with the ALDE line on cohesion policy, led the chair of the meeting to accept the position set out by the group members in committee. What can be seen in the case of this report is that group members from north European states made the initial demand to support the creation of intermediate regions based on economics. They later on changed their views because of a cost-benefit analysis in political terms and the advantages they might achieve later from receiving support from their colleagues on other issues. Such behaviour from the Finnish and the Swedish delegation in the group is evidence of perceived preference coherence with their group colleagues from the responsible committee, but also of political considerations. Consequently, the voting instructions for the report that were initially issued in committee were now resubmitted in plenary and the final report had the support of the political group members. The text was passed with a significant majority (506 in favour, 48 against and 101 abstentions) and only a small number of amendments (10) were tabled in the plenary.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, an analysis of the result of roll-call votes<sup>80</sup> on this report for the MEPs from the ALDE political group indicated that out of all members only one voted against the report, a Finnish MEP, and amongst the other MEPs who had expressed views opposed to that of their colleagues from the Regional Development Committee during the group meeting, in particular the German and the Italian members, only three chose to abstain. There is no explanation of vote for the MEPs who chose to diverge from the group line. To what concerns their other group colleagues, they voted in favour of the

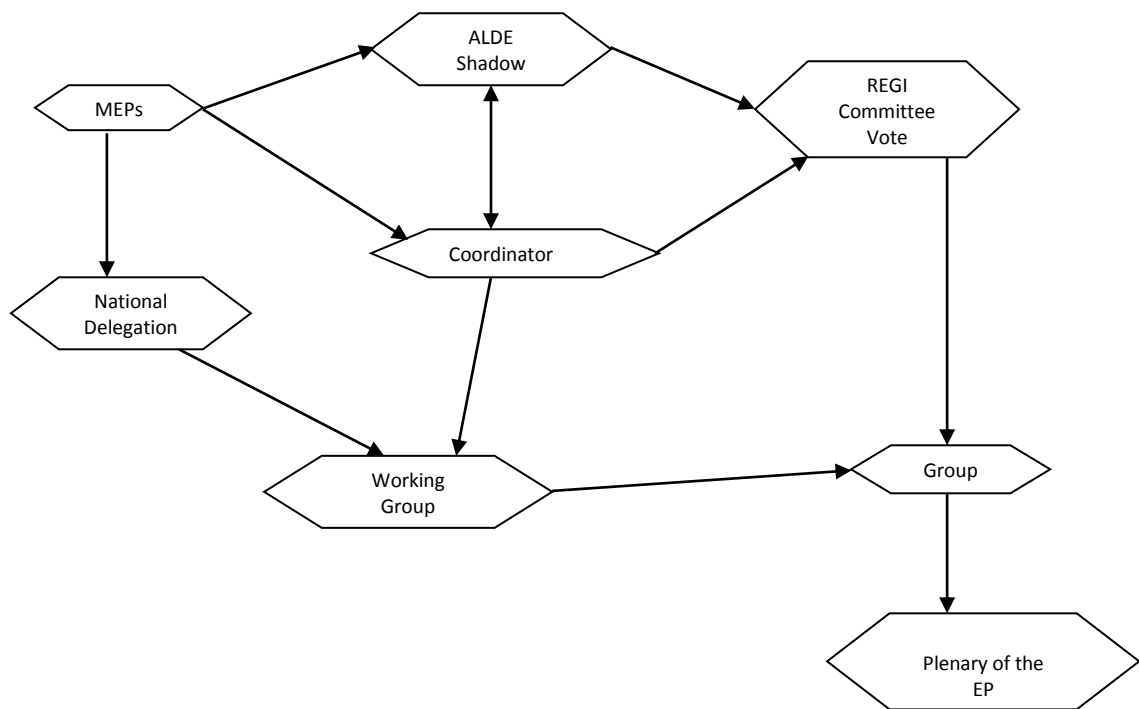
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<sup>79</sup>A detailed account of the option of vote made by ALDE MEPs can be found in the Explanation of vote section of the EP Strasbourg debate from the 5 July 2011. Source: [www.europarl.europa.eu](http://www.europarl.europa.eu)

<sup>80</sup>Minutes of proceedings - Results of roll-call votes, EP Strasbourg, 5 July 2011. Source: [www.europarl.europa.eu](http://www.europarl.europa.eu)

report, as the committee members initially had, and later issued statements in support of decisions comprised in the report in their oral and written explanations of vote.

Therefore, the observations from this case point to the existence of a linking mechanism between committee decisions and the ALDE group coordination of the group line on a report and have mapped the functioning of the process of decision-making (Figure 6.3) at this stage.



**Figure 6.3: Decision-making process in the case of the Fifth Cohesion Report debate**

As predicted by the hypothesis, MEPs from the Regional Development Committee, including their group coordinator, have succeeded in negotiating a group line in committee and subsequently secured the support of their other colleagues, in view of achieving in plenary the concessions already obtained in committee. Such a result provides another clear indication in support of a strong link between committee activity and the final plenary stage of the legislative process in the EP than previously thought. MEPs' policy options and decisions are transferred from the initial committee stage agreement to the final plenary vote through a series of processes and negotiations that are central to understanding decision-making in the EP. Additionally, findings from this case study, as well as those from the previous one, reveal that committee members are part of the linkage mechanisms that ensure committee agreements are taken over by the group and followed in plenary.

#### 6. 4.3 The Report on unlocking the potential of cultural and creative industries

The next case examined in this chapter concerns the report on unlocking the potential of cultural and creative industries. The rapporteur, Marie Therese Sanchez-Schmid, from the EPP, was in charge of passing the text through the leading committee on Culture and Education. ALDE members in committee had different views on the matter of intellectual property rights, their enforcement and their influence on the cultural and creative industries. MEPs from different Member States supported a greater level of enforcement of intellectual property rights, others, on the contrary, saw enforcement as being obsolete and supported the creation of a new business



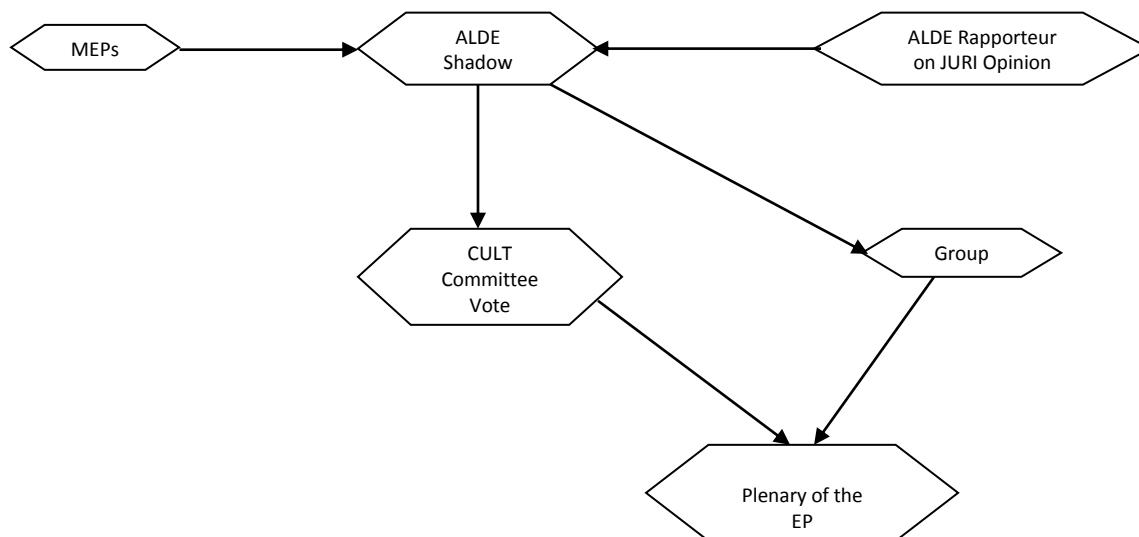
model for the development of cultural and creative industries.<sup>81</sup> The issue was settled in committee and a line was established between members when the report received the opinion of the Legal Affairs committee (JURI). The latter is also responsible for all matters relating to EU policy on intellectual property rights and their enforcement. The decisive aspect in this case, which united the group line in the Culture and Education committee, was the fact that the MEP responsible in the Legal Affairs Committee for drafting the opinion was an ALDE member. This committee was tasked with giving an opinion specifically on the matters where the Culture and Education committee ALDE members were divided: intellectual and property rights and their enforcement. The ALDE MEP who was rapporteur for this opinion in the JURI committee, Cecilia Wikström, was recognised by her other colleagues as having more expertise on the matter and the main points expressed in the opinion drafted by her in JURI were retained in the draft report submitted to plenary. Subsequently, the voting results of members from the lead committee followed the indications set out in the opinion of their colleague from the Legal Affairs committee. At the time, the ALDE shadow rapporteur on this report decided to follow the indications set out in the respective opinion,<sup>82</sup> recognising the expertise of the political group colleague and, automatically, assuming a perceived preference coherence between the two policy positions. The report was then voted in committee with 26 votes in favour and only two abstentions.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Interview with ALDE Policy Adviser responsible for the Culture and Education Committee in the European Parliament, March 2011.

<sup>82</sup> Interview with ALDE MEP from the Culture and Education Committee, March 2011.

<sup>83</sup> Culture and Education Committee meeting of the 17 March 2011.



**Figure 6.4: Decision-making process in the case of the Cultural and Creative Industries Report**

At a next stage, the report was included on the agenda of the ALDE group meeting,<sup>84</sup> mainly because it dealt with issues on which ALDE committee members were divided. This was done to ensure that all national policy positions and preferences have the chance to be expressed before a final plenary vote.<sup>85</sup> However, the intervention of the ALDE shadow rapporteur stating that the text had already reached a consensus amongst committee members and other political groups in committee and that it followed the provisions listed in the opinion drafted by the other ALDE colleague in the Legal Affairs committee, was sufficient for the group to accept the

<sup>84</sup>ALDE Group Meeting, 11 May 2011

<sup>85</sup>Interview with ALDE Policy Adviser responsible for the Culture and Education Committee in the European Parliament, 22 March 2011.

text passed in committee without any further debate. In this case, members were aware of the different views national delegations in the group held in regards to intellectual property rights and their enforcement, as were policy advisers. The fact that this report was not uniquely concerned with intellectual property rights but with cultural and creative industries, a topic where there was general consensus in Parliament and committees on their importance for economic growth, coupled with the lack of a common group line on enforcement of intellectual property rights doubled by the expertise of ALDE members in both committees concerned, led to a swift acceptance in the group. Consequently, the final voting instructions for the plenary followed those initially set in committee. Also, as presented in chapter 5, the result of votes in plenary on this report can be interpreted as corresponding with that in committee, since the voting was done by simple show of hands, with a large majority, as it happens when there are no contentious issues nor any doubts from political groups causing them to ask for a roll-call vote. In addition to this, an analysis of the explanations of vote expressed, as well as those tabled in writing, belonging to ALDE MEPs points to a great level of support for this text and arguments in line with the position of the shadow rapporteur and committee members.

As seen in all three cases analysed here, decisions taken by political groups before a plenary vote rely partly on the information they receive from committee and partly on the group line that members of committee have already set for the entire group debate. They have more knowledge on the matter, they are more familiar with the report and they are perceived as having more expertise than their other group colleagues. These findings are in line with Ringe (2010), in particular that MEPs from the same political group tend to have a set of ‘shared preferences’ (Ringe, 2010: 5), which explains why

there is such a high degree of cohesion inside the EP groups in the absence of clear mechanisms for sanctioning. In many policy areas that require specialised knowledge, most MEPs have a general overview of the existing information and practices, while there are others more familiar with the issue (Ringe, 2010: 5). Their colleagues acknowledge the latter as experts and their preferences are perceived to be similar or representative of those of the entire group. This is the case with committee members who, as representatives of the group in committee have already defined and delineated the group position on the subject. Consequently, the three debates presented in this section are in accordance with the arguments put forward by Ringe, and the comparative analysis of committee and plenary votes on these reports illustrates the principle of perceived preference coherence.

However, in addition to the results that might be expected based on Ringe's model, findings from these three case studies reveal that the process of decision-making inside a political group, and in the EP in general, is more complex. While the perceived preference model might explain the voting behaviour at the last stage in the decision process in the EP, it fails to address the issue of how the process functions and what policy exchanges take place inside a political group, inside a committee to form a group position, before the final vote in plenary. Through the cases presented in this chapter and throughout the thesis, it is shown that during the debates held in preparation of a report or a group line there are a series of interactions that take place between the group rapporteur, group coordinator, committee members and the rest of the group colleagues. I argue, based on the findings from the case studies, that it is in the course of these interactions that committee decisions are internalised by the group and that committee members form the linkage mechanisms that ensure this process.

The findings from the three case studies indicate that the hypothesis has been verified and together with the results of the data gathered from interviews and fieldwork observations reveal that political group preferences are structured and modelled by committee decisions through the group activity of committee members. The results illustrate that, before an MEP might judge his policy preferences to be similar to those of his committee member colleague at the time of the final vote on a report, he goes through a process of group policy position alignment during which committee decisions and committee member views impact the most on the final group line. It is during these meetings that committee agreements are internalised and adopted by the group. At a general EP scale, MEPs from different political groups forge a common line in their respective committees, which is then transferred into plenary results with the help of the group meetings and negotiations. The latter form the linkage mechanisms enabling committee decisions to be reconfirmed in the plenary.

## **6.5 Conclusions**

During the course of EP7 (2009-2014), political groups became more organised and streamlined their working procedures. They had to account for a greater amount of legislative proposals and non-legislative texts in committee and plenary after the latest increase in Parliament's powers with the Lisbon Treaty. As a consequence of this, throughout the different sections, this chapter has analysed aspects of the interplay present between committees, MEPs and the EP political groups. The first section provided an overview of the existing research on EP groups, while the second analysed their organisation. These groups tend to have similar structures and are

guided by the same principles to what concerns following the EP agenda and its decision-making. In addition to these matters, section 3 has presented the particular aspects linked to group structure covering the activities in the parliamentary committees, while section 4 has tested the arguments and the hypothesis of the chapter in three case studies chosen from the political group meetings.

Therefore, together with s 4 and 5, this chapter has provided an insight into the workings of parliamentary committees, in order to test whether or not this is, in fact, the main space where decisions are reached in the EP. It has put forward the idea that political groups rely on the opinion of their expert MEPs in committee and that of the group coordinator. These are the actors that delineate the group's position for the final vote in plenary. Furthermore, this argument implies that, just as political groups, parliamentary committees are the instances that matter most within the decision-making process, while the plenary impacts on the activity of the EP to an even lesser extent. It shows that this is the stage where the main conclusions are reached and these go on to influence the final result in plenary. The fact that groups have proven to be so well organised in terms of covering committee workload is yet another indication that parties have recognised these patterns of decision-making.

The existing research on the committees in the EP has so far focused on the role that the political groups play in the decision-making of this institution (Hix, 2005; Hix, Noury and Roland, 2007; McElroy, 2006; Whitaker, 2010). This chapter is part of a research trying to shift the focus away from political groups, without denying their importance, in order to orient it towards the essential part that committees have in influencing the final results of the legislative process in Parliament. Based on the

findings in chapters 4 and 5, the analysis in this chapter has centred on EP groups, their organisation, their involvement in committee works and the existing frameworks present at this level, which are capable of ensuring cohesion between committee and plenary vote. Through process tracing, using observations from group meetings in the ALDE group and interviews with MEPs, staff and policy advisers, the findings in this chapter have indicated that there are a series of processes and mechanisms that link the work of members in committee with that of the group as a whole. These, in turn, explain why the data and the findings on the field show a significant level of correspondence between the results of votes in committee and plenary.

Following a detailed presentation and analysis of group debates on reports, including the data discussed in the previous two chapters, the observations in this chapter support the argument that MEPs' activities in groups and in committees are essential to the adoption of cohesive committee and plenary votes on specific reports. As the findings show, groups are organised in such a way to allow for the decision on reports in committee, as expressed by its group members, to be followed by all other members. In the first case studied in section 4 of the chapter, the observations showed how members from the responsible specialised committee dominated the debate and were able to define a line corresponding not only to their committee but also to the entire political group. In the second and third analysed cases, the views and policy positions expressed by MEPs from the specialised committees were adopted by other MEPs from their group and subsequently followed in the votes cast in plenary.

Moreover, the findings show that the current decision-making process in the EP is organised to incorporate not only the information resulting from committee sessions,

but also the decisions and the consensus reached by MEPs at this stage. The group meetings, which take place in the ALDE group, as well as in the EPP and the S&D groups, form the linkage mechanisms with the committee that allow for the transferral of decisions from one legislative stage to the next. The consequence of that is a correspondence between committee and plenary results, which I argue, is ensured by the daily activity of members in committee and the communication of this work through the group channels. From the cases presented in this chapter it is clear that group meetings become, in certain instances, arenas where policy lines delineated in committee are presented and incorporated by the group. It is true that the EP group is ensured representation of its political views in committee through its members.

However, findings show that, within this process, the committee view is reclaimed and integrated in the political group through its meetings, debates and negotiations. Consequently, having in mind the main theory underpinning this study that highlights the central role of committees in the decision-making and decision taking process, it can be concluded that the current chapter reveals how groups organise their structure to account for this aspect. The three cases show that the committee decision plays a decisive role in shaping the group position and is ultimately adopted by the plenary. Also, the great involvement of committee members in group debates on the topic corresponding to their committee assignments is evidence that these MEPs close the gap between committee and plenary decision. Through their work, they manage to streamline their groups' positions. Furthermore, this explains the high level of cohesion inside the political group, but also the reason why there are such similarities between the votes in committee and in plenary.



## Chapter 7

### Conclusions

This chapter concludes that committees in the EP drive the decision-making process in the institution, sometimes to a greater extent than political groups do; they are essential to the running of the legislature and instrumental in passing a decision that they have already reached through the full plenary of the Parliament. They not only inform the opinion of the EP, but they also structure, delineate and ultimately *impose* it on the House. However, this is always done with the political groups' knowledge and tacit approval, since the institutional constraints imposed by the large number of acts, the high number of MEPs, the legislative challenge of working with 24 official languages in a supranational environment, have given political groups limited means to ensure cohesion in the Parliament. Furthermore, in spite of the increased use of early agreements in first reading in EP7, as documented by recent studies (Reh *et al.*, 2011; Héritier and Reh, 2012), committees have not been marginalised and continue to impact on the legislative process. Through an analysis of the work of rapporteurs, amendments submitted to reports at committee and plenary level, as well as political group meetings, this study has identified channels that allow the transferral of the decision from committee to the full plenary where it officially becomes the EP opinion.

The sections of this chapter present the main theoretical aspects framing this study and summarise the conclusions of each of the empirical chapters. They will look at the findings and the way in which they contribute to the image of committees in the EP, debating the place these hold within this institution and the existing relationship

between their work and that of political groups. The significance of the findings will then be analysed in the context of the legislature's policy output and political positioning within the decision-making triangle of the other institutions – the European Commission and the Council, but also in that of parliaments at national level. Finally, the chapter will investigate pathways for future research in this field and ways of advancing it.

### **7.1 A summary of the findings**

Stressing the differences between the organisation of the US Congress and that of the EP, chapter 2 concluded that models used so far in order to analyse it, drawn from the American literature, provide only some of the explanation for the work of EP committees. The body of literature that has based its findings on this particular approach has presented a somewhat incomplete image of the activity and the place that committees hold in the EP. The distributional and informational perspectives do not account entirely for the running of the decision making-process in this legislature. They do, however, offer a basis for a more in depth account of what happens in the Parliament, if they are complimented by qualitative data gathered through process tracing from within the institution, interviews and quantitative data from voting results in committees and plenary. An initial appreciation of the studies on the subject reveals that the significant contribution and influence of political groups has been linked to committee activity in the EP. This points to a system of committees that follows the will of political groups but, at the same time, it ignores the interactions that take place in the time that a report is prepared, drafted and voted in committee

and the negotiations and meetings that are linked to committee work. Also, the literature has not offered sufficient explanation, apart from political group influence over all legislative stages in the Parliament, of the high level of cohesion registered (Hix, Noury and Roland; 2007), bearing in mind that groups have few political tools available to discipline members on a regular basis. Thus, chapter 2 highlighted the relevance of investigating whether the centre of decision might not be located elsewhere than with political groups and expressed through such cohesive voting results at both committee and plenary level due to institutional mechanisms used to solve divisions earlier in the legislative process, which were not visible in the full plenary session of the Parliament.

Chapter 3 identified committees as the centre of the decision-making process in the EP, an aspect expressed in the main argument of the research, which maintains that it is the parliamentary committees that form the opinion of the EP and they do this by securing the transfer of the decision reached in committee to the plenary of the full Parliament. They do so by solving possible divisions through a set of institutionalised interactions in meetings and negotiations on specific reports. While stressing the fact that the existing body of literature does not account for such interactions, the chapter has investigated, on a sample of committees, the correspondence between the committee and plenary votes, finding a significant degree of correlation between the two. This has helped frame the hypothesis and identify existing channels through which the transferral of the decision can be secured, in order to then test their impact upon this process, their involvement and thus the validity of the main hypothesis. Subsequently, based on the data, the chapter identified rapporteurs, the number of amendments and the political group meetings as aspects that can account and explain

how the opinion of the EP is constructed in committees. Appreciations were made in reference to each of them and assumptions were expressed in relation to the impact exerted by them over the transferral of the decision. This was done based on sub-hypotheses verified in each of the empirical chapters.

Chapter 4 identified rapporteurs as key actors that are part of the decision-making process in committees, and most importantly, who can ensure that the full plenary of the EP internalises the consensus reached in committee and recognises the committee decision as that of the Parliament. The observations and the data from the results of votes in this chapter have revealed that rapporteurs are essential in ensuring that a committee agreement is followed in plenary. After detailing the different stages linked to committee activity, rapporteurship assignment, as well as the procedures and steps followed by a report in the parliamentary committee, in its path towards the final vote in plenary, the chapter has presented three case studies in order to illustrate the processes active at this level. Two of these were also analysed from different angles in chapter 5 and chapter 6, in an effort to portray the various aspects that are part of developing a draft for a report, amending it, negotiating it and finally voting it in the plenary session. The cases were necessary in order to illustrate the decision-making process and the existing interactions. They revealed the significant role that rapporteurs, as well as group coordinators and committee members, play in the transferral of committee decision to the full EP plenary. Along with descriptive data on votes in committee and plenary, expressed through proportions and the strength of correlations, the overlap of the voting results at committee and plenary stage has been supported by evidence, while the process-tracing in the case studies has contributed to testing the hypothesis of the chapter. The latter has been verified and the findings

reveal that rapporteurs provide one of the main links necessary for the transferral of decision from committee to plenary. Their activity, their negotiations and drive to build consensus provide sufficient evidence of a viable transferral channel allowing for a committee and plenary vote alignment, a fact which confirms the expectations comprised in the central hypothesis of this study.

In order to test another transferral channel and verify the hypothesis, chapter 5 analysed whether the number of amendments in committee is lower than that in plenary and the extent to which the EP will follow the committee decision. The evidence provided by the case studies and the comparison of the number of amendments at both stages has allowed for the two hypotheses to be verified. By looking at amendments in the EP from a different perspective than that used in other extensive studies on this subject, like that of Kreppel (2001) which analyses amendments in view of establishing the Parliament's capacity to influence the other two institutions – the Commission and the Council – chapter 5 has investigated the significance of amendments to a report from an intra-institutional perspective. This was done in order to highlight their relevance in describing the EP decision-making process. Most importantly, it has identified amendments as an indication for committee to plenary correspondence and resolution of divisions in committee as opposed to plenary, which is what the lower number of such amendments submitted at the plenary session stage indicates in the presented case studies. If in these instances a higher number of amendments to the text of the report in plenary would have indicated more involvement from political groups and more influence from their side on the results coming from committee, the verification of the two hypotheses supported an image of parliamentary committees structuring and defining the EP

opinion, instead of one of political groups securing control and guiding the decision-making process. The findings have, again, pointed to a series of interactions and negotiations in committees, which delineate the Parliament's position on a legislative proposal or on a resolution of own-initiative.

After highlighting the influence exerted by committees over the EP position, as opposed to that expressed by political groups, chapter 6 has concluded that it is in fact the internal organisation of political groups that ensures the replication of committee decisions by the full House. Most importantly, it has stressed the role played by rapporteurs, shadow-rapporteurs, group coordinators and committee members in group meetings, particularly in aligning the position of the political group and illustrating the manner in which committee-established agreements can be passed in plenary with the secured support of the group. This aspect can provide an explanation for the increased party cohesion displayed in the EP in spite of the limited tools available to political groups for disciplining their members. Moreover, the chapter has presented in detail the manner in which political groups organise internally in order to follow the committee workload. Through three case studies taken from committees, two of which have also been presented in the other empirical sections of the thesis, and with the use of process tracing, the chapter has illustrated the process which enables a committee opinion to be accepted and followed by all members of a political group and then voted in plenary. This has also been explained with Ringe's principle of perceived preference coherence (2010), which stresses that MEPs follow the view of their committee member colleagues whose preferences they perceive to be closest to their own, accounting for similar circumstances where they would hold the necessary technical knowledge and the overall informational monopole on a particular

report. Such aspects complemented by the evidence have led to findings identifying political group negotiations and meetings covering committee workload as a factor active in aligning the committee and plenary decisions. Within this framework, the case studies have shown that committee members are the actors driving the political group agreement and consensus towards the median line agreed in committee, thus verifying the hypothesis of the chapter. Therefore, the findings in the chapter have revealed that political groups are to an extent aware of the importance of committee decisions, of the informational advantage they display and rely on their committee members to structure the group's position based on the agreements already reached in the pre-legislative stage. Subsequently, evidence from the field sheds more light on the institutional mechanisms that have led to the consolidation of a position on a proposal and a Parliament opinion on a report to be constructed in the parliamentary committees of the EP and validated in the full plenary sessions that take place every month in Strasbourg and sometimes in Brussels.

## **7.2 Parliamentary committees or political groups: Who structures the EP's position?**

Following the institutional developments brought about by the treaties, the EP has achieved greater powers and a more prominent role in the decision-making triangle of the institutions in the EU. The higher number of legislative acts that it has had to deal with has transformed this institution, requiring it to present itself as an efficient body capable of acquiring legitimacy through the legislative output created. This output has been analysed up until now mainly by looking at results in the plenary sessions,

relying on roll-call vote data and asserting the control of political groups and cross-party consensus in the Parliament. Within this framework, parliamentary committees have been described as internal structures providing an informational support and the specialised knowledge necessary for the efficient work of the EP. Through the empirical chapters this thesis has shown that committees in the beginning of EP7 were not informing but rather forming and defining the EP's opinion more so than political groups. The latter rely on their committee members to represent the views of the entire group and in so doing they finish by internalising a committee agreement and validating it in plenary. The work drawn on US Congressional scholarship has limitations in explaining the legislative processes in the Parliament due to differences in the representational models. In the framework of a committee description, MEPs apart from representing a constituency with targeted externalities also represent a country in the EU, which corresponds to a model of committee displaying uniform externalities. This factor coupled with the fact that members in this Parliament are agents of two Principals (Hix, 2002) – the national party they represent, the views of which are internalised by the national delegation, and the political groups in the EP – renders any comparison more difficult to establish and affects the model by making it less applicable. Therefore, the thesis contributes to the existing literature by highlighting some inadequacies engendered by the use of US Congress models in explaining committee activity in the EP; but also by revealing the central place held by committees in this legislature, which gives them prominence over political groups, as well as in structuring the EP opinion on Commission proposals and EU policies in general.



The conclusions contained in this chapter find their explanation in the sequence of institutional changes that the Parliament has had to implement. Faced with a high volume of work, the EP has organised internally to be able to manage the increase in its political and legislative powers efficiently, a factor which has led to the development of a stronger committee system. The technical nature of proposals linked to the single market, of those looking to advance the degree of harmonisation across different policy systems in the Member States, has turned committees into the main arenas where such acts could be analysed in detail. More precisely, the technical nature of EU policy in general has strengthened EP committees and increased their role. Anticipating these effects and being confronted with difficulties in reaching speedy decisions, political groups have organised internally in response to such developments to support this workload, but also because they were aware that apart from the ex-ante control exercised on committee decisions by controlling committee assignments and chairmanships, they were lacking the tools to exercise a stronghold on decisions reached at this level. The result has led to a set of group meetings, negotiations and interactions between committee members and their colleagues, all of which account for the pivotal role played by committees and for the transferral of the decision reached by them at the plenary level.

Moreover, faced with constraints brought about by the number of MEPs after enlargement, the additional official languages that it has had to work in, the EP has had to streamline plenary sessions, so as to render them more efficient as a whole. This has involved Parliament's capacity to pass decisions on legislative proposals quicker and in spite of all existing circumstances, mentioned before, that could impact on the proceedings in the plenary sessions. In such circumstances, the EP has

managed, over time, to take a strong position towards the other institutions in an attempt to influence the EU decision-making process, guide inter-institutional negotiations and increase its institutional profile – all these being amongst the core motivations that have driven the EP in its fight for more powers.

However, bearing in mind these developments, more precisely the need to have a *fast-track* plenary to vote on legislative proposals, amend them and restructure them, while presenting a common unified and coherent position to the other EU institutions, the centre of decision in the EP has had to shift. In order to allow for such a course of events and for this plenary model to exist, the main decision on reports containing the Parliament's position has had to be somehow agreed in committee. Had this not been possible, then the plenary would have had the task to debate extensively the main issues addressed by the proposals to the point where a common position would be formed. So far, this has not happened. On the contrary, the committees are now working to a greater extent on legislative acts, on resolutions, on aligning Parliament's view, on bridging consensus and reaching agreement in order to ensure a swift passage of all decisions through the full House. They are well organised, benefit from the input of specialised staff and have brought about changes in the procedures inside the legislature. The Rule 138 of the Rules of Procedure (2012), is just such an example, and it stipulates that:

‘Any proposal for a legislative act (first reading) and any non-legislative motion for a resolution adopted in committee with fewer than one tenth of the members of the committee voting against shall be placed on the draft agenda of Parliament for vote without amendment. The item shall then be subject to a single vote unless, before the drawing up of the final draft agenda, political groups or individual Members who together constitute one-tenth of the Members of Parliament have requested in writing that the item be open to amendment, in which case the President shall set a deadline for tabling amendments.’ (Rules of Procedure of the EP, 2012).

Such modifications in the internal procedures provide strong evidence in support of the argument placing the aggregation of EP decisions inside its parliamentary committees. Apart from asserting the legislature's effort to contribute in a timely manner to the EU integration process and all its developments, this Rule also stresses that the Parliament itself, including the political groups, has recognised the value and impact of parliamentary committee work and the decisions resulting from it. Indeed, this organisation of the decision-making process inside the EP renders the output of the institution more significant and it increases its legitimacy and influence.

### **7.3 Significance and relevance of the findings**

The majority of the findings in this thesis can contribute to a better understanding of the organisation of the EP and of its decision-making process. They underpin a shift in the localisation of decisions, by resolution of division and coalescing agreement, from the full plenary of the legislature to its parliamentary committees, an aspect which has a significant influence on the way the Parliament has been viewed until now. It puts into perspective the relevance of roll-call vote analysis of the EP and underlines the importance of carrying out studies that use qualitative tools. Most importantly, it highlights the necessity to use process tracing as a research tool in order to identify the lines along which the EP position is structured on a proposal from the Commission or on an own-initiative resolution and to finally locate where and at which point in the process consensus is reached. This is relevant to the entire study of the Parliament and to the analysis of its legislative output. It shows that it is

not sufficient to only look at the final result of votes cast in the plenary session on an act in order to understand the opinion of the EP and how it will influence that of the other institutions in the decision-making triangle – the European Commission and the Council. Moreover, it provides evidence that under such circumstances as those present in a supranational environment, political groups may trade their ability to control all decisions with that of being able to provide a structured common position on most policy initiatives at EU level, all this in view of a greater gain in legislative output and EU institutional influence. In addition to all this, the findings point to the fact that a legislature coming under strong pressure to render itself more efficient has to rely on a strong system of committees, particularly in such instances where the partisan feeling is so divided amongst members who belong to different national parties and are organised into trans-national political groups along broad ideological lines.

Furthermore, the relevance of these findings to other national legislatures is also significant and they can be applied to the analysis of legislatures with strong parliamentary committees, such as the German Bundestag or the US Congress. This can be done in order to illustrate decision-making patterns and underpin existing interactions that occur within its processes. At the same time, the findings can be applied to legislatures that are constrained by a variety of factors, such as language, party identification of their members and representation of constituencies with a large spectrum of both targeted and uniform externalities. Indeed, there are underlying specificities that characterise the EU as a whole and the EP in particular, which might, at first glance, diminish the relevance of the findings for the study of national legislatures. Looking past those, however, one can identify aspects that can be applied

to an analysis in the framework of any federal system, such as the political group organisation in a weak party system environment, the negotiation patterns and the informal structures established to support and increase parliamentary committee influence.

#### **7.4 Future research**

In the process of establishing the importance of EP parliamentary committees as opposed to that of political groups in the decision-making process of this institution, this thesis has answered some of the questions posed by the study of committee versus plenary results. At the same time, it has highlighted other areas of study that can be addressed in future research.

First of all, the fieldwork observations and the descriptive data gathered have only focused on half of the EP7 reports, until June 2011. In future, the research could look at the work carried out by committees for the duration of the entire term and compare it to that in the previous periods ranging from 1999 to 2004 and 2004 to 2009. This should allow for differences to be highlighted between the committee systems based on the level of workload acquired and illustrate the developments that these have undergone in parallel with the increase of powers of the EP and the effect of EU enlargement in 2004.

Secondly, bearing in mind the new provisions introduced by the Lisbon Treaty in regards to the extension of the ordinary legislative procedure, a procedure under

which the Parliament is co-legislator and on an equal footing with the Council, the parliamentary committees have seen their workload increase. As mentioned in this study, this has impacted on their position inside the institution but it would hold added value to assess the manner in which they have reorganised internally and procedurally to deal with the additional number of legislative proposals they receive.

Thirdly, following the extensive comparisons between the committee and plenary in the EP, and based on the results of the proportions between committee and plenary results, another study could assess the changes that the plenary sessions have seen from the time of their conception, within several legislative terms and under the impact of several Treaty modifications and EU enlargements. Therefore, in the framework of future research, the developments in the attitude of political groups towards the plenary could be investigated to assess if this image of an instance where MEPs go to vote on as many legislative proposals as possible in a short period of time has always been present amongst its members. Also, it would be important to establish if at the beginning of parliamentary committee activity the plenary sessions were deemed to hold more relevance for the decision-making of the EP as a whole.

Finally, the research could be extended in the area of comparative studies, by analysing traits from committee systems in the national parliaments of the Member States, as well as the US Congress, and comparing them against the EP parliamentary committee system in an effort to identify the main features that this institution shares with national parliaments, but also the differences that it presents. It will then be important to verify whether these differences result from the particular supranational

nature of the EP or if they have been influenced by inter and intra-institutional developments.

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## **Appendix: List of interviews**

1. MEP political advisor from the Culture and Education Committee, 29 September 2010
2. MEP assistant from the Culture and Education Committee, 22 March 2011
3. ALDE policy advisor from the Employment and Social Affairs and Culture and Education Committee, 9 February 2011
4. ALDE policy advisor from the Culture and Education Committee, 20 September 2010
5. ALDE group assistant from political group secretariat, 27 October 2010
6. ALDE MEP from the Culture and Education Committee, 9 February 2011
7. ALDE MEP from the Foreign Affairs Committee, 8 October 2010
8. ALDE MEP from the Culture and Education Committee, 25 May 2011
9. ALDE MEP from the Employment and Social Affairs Committee, 24 May 2011
10. ALDE MEP from the Culture and Education Committee, 8 February 2011
11. MEP assistant from the Culture and Education Committee, 22 March 2011
12. MEP assistant 2 from the Culture and Education Committee, 22 March 2011
13. ALDE MEP from the Legal Affairs Committee, 23 March 2011
14. MEP assistant from the Legal Affairs Committee, 23 March 2011
15. S&D MEP from the Culture and Education Committee, 16 February 2011
16. MEP assistant from the S&D group, 16 February 2011
17. MEP assistant from the EPP group, 17 February 2011
18. ALDE MEP from the Culture and Education Committee, 20 April 2011
19. MEP assistant from the Culture and Education Committee, 20 April 2011
20. MEP assistant 2 from the Culture and Education Committee, 20 April 2011

21. EPP MEP member of Budgets Committee, 4 May 2011
22. MEP assistant from the EPP group, 4 May 2011
23. S&D MEP member of Budgets Committee, 5 May 2011
24. MEP assistant from the S&D group, 5 May 2011
25. EPP MEP member of Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee, 6 July 2011
26. S&D MEP member of Regional Development Committee, 20 April 2011
27. ALDE policy advisor from the Regional Development Committee, 20 April 2011
28. ALDE policy adviser from Regional Development Committee and Employment and Social Affairs Committee, 22 September 2011
29. MEP assistant from the Regional Development Committee, 20 April 2011
30. MEP political advisor from the Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee, 21 June 2011
31. ALDE MEP assistant, 10 May 2011
32. ALDE MEP assistant responsible for communication policy and press, 30 June 2011
33. ALDE MEP assistant, advisor on copyright issues, 30 May 2011
34. ALDE policy advisor from the Budgets Committee, 6 September 2011
35. EP official from the Budgets Committee, 6 September 2011
36. EP official from the Regional Development Committee, 9 May 2011
37. EP official from the Culture and Education Committee, 30 March 2011
38. ALDE MEP, from the Regional Development Committee, 24 May 2011
39. MEP assistant from the Regional Development Committee, 24 May 2011
40. Interest group representative following the Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee, 16 March 2011

41. Policy officer from one of the leading industry associations in the field of E-commerce, 17 March 2010
42. Policy officer from an association representing consumers' interests, 23 June 2011
43. MEP Assistant from the GUE/NGL political group, 23 September 2010
44. MEP assistant from the EFD political group, 24 June 2011
45. EP senior official from the Plenary Directorate, 7 December 2011
46. EP official from the Plenary Directorate in the Tabling office, 8 December 2011
47. EP official responsible for legislative coordination, 15 February 2012
48. EP official responsible for legislative planning, 7 March 2012
49. EP official responsible for legislative acts, 12 March 2012
50. Commission official following parliamentary Committee activity, 23 June 2010
51. S&D MEP from the Regional Development Committee, 25 May 2011
52. EPP MEP from the Regional Development Committee, 25 May 2011
53. ALDE political group administrator, 11 May 2011
54. ALDE MEP from the Regional Development Committee, 5 July 2011
55. ALDE MEP from the Environment Committee, 23 November 2010
56. MEP assistant from the Environment Committee, 23 November 2010
57. ALDE MEP from Transport Committee, 24 November 2010
58. MEP assistant from Transport Committee, 24 November 2010
59. EP official responsible for inter-institutional relations, 7 March 2012
60. EPP policy advisor on Budgets Committee, 6 September 2011
61. ALDE policy advisor on Environment, 15 February 2011
62. ALDE policy advisor on Internal Market and Consumer Protection, 15 February 2011
63. ALDE policy advisor on International Trade issues, 16 February 2011

64. EPP policy advisor on Internal Market and Consumer Protection, 15 February 2011
65. EP senior official in charge of plenary debates, 11 April 2012
66. EP official in charge of political group coordination, 11 April 2012
67. Official from the EFD group in charge of legislative coordination, 28 March 2012



## Appendix 4.1

### Allocation of points for each political group in the Culture and Education Committee

Situation on 24<sup>th</sup> of January 2011

<b>Group</b>	<b>Total available points</b>	<b>Points taken for reports</b>	<b>Points taken for opinions</b>	<b>Total of points taken</b>	<b>Points still available</b>
<b>EPP-ED</b> - 12 Members	30	14	2.5	16.5	<b>13.5</b>
<b>S-D</b> - 8 Members	20	6.5	5	11.5	<b>8.5</b>
<b>ALDE</b> - 4 Members	10	4	4 (-0.5)	7.5	<b>2.5</b>
<b>Verts/ALE</b> - 2 Members	5	2	0.5	2.5	<b>2.5</b>
<b>ECR</b> - 2 Members	5			-	<b>5</b>
<b>GUE/NGL</b> - 2 Members	5		0.5	0.5	<b>4.5</b>
<b>EFD</b> - 1 Member	2.5			-	<b>2.5</b>
<b>NI</b> - 1 Member	2.5			-	<b>2.5</b>

## Appendix 4.2

### Allocation of points for each political group in the Culture and Education Committee

Situation on 1 December 2010

<b>Group</b>	<b>Total available points</b>	<b>Points taken for reports</b>	<b>Points taken for opinions</b>	<b>Total of points taken</b>	<b>Points still available</b>
<b>EPP-ED</b> - 12 Members	30	14	2.5	16.5	<b>13.5</b>
<b>S-D</b> - 8 Members	20	6.5	5	11.5	<b>8.5</b>
<b>ALDE</b> - 4 Members	10	4	4	8	<b>2</b>
<b>Verts/ALE</b> - 2 Members	5	2	0.5	2.5	<b>2.5</b>
<b>ECR</b> - 2 Members	5			-	<b>5</b>
<b>GUE/NGL</b> - 2 Members	5		0.5	0.5	<b>4.5</b>
<b>EFD</b> - 1 Member	2.5			-	<b>2.5</b>
<b>NI</b> - 1 Member	2.5			-	<b>2.5</b>

#### Points attributed during the meeting on 1 December 2010

<b>Reports</b>	<b>Points</b>	<b>Groupe/ rapporteur</b>
The European Schools' system in 2009 COM (2010) 595 final	0	EPP
<b>Opinions</b>	<b>Points</b>	<b>Groupe/ rapporteur</b>
-		

### Appendix 5.1: Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee – Amendment numbers and results of votes

<b>Report</b>	<b>Ams in committee</b>	<b>Ams in plenary</b>	<b>Committee Yes</b>	<b>Committee No</b>	<b>Committee abstention</b>	<b>Plenary Yes</b>	<b>Plenary No</b>	<b>Plenary abstention</b>	<b>Type of report</b>
Internal Market Scoreboard	36	0	22	15	0	530	85	3	INI
Consumer protection	87	0	34	0	3				INI
SOLVIT	44	0	34	2	1				INI
Delivering a single market to consumers and citizens	236	0	32	0	3	578	28	16	INI
New developments in public procurement	130	1	28	0	8				INI
EEA-Switzerland: internal market	11	0	32	2	0				INI
Completing the internal market for e-commerce	166	0	32	0	0				INI
Future of European standardisation	118	3	36	0	1				INI
Impact of advertising on consumer behaviour	132	0	30	1	2				INI
Implementation of the Services Directive 2006/123/EC	80	1	32	1	5				INI
Revision of the General Product Safety Directive and market surveillance	77	0	36	0	2	628	11	7	INI
A Single Market for Enterprises and Growth	237	0	24	0	13	570	44	28	INI
A Single Market for Europeans	266	9	21	3	13	600	48	27	INI
Governance and Partnership in the Single Market	122	0	24	1	12	595	61	10	INI
A more efficient and fairer retail market	155	0	32	3	0				INI
Universal service and the 112 emergency number	84	0	33	0	1				INI
Repealing of Council Directives regarding metrology	56	10	30	3	0	656	0	2	COD

Textile names and related labelling of textile products	100	72	30	1	6	528	18	108	COD
Late payment in commercial transactions (recast)	210	1	30	0	6	612	12	21	COD
Second reading: Regulation laying down harmonised conditions for the marketing of construction products	183	84	36	1	0	390	4	6	COD
Consumer rights	673	265	32	16	1				COD
Textile fibre names and related labelling and marking of fibre composition	43	35	30	2	4	528	18	108	COD
Enforcement of consumer protection laws	6	3	33	0	0				COD

## Appendix 5.2: Regional Development Committee – Amendment numbers and results of votes

Report	Ams in committee	Ams in plenary	Committee Yes	Committee No	Committee abstention	Plenary Yes	Plenary No	Plenary abstention	Type of report
Contribution of Cohesion policy to the achievement of Lisbon and the EU2020 objectives	99	9							INI
Implementation of the synergies of research and innovation earmarked Funds	74	0	39	1	1	559	18	36	INI
Transparency in regional policy and its funding	54	0	34	1	2	629	6	26	INI
European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and the role of macro-regions in cohesion policy	109	0	43	1	0				INI
Contribution of EU regional policy towards fighting the financial and economic crisis - Objective 2	68	0	42	0	2	609	46	14	INI
Good governance with regards to the EU regional policy	61	0	35	0	0				INI
Achieving real territorial, social and economic cohesion within the EU	103	0	38	5	1	491	117	13	INI
Objective 3: a challenge for territorial cooperation	134	0	45	1	0				INI
Report 2010 on the implementation of the cohesion policy programmes for 2007-2013	105	0	40	1	0				INI
Increased effectiveness between the ERDF and other structural funds	36	0	43	1	0				INI
European Urban Agenda and its Future in Cohesion Policy	103	0	36	0	2				INI

Commission's fifth Cohesion Report and the strategy for post-2013 cohesion policy	569	10	31	4	9	506	48	101	INI
Regulation on the ERDF as regards the eligibility of housing interventions	17	9	34	3	1	588	57	16	COD
Regulation concerning general provisions on the ERDF, the ESF and the Cohesion Fund	27	23	36	4	1	519	33	83	COD
Regulation on EU financial contributions to the International Fund for Ireland (2007-2010)	0	1	42	0	1	630	9	25	COD

### Appendix 5.3: Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Committee– Amendment numbers and results of votes

<b>Report</b>	<b>Ams in committee</b>	<b>Ams in plenary</b>	<b>Committee Yes</b>	<b>Committee No</b>	<b>Committee Abstention</b>	<b>Plenary Yes</b>	<b>Plenary No</b>	<b>Plenary abstention</b>	<b>Type of report</b>
Commission White Paper: 'Adapting to climate change: Towards a European framework for action'	171	4	49	3	2				INI
Action plan on Organ Donation and Transplantation (2009-2015)	33	10	58	0	1				INI
Action Against Cancer: European Partnership	81	0	56	0	0				INI
Management of bio-waste in the European Union	81	0	55	3	0				INI
A Community approach on the prevention of natural and man-made disasters	72	0	42	6	2				INI
Implementation of EU legislation for the conservation of biodiversity	194	1	55	0	0				INI
European initiative on Alzheimer's disease and other dementias	188	0	48	0	1	646	6	6	INI
Reducing health inequalities in the EU	96	0	52	1	7	379	228	49	INI
Evaluation of the management of H1N1 influenza in 2009-2010 in the EU	172	1	58	2	1				INI
Forest protection and information in the EU: preparing forests for climate change	298	0	53	6	0				INI
GDP and beyond – Measuring progress in a changing world	26	0	59	1	1				INI

EU legislation on Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (TSE) and related feed and food controls	36	0	56	0	1				INI
Options to move beyond 20% greenhouse gas emission reductions	241	8	44	14	1				INI
Animal health requirements applicable to the non-commercial movement of pet animals	6	4	35	0	1	618	17	5	COD
Importation of certain live animals and their fresh meat	0	0	36	0	0	533	9	16	COD
Standards of quality and safety of human organs intended for transplantation	203	106	53	0	1	643	16	8	COD
Provision of food information to consumers	575	351	33	6	1	559	54	32	COD
Second reading: industrial emissions (integrated pollution prevention and control) (recast)	353	77	40	13	4	402	189	54	COD
Prevention of the entry into the legal supply chain of medicinal products which are falsified in relation to their identity, history or source	374	120	46	0	2	500	12		COD
Second reading: obligations of operators who place timber and timber products on the market	?	94	49	6	2	465	22	187	COD
Second reading: novel foods	150	120	49	2	3	667	16	9	COD
Community procedures for the authorisation and supervision of medicinal products for human and veterinary use and establishing a European Medicines Agency	86	41	52	0	0	559	7	12	COD
Community code relating to medicinal products for human use	270	74	49	0	5	569	8	15	COD
Restriction of the use of certain hazardous substances in electrical and electronic equipment (recast)	339	106	53	0	1	640	3	12	COD
Waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) (recast)	273	107	51	1	3	580	37	22	COD
Placing on the market and use of biocidal products	226	361	24	3	9	553	20	83	COD
Setting emission performance standards for new light commercial vehicles	313	58	35	25	1	520	122	13	COD
Information to the general public on medicinal products for human use subject to medical prescription	31	13	51	2	3	564	41	45	COD
Community code relating to medicinal products for human use	313	96	46	1	3	558	42	53	COD
Second reading: application of patients' rights in cross-border healthcare	227	107	47	2	1	297	120	152	COD
European environmental economic accounts	52	46	40	4	4	616	26	24	COD
Provisions for engines placed on the market under the flexibility scheme	114	24	51	5	2				COD



Provisions for tractors placed on the market under the flexibility scheme	12	25	45	5	6	402	218	11	COD
Possibility for the Member States to restrict or prohibit the cultivation of GMOs in their territory	114	51	34	10	16				COD
Regulation on the provision of food information to consumers,	?	137	57	4	1				COD
Fruit juices and certain similar products intended for human consumption	64	0	41	9	4				COD

#### Appendix 5.4: Budgets Committee– Amendment numbers and results of votes

Report	Ams in committee	Ams in plenary	Committee Yes	Committee No	Committee	Plenary Yes	Plenary No	Plenary abstention	Type of report
Financial Regulation as regards the European External Action Service	34	34	59	3	0	578	39	28	COD
Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: Cataluña automoción/Spain	3	0	36	2	0	579	59	10	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: Qimonda/Portugal	3	0	36	2	0	580	60	9	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: Nordjylland/Denmark	3	0	36	2	0	567	59	8	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: NXP/Netherlands	3	0	36	2	0	581	54	9	BUD
Council's position on Draft amending budget No 3/2010, Section III - Commission	1	0	41	2	0	0	0	0	BUD
Council's position on draft general budget for the financial year 2011 - all sections and Letters of amendments No. 1/2011, 2/2011 and 3/2011 to the draft general budget		0	36	2	4	0	0	0	BUD
Council's position on Draft amending budget 6/2010, Section II - European Council and Council, Section III - Commission, Section X - European External Action Service	0	0	38	2	0	608	41	11	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: Ireland - SR Technics	0	0	19	0	1	459	54	8	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: Noord Brabant and Zuid Holland , Division 18/Netherlands	1	0	19	1	1	558	69	17	BUD

Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: Noord Holland and Utrecht Division 18/Netherlands	1	0	19	1	1	555	68	22	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: Noord Holland and Zuid Holland Division 58/Netherlands	1	0	19	1	1	559	66	21	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: Gelderland and Overijssel Division 18/Netherlands	1	0	19	1	1	558	68	20	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: Drenthe Division 18/Netherlands	1	0	19	1	1	562	66	19	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: Limburg Division 18/Netherlands	1	0	19	1	1	560	67	20	BUD
Council's position on Draft amending budget No 8/2010, Section III - Commission	0	0	22	0	0	596	5	2	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Union Solidarity Fund: Ireland – floods in November 2009	0	0	22	0	0	538	20	3	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: SI/Mura, Slovenia	2	0	13	1	1	489	51	19	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Union Solidarity Fund: Portugal - floods; France - Xynthia (storm)	0	0	13	1	0	476	7	2	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: Heidelberger Druckmaschinen AG/Germany	2	0	13	1	1	502	57	15	BUD
Council's position on Draft amending budget No 9/2010, Section III - Commission	0	0	14	1	0	519	8	5	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: Noord Holland ICT/Netherlands	1	0	20	1	0	567	46	10	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: H.Cegielski-Poznań from Poland	0	0	18	2	0	566	49	23	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: Lear from Spain	0	0	18	2	0	554	62	25	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: Comunidad Valenciana - natural stone from Spain	0	0	18	2	0	547	63	22	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: Comunidad Valenciana	0	0	18	2	0	521	47	21	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: Spain	0	0	18	2	0	524	57	21	BUD

Mobilisation of the Flexibility Instrument for the Lifelong Learning Programme, for the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme and for Palestine	0	0	36	2	0	525	20	13	BUD
Draft general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2011, all sections	4	4	27	5	1 0	508	141	19	BUD
Granting an EU guarantee to the European Investment Bank against losses under loans and guarantees for projects outside the European Union	7	7	20	2	1	538	37	37	COD
Guidelines for the 2012 budget procedure, Section I – European Parliament, Section II – Council, Section IV – Court of Justice, Section V – Court of Auditors, Section VI – European Economic and Social Committee, Section VII – Committee of the Regions, Section VIII – European Ombudsman, Section IX – European Data Protection Supervisor, Section X - European External Action Service	7	7	34	1	1	574	74	29	BUD
General guidelines for the preparation of the 2012 budget	25	24	32	4	3	0	0	0	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: PL/Podkarpackie machinery from Poland	5	0	35	3	0	514	50	16	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: CZ/Unilever from the Czech Republic	1	1	35	3	0	553	53	19	BUD
Estimates of revenue and expenditure of Parliament for the financial year 2012 - Section I - Parliament	18	14	33	7	0	479	176	23	BUD
Draft amending budget No 1/2011, Section III – Commission	1	0	24	2	1	591	22	53	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Union Solidarity Fund: Floods in 2010 in Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Croatia and Romania	4	0	24	2	1	647	17	5	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: BE/General Motors Belgium from Belgium	3	0	26	4	1	560	81	17	BUD
Mandate for the trilogue on the 2012 Draft Budget	32	31	25	7	7	379	128	94	BUD
Draft amending budget No 2/2011, Section III – Commission	1	1	35	1	0	619	39	11	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: DK/LM Glasfiber from Denmark	1	0	20	4	0	575	60	25	BUD

Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: DK/Odense Steel Shipyard from Denmark	10	0	19	4	0	575	61	30	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Union Solidarity Fund: flooding in Slovenia, Croatia and the Czech Republic in 2010	1	0	32	1	0	644	16	5	BUD
Draft Council regulation laying down the multiannual financial framework for the years 2007-2013	1	0	25	1	0	445	39	18	APP
Draft amending budget No 3/2011 of the European Union for the financial year 2011, Section III – Commission	3	3	24	0	2	625	14	29	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: technical assistance at the initiative of the Commission	0	0	28	3	0	557	76	23	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: AT/Steiermark and Niederösterreich from Austria	3	0	29	1	1	558	64	23	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund	0	0	37	1	1	578	26	12	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Union Solidarity Fund	0	0	34	1	0	581	23	6	BUD
Draft amending budget No 7/2009, the Klaus Storm in France	0	0	33	1	0	605	23	14	BUD
Draft amending budget N° 9/2009, earthquake in Italy, Section III - Commission	0	0	29	0	0	654	4	15	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: Germany	0	0	30	0	0	598	49	30	BUD
Mobilisation of the EU Solidarity Fund: Italy, the Abruzzo earthquake	0	0	29	0	0	620	4	14	BUD
Draft general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2010, Section I - European Parliament, Section II - Council, Section IV - Court of Justice, Section V - Court of Auditors, Section VI - European Economic and Social Committee, Section VII - Committee of the Regions, Section VIII - European Ombudsman, Section IX - European Data Protection Supervisor	3	2	35	1	0	0	0	0	BUD
Draft general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2010, Section III Commission and Letter of amendment No 1/2010 to the draft general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2010	13	8	39	0	0	483	48	32	BUD
Transitional procedural guidelines on budgetary matters in view of the entry into force of	8	8	36	1	1	576	39	20	INI

the Lisbon Treaty									
Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: Belgium - textile industry; Ireland - Dell	1	1	35	4	0	591	55	28	BUD
Mobilisation of the Flexibility Instrument	0	0	34	2	1	544	18	14	BUD
Draft amending budget No 10/2009, Section III - Commission	0	0	30	1	0	559	25	10	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: <b>SE/Volvo, AT/Steiermark, NL/Heijmans</b>	8	8	28	1	0	531	61	18	BUD
Draft general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2010 as modified by the Council (all sections) and Letters of amendments Nos. 1/2010, 2/2010 and 3/2010 to the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2010	8	8	37	0	1	483	48	32	BUD
Amended proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council amending the Interinstitutional Agreement of 17 May 2006 on budgetary discipline and sound financial management as regards the multiannual financial framework: Financing projects in the field of energy in the context of the European Economic Recovery Plan	0	0	34	2	1	536	18	22	ACI
Estimates of revenue and expenditure for Amending Budget 1/2010 (Section I, European Parliament)	5	0	31	2	3	430	117	58	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: Lithuania - construction of buildings	0	0	25	0	0	557	43	14	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: Germany - redundancies	0	0	26	0	1	525	52	15	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: Lithuania - redundancies	0	0	28	0	0	546	45	14	BUD
Report on the proposal for a Council decision on the allocation of financial intermediation services indirectly measured (FISIM) for the establishment of the gross national income (GNI) used for the purposes of the European Communities' budget and its own resources	2	2	28	0	0	534	4	20	CNS
Report on the guidelines for the 2011 Budget procedure, Section I - European Parliament, Section II - Council, Section IV - Court of Justice, Section V - Court of Auditors, Section VI - European Economic and Social Committee, section VII - Committee of the Regions, Section VIII - European Ombudsman, Section IX -European Data Protection Supervisor	4	4	33	0	0	0	0	0	BUD

Report on Priorities for 2011 budget - Section III - Commission	28	28	31	0	4	558	48	16	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: Lithuania/Manufacture of wearing apparel	0	0	30	1	1	562	34	17	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: Lithuania/Manufacture of furniture	0	0	30	1	1	558	33	23	BUD
REPORT on the estimates of revenue and expenditure of Parliament for the financial year 2011	6	6	35	4	0	0	0	0	BUD
Report Council's position on Draft Amending budget No 1/2010 of the European Union for the financial year 2010, Section I - European Parliament	1	1	31	3	2	509	111	31	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund	0	0	26	0	0	562	55	40	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: ES/Castilla - La Mancha	0	0	26	0	0	580	50	24	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: ES/Region of Valencia	0	0	26	0	0	575	51	25	BUD
Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: Ireland/Waterford Crystal	0	0	26	0	0	573	48	25	BUD
Draft mandate for the trilogue on the 2011 Draft Budget	34	33	38	2	1	571	45	41	BUD
Draft amending budget No 4/2010, Section III - Commission	0	0	29	0	0	652	18	1	BUD
Funding and functioning of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund	71	0	27	9	1	0	0	0	INI
Draft amending budget No 2/2010 of the European Union for the financial year 2010	0	0	30	0	0	618	25	17	BUD
Draft amending budget n° 7/2010, Section III- Commission	0	0	35	2	0	467	41	19	BUD
Draft amending budget n°5/2010, Section III - Commission	0	0	36	1	0	554	21	21	BUD
Interim report on the proposal for a Council regulation laying down the multiannual financial framework for the years 2007-2013	0	0	30	2	3	581	27	74	APP

### Appendix 5.5: Culture and Education Committee– Amendment numbers and results of votes

<b>Report</b>	<b>Ams in committee</b>	<b>Ams in plenary</b>	<b>Committee Yes</b>	<b>Committee No</b>	<b>Committee abstention</b>	<b>Plenary Yes</b>	<b>Plenary No</b>	<b>Plenary abstention</b>	<b>Type of report</b>
Europeana - the next steps	0	1	30	0	0				INI
University-business dialogue	109	0	29	1	0				INI
An EU Strategy for Youth - Investing and Empowering	204	0	31	0	0				INI
Key competences for a changing world: implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme	133	0	26	1	2				INI
Journalism and new media - creating a public sphere in Europe	185	1	24	3	1				INI
Public service broadcasting in the digital era: the future of the dual system	155	0	19	5	1	522	22	62	INI
Early Years Learning in the European Union	91	0	27	0	0	506	27	55	INI
Cultural dimensions of the EU's external actions	189	0	26	0	0	519	46	25	INI
Unlocking the potential of cultural and creative industries	182	0	26	0	2				INI
Youth on the Move: - a framework for improving Europe's education and training systems	225	0	27	0	2				INI
European Union action for the European Heritage Label	146	62	28	0	0	497	18	41	COD