First-Timers Yes, Virgins No: The Roles and Backgrounds of New Members of the European Parliament

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Abstract

This paper reports on a project designed to add to our understanding of the European Parliament by exploring and explaining the roles taken on by its newest members. It outlines an the rationale for, and an initial attempt to construct, a typology of role orientations (or cognitions) from interviews with over fifty 'first-time' MEPs, twenty from the ten 'accession states' and thirty from the 'EU-15' (see Bale and Taggart, 2005). Its other purpose, is to provide an overall picture of the previous experience and demographic profiles of the 2004 cohort of first-time MEPs – data that we hope will be of general interest (partly because we compare first-timers from the accession and EU-15 states) and will in time be used to determine the relative impact of social background and institutional socialisation in the roles adopted by Europe's new parliamentarians.

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National politics in Europe are increasingly affected by European integration. Yet despite the fact that one of the defining ideas shared among those subscribing to the European project is representative democracy, the institutions of the EU are frequently criticised for being insufficiently representative. There is a perceived disconnect between national and EU politics, and between institutions and citizens. As the EU's only directly elected institution, the European Parliament (EP) is its key representative body. Partly in response to accusations of 'democratic deficit', the EP has dramatically increased its power and its size in the last two decades. In 2004, it is bigger than ever and is doing more than it has ever done before. Yet the popular perception of the EP is of an institution of debateable relevance and legitimacy which is home to a Euro-elite that is detached and unrepresentative. It is no exaggeration to say, then, that, for researchers, for the public, and for those making public policy, understanding the EP has never been more important. It is fortunate, then, that anyone interested in the institution can draw on a burgeoning literature contributed to by a thriving community of scholars in both Europe and the USA.[1]

Existing research on the EP tends to focus, firstly, on the role of the EP in European integration and therefore its 'Europeanisation' effects, and, secondly, on parties and elections (see Hix, Raunio and Scully, 2003 for a comprehensive overview). These approaches, often driven by an explicitly comparative perspective and using legislative voting, internal rules and norms, and surveys, continue to generate an impressive body of work (eg Hix, 2002, Kreppel, 2002 and Mamadouh and Raunio,

[1] More details can be found by going to the website of the LSE-based European Parliament Research Group (EPRG), http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/EPRG/

2003). Nevertheless, as Scully and Farrell (2003: 271) observe, there is 'much more that we can and should know' about MEPs as 'individual elected representatives'.

One thing, however, we know already: 'A remarkable feature of the European Parliament', write Corbett et al. (2003a: 40), 'is the high turnover in its membership at each election.' Around half of all the elected representatives who gather in Brussels and Strasbourg at the start of each parliamentary term will be new, 'freshmen' or first-time MEPs. The new European Parliament in the new European Union represents an even less settled prospect than ever, with first-time members constituting the majority. Indeed, with over 400 new members (out of a total of 732), the EP is numerically more of a new institution than an old one. We know, then, that most MEPs are first-timers, but we do not know much – yet at least – about them.

The research presented here is based on a project, funded by the Nuffield Foundation, covering the period July 2004 to July 2005 entitled *The New European Parliament and the New European Parliamentarians*. Our project was designed to 'capture' the new intake of MEPs in order to establish a benchmark to measure their subsequent careers in the EP and gather data on their backgrounds, interests and experiences prior to entering it. In order to do this, we conducted an intensive round of semi-structured, interviews with over 50 MEPs from the new intake. We also constructed a database containing background information on all the first-time MEPs. The project is self standing but is also a pilot for a longer and more ambitious study of the MEPs in the sixth European Parliament, 2004-2009.

Interpreting roles

The overall aim of the project is to complement the existing body of work on the EP by adding new research (based on both intensive interviews and a new database) that treats MEPs not so much as *European* parliamentarians but as parliamentarians *per se*. Such a focus allows us to draw on the insights of research on US and UK legislatures (eg Barber, 1965, Davidson, 1969, Searing, 1994) - research that employs intensive qualitative techniques such as interviewing, observation and direct

engagement with the legislators themselves, as well as a focus on roles that, although not completely ignored, has not been the main driver of research on the EP thus far.

In relation to existing work, then, our research builds on four assumptions. First, we share the view that the EU can be studied comparatively rather than *sui generis* (Judge and Earnshaw, 2003: 8-25 and Scully, 2003: 137-8). Second, recent work by Scully (2005) argues strongly that the Europeanisation focus of EP studies (see Checkel, 2003) has turned out to be something of a blind alley and suggests the need to move on to an individual-level approach which enriches quantitative roll-call analysis and one-off survey work with qualitative, longitudinal methods. Third, there is much more work to be done on the socialisation, rather than just the Europeanisation (see Franklin and Scarrow, 1999) of MEPs and indeed legislators in general. Although there has been some recent work in Britain (Rush and Giddings, 2002), most research on first-time elected representatives, was published or carried out some time ago and covered the US (eg Asher, 1973) and Canada (eg Clarke and Price, 1977, 1980, 1981 and Price, Clarke and Krause, 1976) or both (Kornberg and Thomas, 1965). Fourth, the recent 'interpretive' turn in British political studies (see Bevir and Rhodes, 2003) argues for the importance of researching actors' own views of their behaviour and the institutional context in which they function - a bottom-up approach that stands in marked contrast with top down approaches which privilege the pre-digested frameworks of researchers over the self-understanding of their subjects.

This 'interpretive' turn is in some ways nothing new. In the field of legislative studies it calls to mind an older tradition that exploited on a hybrid mix of qualitative and quantitative methods to explore institutions and their inhabitants via the roles the latter arrived with and took on in the former (see Müller and Saalfeld, 1997). According to Donald Searing's work on *Westminster's World* (Searing, 1994) 'the roles of politicians are dynamic and adaptive patterns of goals, attitudes and behaviours' and therefore need to be explored from a more interpretive (or interpretative) than positivistic (or naturalistic) stance. But this need not - indeed should not (ibid: 23) - preclude us from linking an interest in roles back into what in recent years have become the conventional modes of legislative analysis. As Searing (ibid: 22) argues,

> [a] role's attitudinal components (desires and beliefs) can be thought of as proximate attitudes intertwined with behavior. The reconstruction of these proximate attitudes and behaviors constitutes an interpretative explanation. Now one of the most important ways that this interpretative explanation becomes nested in more-naturalistic macroexplanations is by constructing generalizations that link it back to more-contingent systemic factors that structure the experiences through which the attitudes are learned. Investigations of these origins of roles help us to explain them more fully. We also explain them more fully by investigating their consequences.

Nor should it prevent us (ibid) from employing some of the same vocabulary of what have become more conventional approaches: for instance, roles (or aspects of them) can be treated (though not of course at the same time) as dependent variables and independent variables.

According to Searing, there are essentially three approaches to studying politicians roles, each with its own principal topics of interest and preferred research methods. The 'structural approach' typified by Wahlke et al. (1962) was most interested in 'sets of norms linked to performance of institutional functions' that could be uncovered by highly structured, survey interviews of large samples; but it overemphasised the (albeit significant) extent to which roles were about the expectations of others and the degree of conformity with them. The 'interactional approach', typified by Fenno's participant observation studies with smaller numbers (see Fenno, 1991), was interested (quite properly) in behaviour in specific settings and in how roles were negotiated and picked up; but it neglected both institutional specifics and exogenous preferences. The 'motivational approach', which Searing himself preferred, is found in less theoretically-self-conscious studies (eg Barber, 1965, Woshinsky, 1973, King, 1974, Payne, Aberbach et al., 1981) based on semi-structured interviews with medium sized samples; it aims principally at describing situationally-specific role orientations that recall Wahlke et al's 'purposive roles', as well as emphasising the influence of individual (career-based, ideological or even emotional) preferences, incentives and rationalities determined not just within but also outside the institutional context.

Interestingly, Searing's more interpretivist approach seems to have played only a marginal role, if any, in the handful of recent studies of the EP that do take roles seriously. All focus on roles built on textbook understandings of legislative functions

and notions of representation rather than being based on the self-understandings of the subjects. Richard Katz's two studies, for example, (Katz, 1997 and 1999) employ the concept of role orientations but mainly to tap national variation (on things like protecting national interests rather than boosting European cooperation or using ones own trustee-like judgement rather than defer, delegate style, to the demands of party) between a sample of candidates to the European Parliament

Scully and Farrell (2003) likewise link their study of roles in the EP with both democratic theory's concerns with representation and the classic textbook functions of parliament. Using a survey carried out in September 2000 by Hix and Scully, they are concerned with 'parliamentarians' views of their role as individual representatives: how do they understand this role, what are their priorities within it, and what explains differences between them?' The role of the legislator was subdivided by the authors of the survey into six (legislating, parliamentary oversight, social group representation, representing individual citizens, developing common strategies for EU policies and mediating different social interests), and factor analysis performed to generate four distinct outlooks or 'understanding[s] of the MEP's job' that might explain the importance attached to each of the roles: these were 'party orientation', 'social arbitration', 'interest articulation', and 'parliamentarian'. Next an attempt was made to explain why some MEPs tended toward one outlook while others tended toward others. Interestingly, however, the researchers concluded (Scully and Farrell, 2003: 278-9) that

> measurable, systematic factors provide only a partial ability to explain differences....Thus, our suspicion [is] that much of the variance in attitudes towards the representative role may arise from individual differences not readily captured in more systematic analysis....[T]his may indicate the extent to which most European parliamentarians have thought deeply about their role, and reached differing, individual interpretations of it.

Before hurrying off, however, to find new ways to tease out and explain those 'differing, individual interpretations', however, it is worth reflecting on a couple of the few 'systematic factors' that did seem to make a difference. Two, in particular, are tucked away, yet stand out. The first is an observation that 'social arbitration' - 'most strongly associated with attitudes towards social group representation, social

mediation and the development of common EU strategies,...suggesting a commonality between representing broad social agendas and seeking to ameliorate social problems' - was 'negatively correlated with experience in the chamber' (Scully and Farrell, 2003: 278). The second is the that 'those with greater length of service in the chamber are more inclined to emphasize the importance of traditional parliamentary activities' (ibid.: 278). These findings are interesting because they recall those of a notable investigation of the US congress (Davidson, 1969), and they are important because like that investigation, they point to the significance of socialisation when it comes to the role orientations, and by inference the behaviour, of legislators.

Using over one hundred interviews with US congressmen, Roger H. Davidson, developed a taxonomy of role cognitions which predisposed those holding them to certain activities. These cognitions included 'tribune' (big on representation) 'ritualist' (big on the legislative process), 'inventor' (big on policy ideas), 'broker' (big on balancing and blending interests) and 'opportunist' (big on campaigning), while the activities focused on were legislation, playing 'errand boy' for constituents, campaigning and communicating. In so doing, Davidson came up with a crucial distinction - implicit, too, in Scully and Farrell's work - as well as a useful working definition of role orientation (or more precisely 'role cognition'), which he saw (Davidson, 1969: 97) as

> perhaps the most revealing single indicator we have of how legislators define their jobs. It affords a snapshot of the member's mental image of himself as a legislator. While presumably adjacent to the choices members make in performing their daily tasks, role cognition is not actual behavior in the commonly accepted usage. As an expressed attitude, it is a predisposition to behave in certain ways. This is why the normative quality of role cognition has been stressed: As a self-assessment of what the legislator is expected to do, his role cognition will pull him in certain directions and not in others.

Like Scully and Farrell, and indeed numerous investigators before him, Davidson discovered that, while factors like occupational training, political experience and career patterns, 'help to illuminate the ways in which legislators respond to their environment in selecting and acting out their roles', 'so-called "social background variables" offer scant explanation of legislative role-taking' (Davidson, 1969: ix). But, more perhaps than others, he was led to a logical conclusion that may be the most

interesting aspect of his study. Davidson found that, when it came to why a legislator would choose one role more than another, social characteristics were, on balance, less important than length of time and status in the legislature. In short, socialisation mattered as much if not more than social background.

A typology of roles for first time MEPs

Our initial focus was what our interviews revealed about the role orientations of the parliamentarians and the extent to which they vary with their background, interests, experience, and skills. As reported in a previous paper (Bale and Taggart, 2005), our working hypothesis (primarily based on data collected from the pilot study) is that there are four ideal types of role orientations, which we label as follows:

> ***policy advocate*** - dedication to a limited range of issues; EP seen as arena for policy promotion and policy making; focus on building and demonstrating expertise; prioritising committee work; prepared to work across party group lines; satisfaction comes from legislative achievement.
>
> ***constituency representative*** - constituency can be country, electoral district or a particular interest group; EP seen as problem solving venue and potential provider of benefits; focus determined by constituency rather than by the MEP; emphasis placed upon travel to, presence in and delivering to those represented; satisfaction comes from delivery of selective goods.
>
> ***European evangelist*** - strong commitment to the European project; EP seen as means to 'sell' Europe back home; focus on pan-European themes and achievements; often has prior European or international experience; explicit commitment to working across nationalities and delegations; satisfaction comes from identification with key symbolic milestones of European integration.
>
> ***institutionalist*** - institution can be party, party group or EP as a whole; parliament seen as an end in itself; focus is determined by strategic,

instrumental considerations; emphasis on party group; satisfaction derived from institutional progress; may exhibit leadership aspirations.

A final, residual category - and one by definition not captured by our pilot project's research methods - would be ***absentee***. We intend to estimate the size (though not, given the sensitivity of the issue, the membership) of this group by cross referencing non voting in key plenary votes with more informal sources of data on non-attendance.

Taking, very briefly, the interviewees from the 'accession states' interviewed in late 2004 and early 2005, and bearing in mind we make no claims as to statistical validity, the European evangelist was the single most common orientation. Many who could be so called had extensive experience dealing with the EU, often, for example, via their role in European committees of their national parliaments: they had in effect spent several years selling their country to Europe and were now in the business of selling Europe to their country. The least common orientation was insitutionalist. As for constituency representatives, not all of them conceived of their constituency in geographical terms but constructed it to mean a certain sector or minority. For policy advocates, the policy or policies advocated varied, although a number of those from CEE countries saw it as part of their mission to explain Russia to the EU and to warn it not to be too accommodating or naive about its intentions and methods.

What comes over more generally, taking into account MEPs from across the EU, is the extent to which role orientations are individualised and not in any immediate sense predictable from party or national backgrounds. What also comes across strongly is that the fluid nature of the EP, and the fact that its members are less hemmed in by domestic parties, voters and interests, allows MEPs considerable leeway in choosing - at least initially - how they want to play things while they are in Strasbourg and Brussels. Finally - on a more human note but one that researchers cannot really ignore - the other thing that comes across strongly, is the huge personal strain imposed by membership of an institution that demands so much travel and separation from home.

Future trajectories

The typology presents us with our dependent variable and from that flow a number of obviously key research questions. What are the causes and correlates of role orientations? Do role orientations remain static or change over time? What is the relationship between role orientations and behaviour in the EP? What is the impact of roles taken on MEPs' perceived or real 'success' or 'failure'?

Tracking MEPs over five years, as we hope to do, will allow us to see whether, why and how their goals, perceptions and roles change over time. We would expect there to be some relationship between the different roles taken by MEPs and their progress, status and positions within the EP. Tracing trajectories over time allows us to observe emerging differences between MEPs and to compare their expectations with their actual achievements. Travelling up what is from the beginning a steep learning curve will almost certainly impact on the roles taken by MEPs. Finding out what they can and cannot do will have consequences for both their attitudes, desires and beliefs and their behaviour. Different roles will be differently affected by this journey along the learning curve.

For example, beginning with the European evangelist, we expect this role to be easier to maintain: indeed, it may become something of a 'rational refuge' for those who began with other orientations. The European project is sufficiently diffuse that evidence of its success can always be found by enthusiasts, just as, for Eurosceptics, evidence of failure is always around. MEPs taking this role will generally enjoy the greatest degree of latitude in an institution that already grants its members considerable degree of freedom. In contrast we believe policy advocates may have the greatest difficulty in sustaining their roles. This is because, we assume, the EP's relative lack of purchase on policy militates against an MEP notching up clear policy wins. For those constituency representative types whose constituency is defined in national terms, we expect that they, like the European evangelists, will have a relatively easy time in sustaining their roles. Again, the breadth of an agenda that is about using the EP to defend national interests and the ability (indeed perhaps need) to identify those interests in selective ways, means that frustrations should be relatively rare. For constituency representatives whose constituencies are more

specific, we expect that there will be more dissonance within this role as the EP provides a difficult arena for the unequivocally successful delivery of constituency service. Institutionalists of the leadership aspirant type will have difficulty in sustaining these roles if they are unsuccessful in attaining office. Unusually for a parliament, the EP does provide the opportunity for freshmen MEPs to be relatively successful relatively quickly. Conversely, those unlikely to succeed will realise this equally swiftly and may well switch roles accordingly.

Where they are now

All this, however, is ahead of us – and, more importantly, ahead of the MEPs themselves. Before we, like other researchers, can confidently dismiss or at least play down the impact of social background (relative to socialisation), we need to do the spadework to establish what Europe's new parliamentarians were before they entered Europe's new parliament. Obviously, for our sample of interviewees we can go into much more detail, but it is just as important to gain an overall sense of the cohort of which they are a part. In fact, this is no easy task. Preliminary work begun before we contemplated the project indicated the need for a comprehensive database that would have to be constructed from scratch, using material from various digests, guides, compendiums, websites and personal enquiries.[2] The figures reported here come from that database (and from the European Parliament's website), entries in which were hopefully correct as of end-July 2005.

The first thing that stands out from the data collected is that the new European Parliament really is new. As Table 1 shows, not one party group contains more 'old hands' (ie incumbents) than first-timers. The same table also confirms the prediction that the 2004 accession would benefit the (centre) right of the political spectrum more than it would the left. At first glance the distribution of first-time MEPs across the party groups is almost a match for the distribution of all MEPs. However, this disguises a big difference between first-timers from the EU-15 and those from the accession states, particularly with regard to the EP's two largest party groups:

[2] We would like to acknowledge here the tireless research assistance of Dan Keith, a doctoral student at the Sussex European Institute. Dan not only put in the hours doing the enquiring, the coding and the setting up of the database, but his good sense often guided us as much as we guided him.

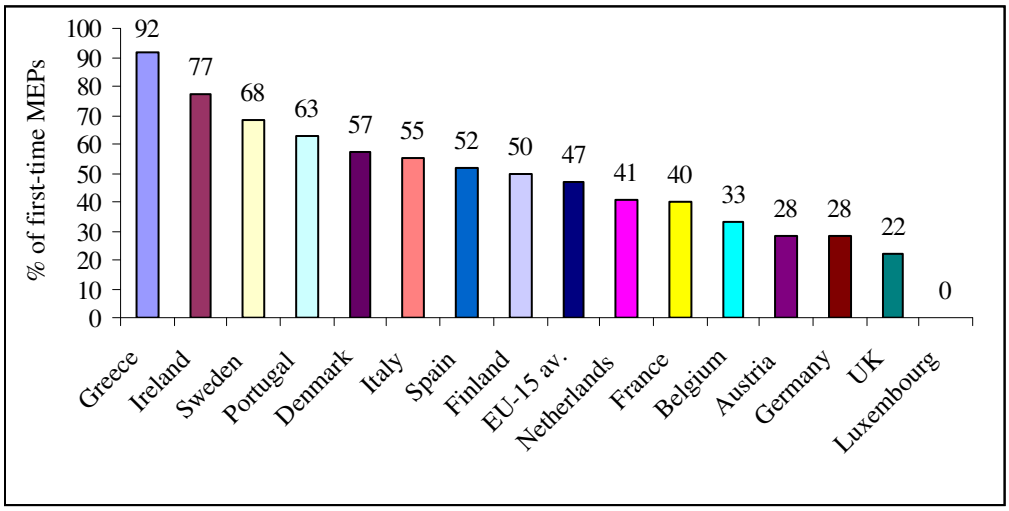
whereas only 28% of EU-15 first timers ended up in the EPP-ED (the centre right Christian Democrat-Conservative combination known as the European People's Party – European Democrats), some 42% of their accession country counterparts did so; however, only 20% of the latter joined the PES (the social democratic Party of European Socialists), which attracted 30% of first-timers from the EU-15 countries. Table 1 also bears out, among other things, the prediction that accession would do the Green group in the EP no favours.

Table 1 The distribution of MEPs in EP Party Groups

	First-time MEPs (N)	First-time MEPs %	First-time MEPs EU-15 (N)	First-time MEPs EU-15 (%)	First-time MEPs Acc.10 (N)	First-time MEPs Acc.10 (%)	All MEPs (N)	All MEPs (%)	First-timers as % of Party Group
EPP	139	34	70	28	69	42	266	36	52
PES	106	26	73	30	33	20	201	27	53
ALDE	50	12	31	12	19	12	89	12	56
Greens	22	5	21	9	1	1	42	6	52
Left	29	7	21	9	8	5	41	6	71
ID	26	6	15	6	11	7	35	5	74
UEN	18	5	5	2	13	8	27	4	67
Unattached	18	5	10	4	8	5	29	4	62

As shown in Figure 1, there is also considerable variation between EU member states as to the number of their MEPs that are first-timers – mainly (though probably not completely) due to different parties winning seats in 2004 compared to 1999.

Figure 1 First time MEPs as a proportion of EU-15 states' contingents in the EP

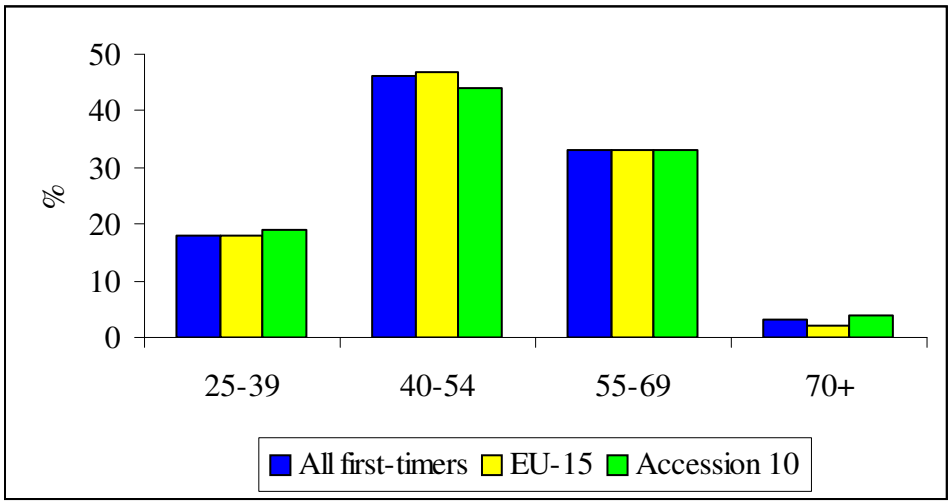


Obviously none of those from the accession states are incumbents, but the proportion of MEPs from the EU-15 states that are new ranges from none from Luxembourg, through around a quarter from Germany, Austria and the UK, a third and over from Belgium, France and the Netherlands, over half from Finland, Italy, Denmark and Spain, around two-thirds from Portugal and Sweden, three quarters from Ireland, up to an incredible nine out of ten from Greece.

Moving on to demographic data, lack of data on the parliament as a whole means we cannot make comparisons between incumbents and first-timers.[3] However, as Figure 2 shows, we can say there is little difference between the age distribution of first-time MEPs from 'new' and 'old' member states.

[3] The paucity of systematic data available on all Europe's parliamentarians is something we hope to correct in the future by extending our database to all MEPs.

Figure 2 Age distribution among first-time MEPs



Readily available data does exist – courtesy of the IPU – to allow us to make comparisons between the number of women in the EP as a whole and the numbers coming in as first-time MEPs. Our figures also allow us to compare, once again, the EU-15 and the Accession 10 member states. As Table 2 shows, just over half of all women MEPs are first-timers, but considerably less than a third of first-timers are women, with a significantly smaller proportion (23% compared to 31%) coming from the new member states. This suggests that what would have been an improvement in female representation was offset by the accession, meaning the EP remains in very much a mid-table position in Europe according to the rankings prepared by the IPU.[4]

Table 2 Women in the European Parliament

First-time women MEPs (N)	First-time women MEPs (%)	EU-15 female first-timers (N)	EU-15 fermale first timers (%)	Acc.10 female first-timers (N)	Acc.10 female first-timers (%)	All women MEPs (N)	All women MEPs (%)	First-timers as % of all women
114	28	77	31	37	23	222	30	51

[4] See http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm

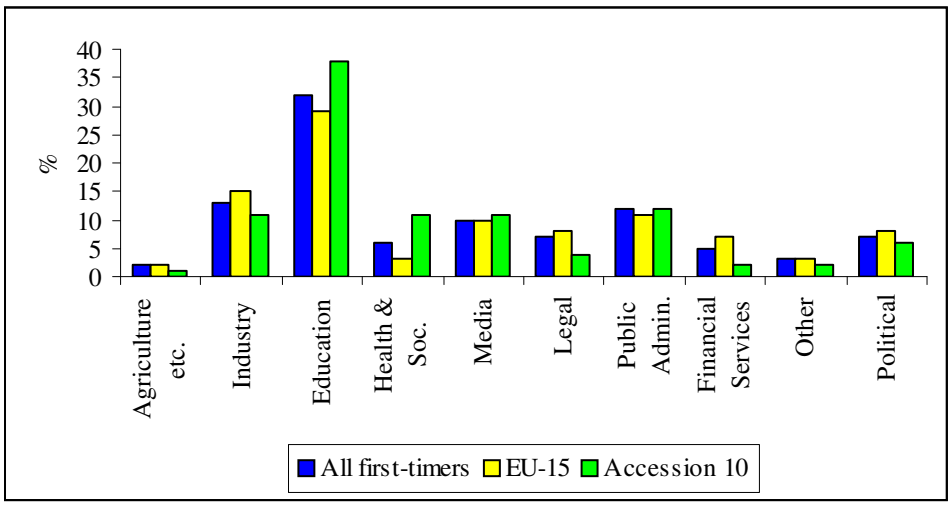
If the age distribution of first-time MEPs hardly varies between member states and the gender distribution varies only a little (if significantly), there is one area where our figures point to a big difference, namely education (see Table 2). First time MEPs across Europe are a well-educated lot. The vast majority have first degrees and some six out of ten possess some kind of postgraduate qualification, up to and including a Ph.D. But the first-time MEPs coming from the new member states are even better educated than their 'western' counterparts. Indeed they are almost twice as likely to have a postgraduate qualification more than twice as likely to possess a doctorate. In fact, it may not be an exaggeration to say that the MEPs from the new member states may be every bit as well qualified as the academic audience for whom this paper is primarily intended!

Table 2 Education, education, education: first-time MEPs' postgraduate qualifications

	First-time MEPs (N)	**First-time MEPs %**	**First-time MEPs EU-15 (N)**	**First-time MEPs EU-15 (%)**	**First-time MEPs Acc.10 (N)**	**First-time MEPs Acc.10 (%)**
Postgraduate education	244	60	110	45	134	83
Doctorate	121	30	45	18	76	47

This impressive array may well have something to do with the previous occupations of first-time MEPs, detailed in Figure 3. Employment in education was by some considerable distance the single most common background, with almost a third of first-time MEPs (and more in the accession states) having worked in this area. Just over 10% worked in industry, in media and in public administration, and – in the accession states – in health and social services. Perhaps surprisingly, only 7% had a legal background. And interestingly, given the importance of agriculture and fisheries to the EU budget that the EP has to sign off on, only 2% had worked in those areas.

Figure 3 First time MEPs' occupational backgrounds



Finally, what about the previous political experience of first-time MEPs? The main message is that they may be new to the European Parliament but many of them are not new to politics. True, not many, taken as a whole, have experience working with or in EU institutions or, indeed, other international organisations such as the NATO or OSCE assemblies, although a quarter of first-time MEPs from the new member states had worked with or in such organisations. However, over two-thirds of all first-time MEPs have experience as elected politicians – a proportion that rises to three quarters for first-time MEPs from the accession countries. Table 3 also reveals interesting differences between where this elected experience was gained, with first-time MEPs from the old member states being considerably more likely than their counterparts from the new member states to have served at local and regional levels, while the latter were much more likely to have served in national parliaments and in government. Indeed, while just over a third of first-time MEPs from the EU-15 had served in their national parliament, some six out of ten first-timers from the accession states had done so – and one in three had served in their national governments in some capacity. Over half of all first time MEPs had held national office within their party, though perhaps because of the new member states' relatively underdeveloped regional systems, less of those from that part of Europe had served their parties at that level.

Table 3 First time MEPs' previous political experience

Previous Experience	First-time MEPs (N)	First-time MEPs %	First-time MEPs EU-15 (N)	First-time MEPs EU-15 (%)	First-time MEPs Acc.10 (N)	First-time MEPs Acc.10 (%)
EU institutions	40	10	22	9	18	11
International organisations	72	18	29	12	43	26
Elected Office	288	71	168	68	120	74
Local council	171	42	124	50	47	29
Regional government	52	13	43	18	9	6
National parliament	185	45	89	36	96	60
National government	95	23	41	17	54	33
High position in national party	206	50	120	49	86	53
High position in regional party	60	15	49	20	11	7

Conclusion

First-timers they may be but unschooled virgins they are not – especially if they come from one of the EU's new member states. This is the main message from our data on the background and experience of those entering the European parliament for the first time during its sixth term. The question for further research is whether or not experience and demographic factors have any bearing on the role orientations of the first-time MEPs, orientations which may change over time as they are socialised into the new institution. Initial analysis of our interviews suggest that, in common with other researchers on legislatures, we are likely to find that beliefs and behaviour cross cut background, though we cannot be sure – unless we are afforded an opportunity to track parliamentarians across time – that their formative experiences, age, sex, etc. 'will out' in the end. It is certainly more likely to make a difference to how they do and how they think about what they do than any formal training they are given either at the beginning or through the course of their parliamentary terms.

One thing many of our interviewees mentioned was the lack of such training, either on the part of the institution (even though its secretariat is generally highly thought of by MEPs) or by the party groups that dominate its organisation. For some first-timers this was not a problem. Some knew or were able to find out a lot about the institution from their own experience or that of others. Some of the MEPs from new member states were EP observers in the run-up to accession – although, from our calculations, two thirds of them were not. Finally, some were quite content with the lack of formal induction training because they believed in learning by doing. Others, though, felt that a more thorough programme would have allowed them to hit the ground running, to be more effective more quickly. Perhaps one of the practical applications of our research over the long term will be to assist, at least a little, in that process.

The EP and the MEPs present considerable challenges to researchers keen to tackle it comparatively. The former is not simply - and, in the fullest sense, not even - a legislature. And more than most national parliaments it is still very much a work in progress. Moreover, understanding its members involves understanding twenty-five national contexts, as well as the EU context. We began, however, by wanting to avoid treating the whole thing as *sui generis*. We still hold to that insistence. Nevertheless, we have to recognise that the difficulty we believe those MEPs we call policy advocates and constituency representatives will have in maintaining those orientations may mean the EP is bound to be a *European* institution. And whether the movement towards European evangelism that we hypothesise (assuming of course that it occurs) ends by explaining the *going native* meta-narrative which we were equally determined at the outset to avoid will be interesting to see.

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