

Intra-Party Group Unity in the European Parliament Prior to its First Direct Elections in 1979

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This article examines the inner unity of the European Parliament's (EP) party groups prior to its first direct elections in 1979, at a time when such unity was technically not necessary, given the EP's dominantly consultative role, according to the Treaties; and when no electoral incentives and few disciplinary tools could be used to enforce unity. Using semi-structured interviews with former Members of the EP (MEPs) from all EP party groups existing prior to 1979, as well as EP documents from that time, this article highlights, on the one hand, the positive and strategic incentives that group unity brought to individual MEPs. On the other hand, the article demonstrates the MEPs' socialisation to group solidarity norms, their shared preferences and their personal connections. The article also suggests the role of MEPs' attitudes towards European integration, and willingness to increase the power of their institution.

Keywords: Cohesion, European Communities, European integration, European Parliament, Party groups, Party unity

1. Introduction

One of the first acts of the predecessor of the European Parliament (EP), the Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), was to form party groups. The ECSC Treaty did not provide for such groups, nor were they technically necessary at the time: according to the Treaty, the Assembly was nothing close to a parliament, but instead a merely consultative body with the sole aim to control the ECSC High Authority. However, the Assembly's early members aimed from the beginning to turn their institution into a supranational parliament in the long term. Establishing party groups swiftly proved to be one of

the simplest yet most effective steps to increase the Assembly's parliamentary character.

Each group consisted of a wide range of national parties' members with, at times, considerably differing attitudes. Thus, it proved to be not quite as easy to obtain intra-party group unity as it was to establish the groups in the first place. One major difficulty was the absence of any kind of whip to enforce party discipline: since the careers of the Assembly's members were decided at national, not European level, the party groups themselves had only few instruments at hand to either punish or reward members. Besides, intra-group unity could not be prompted by the usual dynamics of parliamentary competition between government and opposition. This article seeks to analyse why the party groups nonetheless developed a level of inner unity that proved crucial in the structuring of the EP's everyday work.

This article opens with an outline of the applied theoretical approach and an overview of the development and functioning of the EP's party groups prior to its first direct elections. The analysis then assesses how and why intra-group unity was reached. First, it brings into light the role of the Members of the EP's (MEPs') socialisation to the norm of group solidarity, as well as their desire to create a powerful parliamentary institution. Second, it puts forwards the ideological preferences of the MEPs, and identifies the role of shared ideas and motives particularly with regard to European integration. Third, it highlights the pragmatic reasons that motivated individual MEPs to follow and support their party group's positions, and what possibilities the groups had to keep their members in line. The concluding remarks summarise the main findings, and offer an outlook on remaining research gaps.

This article examines party group unity beyond the MEPs' voting behaviour—not least because many votes both in EP committees and in plenary were unanimous at that time. Consequently, the article focuses on the processes leading to group unity, and takes into consideration the MEPs' socialisation and ideological stances, which proved crucial factors in the evolution of a functioning EP party group system.

The originality of this article lies not least in the fact that it analyses intra-group cohesion prior to 1979, at a time when the EP did not correspond to the institution described in the Treaties. As such, the article goes beyond a usual misconception of many historians and political scientists who consider the first direct elections of 1979 as the first necessary step towards a truly parliamentary character of the EP (among others [Shackleton, 2012](#); [Defarges, 2005](#); [Kardasheva, 2009](#)). Noteworthy exceptions studying the EP from its beginnings are, among others, works by [Rittberger \(2003, 2014\)](#), [Knudsen \(2014\)](#) and [Meyer \(2014\)](#). This article shows that today's role of the EP and its swift gain in power over the last decades cannot be fully understood without taking into consideration the EP's early years, and particularly the MEPs' behaviour during these years ([Roos, 2017](#)).

2. Theoretical approach

This article takes as a point of departure the significant difference between the role provided for the EP by the Treaties, and its informally evolving, and over-time formalised, role as the Communities' supranational parliament. The article emphasises that intra-party group unity must be understood as a process undergoing frequent change. It traces the causes of intra-group unity and demonstrates the path-dependent development of such unity, despite the fact that the party groups underwent permanent transformations due to relatively high turnover, resulting from the MEPs' double mandate: with every national election the respective national delegation was changed; moreover, many MEPs left the EP before the end of their national mandate because they had to take over national positions, or because they could not sufficiently fulfil their parliamentary duties at all levels.

Given that the MEPs had the power of decision over the EP's Rules of Procedure, and hence the EP's inner structure, this article focuses on the activist role played by the early MEPs rather than on Treaty provisions. The EP, shaped by its members, must be understood to have been under permanent construction, not simply in a teleological sense of getting closer and closer to a real parliament, but in the sense that its members were never satisfied with the role and powers given to the EP, and consequently frequently attempted to change their institution according to their perception of what it should be. As will be elaborated below, the EP's party groups swiftly turned into important fora in the MEPs' struggle for more influence and more parliamentary powers.

With regard to the party groups' inner unity, this article adopts the definition of unity presented in the introduction to this special section, that is the acting of legislators in unison, resulting notably from group cohesion and discipline. For the case of the EP party groups prior to 1979, this analysis demonstrates that cohesion played a much more significant role than party group discipline. Being mostly based on rationality and compulsion, and at least to some extent enforceable by a kind of whip, discipline had but a thin basis in the EP as an institution whose party groups had few formal rights and powers, no whip and hardly any possibility to offer their members career opportunities in exchange of their allegiance. Cohesion, however, which constitutes the sociological dimension of unity, was reached early on in the EP's institutional evolution, notably through shared preferences among the early MEPs, and their socialisation both at national and European parliamentary level.

This article examines the strategic motivations driving MEPs to act in unison within their groups, both from an ideological and a pragmatic perspective. The analysis demonstrates that prior to 1979, MEPs' loyalty to their respective groups played no significant role in the evolution and maintenance of intra-group unity. It was much more the pursuit of political and institutional aims, and of the highest level of effectiveness in combining national and European mandates, that induced MEPs to

stick to party group lines. In order to explain the evolution of intra-party group unity in the EP prior to its first direct elections, it is necessary to examine the individual MEPs' reasons for falling into line, and the extents to which the delegates shaped that line themselves in the early years of the EP's existence. This article thus focuses on the individual level of party group unity rather than on the acting of the group as a whole, which could not meaningfully explain that unity's coming into being.

3. The European Parliament's party groups prior to 1979: development and functions

The EP had few powers and tasks based on the founding Treaties of the European Communities: it was to control the Commission, and could be consulted by the Commission and the Council on a limited number of policy areas. In most cases, the EP's opinion had no binding character, which did not stop the early MEPs from expressing their opinion whenever they thought fit. Based on the Treaties founding the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom), the EP was no parliament, but a consultative assembly of national parliamentarians. Two treaties on the Communities' budget of 1970 and 1975 increased the EP's parliamentary powers to some extent, since they gave the EP a certain level of budgetary control. The EP's first direct elections in 1979 added to the EP's supranational parliamentary character, making its members directly elected supranational parliamentarians. Formally, however, the EP only gained parliamentary character with the extensions of its powers and competencies through the Single European Act and the Treaties of Maastricht and Amsterdam.

Despite the limited parliamentary characteristics of the EP, most of the early MEPs aimed to act as much like Euro-parliamentarians as possible. They had one crucial tool at hand to do so: the Treaties granted the EP full decisional power over its own Rules of Procedure (Articles 25 ECSC, 142 EEC, 112 Euratom). Thus, the early MEPs could shape the role of their institution according to their shared aim to turn the assembly into a supranational parliament. As one of the first structural decisions, the MEPs created party groups in 1953, and thus organised the EP's everyday working procedures based on political affiliation, not nationality (EP 1, 1953). The EP's party groups swiftly structured the entire parliamentary work, not least through the establishment of party group secretariats and the allocation of funding to the groups. Moreover, the party groups determined the composition of the EP's committees, also established in 1953 (EP 2, 1953). Speaking time in plenary sessions, committee chairmanships and rapporteurships were distributed among the groups according to their size.

The first EP party groups namely the Christian-Democratic, Socialist and Liberal Group were formed based on the national party affiliation of the early

MEPs, corresponding to the main existing party families in the original six Member States. The evolution of EP groups was furthermore influenced by a number of events, triggering the formation of new groups, or the split-up or merger of existing ones. In January 1965, for instance, the EP reduced the minimum number of MEPs required to form a party group, to allow a number of French Gaullist parliamentarians, many of whom had previously been in the Liberal Group, to found their own group. The newly established *Union démocratique européenne* had a rather nationalist attitude, based on the political position of most of its members. In 1973, the *Union démocratique européenne* was re-named the group of the European Progressive Democrats when members of the Irish Fianna Fáil party joined it.

Tensions within party groups not always led to splits. While usually being named as the group with the highest inner cohesion (Mittag, 2011), the Socialist Group experienced a period of tensions in the 1950s, when the Europeanism that the Benelux and Italian MEPs in the group pursued collided with the German Social Democratic Party's (SPD) opposition towards plans for a European Defence Community (Guerrieri, 2015, p. 396), based on the German Social-Democrats' fear that closer European integration would endanger German re-unification. The German Social Democrats' turn to a more favourable position towards more European integration in the late 1950s, however, eased these tensions.

In the early 1970s, the EP experienced significant extensions, which contributed to a rise in controversy across all groups. In 1973, Denmark, Ireland and the UK joined the Communities. Thus, members of several new national parties entered the EP. In the same year, French Communists, who had until then been blocked from joining their national delegation (as were Italian Communists and Socialists until 1969), entered the EP (Bracke, 2007). Both these extensions made the EP considerably more heterogeneous in political attitudes.

The Communist MEPs formed a group of their own in 1973, instead of joining an existing one, since they did not fit politically in any of the established groups (Fitzmaurice, 1975). The British and Danish Conservatives and the Irish Fine Gael negotiated with the EP's Christian Democratic Group. Eventually, only Fine Gael joined the Christian Democrats—even though there had also been discussions right after the enlargement whether Fine Gael should instead join the EP's Socialist Group (interview with Charles McDonald). The majority of Fine Gael MEPs was, however, convinced that they fit better into the Christian Democratic Group. The Danish and British Conservatives eventually formed their own group. While the German Christian Democratic MEPs had hoped to create a centre-right front with them, the Italian and Benelux members of the Christian Democratic Group feared the loss of the group's Christian Democratic identity if taking in the Conservatives (Jansen, 1998).

British Labour MEPs joined the Socialist Group in 1975: being rather Euro-sceptic, the party had insisted to wait for the result of a referendum on UK

membership that year before entering the EP (Pollack, 2009). During the 1970s, and for years beyond the first enlargement, British Labour MEPs occasionally gave their fellow members of the Socialist Group a hard time finding common positions: according to the German MEP Heinz Schreiber, who was a member of the Socialist Group, some Labour MEPs considered British interests to be occasionally endangered by European ones, thus complicating the finding of common positions within a group otherwise dominated by pro-integrationists (interview with Heinz Schreiber). Overall, however, the level of intra-group controversy remained relatively low in the EP prior to 1979.

4. Tracing and explaining intra-party group cohesion in the EP prior to 1979

The following analysis of factors of and reasons for intra-group unity in the EP prior to 1979 is based on the one hand on a selection of EP documents, among others resolutions, reports, minutes of debates and draft documents from the period 1953–1979. On the other hand, the analysis relies on 22 semi-structured interviews with former parliamentarians from all Member States and party groups prior to 1979. The interviews offer insights into the early MEPs' self-conception and understanding of their tasks and responsibilities connected to the different levels of their double mandate as national and European parliamentarians. The interviewees were picked with regard to their national background and party affiliation, to get a relatively representative sample in terms of EP party groups and national delegations. In combination with the EP documents, the statements of the interviewed MEPs provide a very clear picture of everyday working procedures in the EP, and the role played therein by the EP's party groups.

The following analysis differentiates a number of factors that help explaining the evolution of intra-group cohesion in the early EP. It sorts these factors in four categories: first, the impact of the MEPs' parliamentary socialisation both in the national parliaments and at EP level is studied. Second, the analysis looks at the importance of shared preferences binding MEPs together in their groups, and making them act in unison. However, also the limits of these shared preferences are discussed. Third, pragmatic reasons of labour division underlying group unity are analysed. Fourth, incentives are examined that made MEPs uphold intra-group unity, despite the absence of any kind of whip.

4.1. Socialisation

One of the main factors of the party groups' inner cohesion was the MEPs' parliamentary socialisation: since all of them were MPs in their respective Member States, they all brought their national parliamentary traditions with them to

Strasbourg, whether wittingly or unwittingly (Hix et al., 2003, p. 313ff). All delegates were used to some form of party discipline and cohesion. Thus, it appeared reasonable to them to organise their institution's work along party lines, driven by the motivation to turn the EP into a real supranational parliament, rather than making it another inter-parliamentary assembly, such as the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (confirmed in most interviews). The newly created party groups were to be as efficient as possible. Intra-group cohesion certainly seemed to be one of the most obvious tools to create effective procedures and mechanisms of parliamentary work, as the MEPs knew from their national parliaments.

The structures and procedures which the early MEPs established and gradually formalised developed themselves an own socialising effect on later delegates. Being new to the Parliament, MEPs tended to follow established procedures in order to swiftly integrate, and to benefit from the position and influence their respective party group had achieved. Having once become integrated members of a party group, MEPs would continue to abide to party group lines and procedures, in order to continuously benefit from group membership. Often they would also follow party group lines because they wanted to be, or had been, allocated certain positions and tasks within their group, or in committees or the EP as a whole based on their group membership. MEPs would develop expectations of their group not only with regard to positions, but also with regard to being assigned speaking time on specific issues according to their expertise, or getting the support of their group for an own initiative if supporting other group initiatives themselves. Once integrated into the group structures, MEPs would introduce new delegates to established procedures that they had come to experience as beneficial and effective, so that these procedures would remain effective. Since all MEPs already knew party discipline from the national parliaments, these socialisation procedures did not require a significant change of habits with regard to parliamentary behaviour.

Such socialisation of MEPs within party groups is most clearly visible in the cases of a number of delegates who entered the EP seeking in the first place to represent their own Member State, and being rather sceptical towards more European integration, which the majority in the EP strongly advocated. Regardless of whether their opinion towards European integration changed or not, the assimilation of these MEPs shows that they recognised the EP's party group system as efficient and beneficial. One clear example is the British Labour MEP Lady Fisher of Rednal, who entered the EP in 1975. In her 'maiden speech' during a plenary debate on the education of migrant children in November that year, she spoke exclusively for her country of origin, even though representing the EP's Socialist Group during the debate (see also EP 3, EP 4). After several months in parliament, however, every reference to the UK disappeared from her

speeches, and she spoke dominantly from a European point of view, thus more clearly representing her group rather than her Member State and national party (EP 5, EP 6).

4.2. Shared preferences

Intra-group cohesion in the EP prior to 1979 can be traced in EP documents that show not only the different groups' standing on certain issues, but also their inner unity. In some cases, such documents also reveal the existence of internal minorities who represented alternative opinions. The occasional mentioning of such minorities implies that whenever none was pointed out, unity within the groups prevailed. One example that allows some insight into the groups' inner cohesion is the preparatory work to an EP Resolution on European Union, adopted on 10 July 1975. In the preparation process all party groups were requested to submit their opinion on European Union (EP 7). So they did, and their answers are quite telling.

The Christian Democrats' statement contained very detailed propositions for the implementation of European Union (EP 8): the group called for a strengthened role of the EP and its direct election, went into detail in what way the conciliation procedure, introduced with the budget treaties of 1970 and 1975 (Priestley, 2008), should be extended, and what power a real European government should have. Agreement on such specific and at the time rather controversial issues signifies a high level of congruence among the party group's members' preferences. The answers of the Socialist Group were to some respect very similar to those of the Christian Democrats, particularly with regard to the call for a Community government, and a strengthened role for the EP (EP 9). The Socialists' statement, however, also contained some indication that the group's cohesion was not comprehensive: a footnote indicates that a number of Danish, Irish and Dutch members of the group did not share the opinion of the other members that foreign and security policy should be areas of European competence.

The answers given by the EP's Conservative Group were rather detailed and coherent (EP 10). The Conservative's document contained an explicit call for direct elections of the EP as a first step towards European Union, since the group considered the elections the key to all progress. Furthermore, the group expressed its opposition to a comprehensive programme for the extension of the Community's political competences, but stated that such competences would need to grow progressively, and should be based on intergovernmental co-operation and the public's wishes and needs. In the European Union of the future, the group saw the main decision-making power remaining with the Council, the Commission's powers and tasks remaining relatively unchanged and the EP's being slightly increased, notably through a partial power of initiative and an extension of the conciliation procedure.

Even the Progressive Democrats—arguably the least Euro-enthusiastic group in the EP at the time—argued in favour of progressively establishing European Union. Yet, the group called for a strengthening of the Council and stated that Community-wide direct elections of the EP would be impossible since there would be no European nation-state. This signifies the inner conflicts of the group: some members were open to significantly more integration, whereas others pursued a Community in which decision-making power remained firmly in the Member States' hands. The answers submitted by the Liberal and Allies Group (EP 12) contain some similarly vague statements, for instance that a Union should only contain constitutive elements of a federation where that would be necessary, or that the EP should get a power of initiative, however only in those domains directly affecting the individual citizen. In addition, the Liberal Group's statement openly shows a certain degree of disunity within the group by stating that some members would have wished to include a longer list of policy areas which should fall under Community competence, but that the majority of group members considered it too ambitious to reach such integration anytime soon.

These different statements on European Union indicate the crucial basis of shared preferences connecting the MEPs—though to different extents—within the party groups. Within the different groups, delegates shared roughly the same ideas of European integration, and often pursued the same political and institutional objectives. Even if holding at times different opinions on specific strategies and policy aspects, the shared objectives motivated the MEPs to act and to vote together within their groups. This is visible, among others, in a speech by the Italian Communist MEP Altiero Spinelli, who in a debate on youth unemployment pointed out that the majority of his group would vote together on a motion for a resolution on the table, even though they did not have a very favourable opinion of the precise proposals put forward. However, they would consider the fight against youth unemployment too important as not to do anything against it (EP 13). The fact that Spinelli spoke of the majority of the Communist MEPs voting in favour of the motion, not the entire group, points out that though shared preferences had a power to *unite* MEPs, they were not strong enough to *enforce* party group unity.

MEPs voted and acted together in their groups based on shared preferences not only for ideological reasons of reaching a common aim. Acting according to shared preferences also had an important rational dimension: as at other parliamentary levels, MEPs tended to follow those colleagues whose 'outcome preferences most closely resemble[d] the positions they would [have chosen] if they possessed the expertise and resources to make their own fully informed decisions' (Ringe, 2010, p. 34). Having only limited capacities for the fulfilment of their roles as MEPs due to their double mandate, MEPs could develop an expertise only in few and rather narrow policy fields. It hence served their interest as Euro-

parliamentarians to be able to rely on colleagues with an expertise in other areas, with whom they knew to share a common basis of general political preferences. Generally, MEPs considered at that time to have more common ground in terms of political preferences with delegates from the same party family from other Member States than with delegates from their own Member State, but different national parties. This is visible in a number of speeches during plenary debates (EP 14, EP 15), in which MEPs explicitly distanced themselves from delegates from the same country, but in other party groups, and instead positioned themselves explicitly as representatives of their EP party group.

4.3. Division of labour

In most aspects and at most levels of parliamentary work, the EP's party groups played an important role. Through the pooling of like-minded expertise, as well as coordination by the groups' secretariats, the groups were a crucial level notably for preparatory work and coordination. Particularly with regard to the fact that all MEPs were part-time Euro-parliamentarians and had to split their time between national, regional and European level, the groups' continuous input and frequent meetings all over the year facilitated significantly the work of the EP as a whole (Mittag, 2011, p. 26). Through the development of party group lines and the work of their permanent staff, the groups furthermore guaranteed a level of consistency among the dominating political attitudes among the MEPs, despite a relatively high turnover and frequently changing compositions of national parties within the party groups. Thus, the groups were crucial pillars in the EP's intra-institutional structure.

Regardless of changes within the EP's party groups based on high turnover and changing compositions of national delegations, persisting intra-group cohesion is traceable notably in plenary-debate speeches. From the mid-1950s onwards, it was mainly the groups that structured the debates through contributions of MEPs speaking expressly in their group's name. Only occasionally did MEPs take the floor to express an opinion unique to their national delegation, or not shared by a sufficient number of party group members (EP 16). Most of the time, however, MEPs referred to their respective group's position in their speeches, and delimited the own position against (members from) other groups. This had, to a certain extent, personal strategic reasons: speaking for a group guaranteed an immediate higher level of support by other MEPs than if having to assemble fellow delegates behind the own position every time one presented an issue. It also helped MEPs to swiftly position themselves in the frequently changing composition of the EP: as mentioned above, turnover among MEPs was rather high in the EP prior to 1979. Due to the burden of the double mandate, many MEPs stayed for only a few years, sometimes even months. Since

the work in the EP and particularly the subjects discussed at European level differed quite a lot from the routines the delegates were used to in their national parliaments, it took them some time and effort to get acquainted to the EP's procedures. The groups offered the delegates a frame to swiftly understand how the EP worked, how one could voice one's opinion, and become actively involved.

Moreover, well-functioning party groups allowed MEPs to concentrate their time and efforts in the EP on chosen areas of expertise and personal interest, while the delegates were, at the same time, able to rely on being represented by their party group peers in line with their own interests in other areas. Since being an MEP was only one part of their multi-level mandates, they needed to be able to follow like-minded parliamentarians with an expertise different from their own to cope with the overall workload (Ringe, 2010).

4.4. Incentives to uphold intra-group unity

Indeed, MEPs not only benefitted from the background work and expertise offered by the groups, they equally needed the groups to be able to actively participate in the EP's everyday work at different levels. This played an important role in the upholding of party group unity in the EP. As mentioned above, the committees' composition was supposed to reflect a balance of the groups. The role as rapporteur, committee chairman, EP president or vice-president was also allocated with an eye on the fair distribution among the groups. While measures to enforce party group cohesion or discipline were rather limited, the possibilities of sanctioning if an MEP went against the group's line played a role: if aiming to get a certain role, MEPs were well-advised to 'swim with the tide. Because if you were a good [party group] member, [...] then you got all the rapporteurships and the posts that were going', as the Scottish Conservative MEP John Corrie said in an interview. Following one's party group's guidelines and routines hence made practical sense for the MEPs to swiftly get a standing in the EP, and to reach positions they were interested in; it indeed minimised the personal effort needed to reach positions and accelerated the process. Thus, MEPs had a strategic personal interest in supporting their group's inner cohesion.

In addition, several of the interviewed MEPs indicated that they knew they could not expect support from their group for their own political initiatives if they did not follow the group's course on other issues. Winifred Ewing, a British non-affiliated MEP, made that clear in a speech during Question Time in 1977, in which she pointed out that she did not have access to agenda-setting or to the initiation of topical debates, and thus to voicing her point of view in plenary

meetings outside Question Time, since she lacked as an unaffiliated delegate the backing of a sufficient number of other MEPs (EP 17). The party groups permanently offered this backing to their members, and thus allowed and facilitated their active involvement. Through the groups, it was considerably easier for MEPs to get issues through the plenary, from the initiation of a debate to the amending of proposals under consideration. Speaking for a group reduced the required effort to convince peers to support one's standpoint, since a considerable number of MEPs was already affiliated to the position by group membership, and since a statement had more weight if being carried by a group rather than a single delegate.

Prior to the EP's first direct elections, the MEPs received their mandates from their national party colleagues. That could lead to the conclusion that MEPs would represent their national party's positions rather than that of EP groups. Yet, national parties did not impair intra-group cohesion in the EP: they hardly controlled, and supervised even less, what their delegates did or said in Strasbourg and Luxembourg, often based on a low interest in what happened in the EP. Consequently, the MEPs enjoyed a certain independence from their home parties in the EP. In addition, while there were instances in which individual national party delegations expressly distanced themselves from a position of their EP party group, MEPs usually did not have to make a decision to either support their national party's or their EP party group's interest. This was the case, on the one hand, because national parties' delegations formed a party group based on shared preferences, as described above. On the other hand, decisions made in the EP were often so specific that it would have been too much work with a too limited expectable outcome for the national parties to develop a detailed position potentially opposing that of the respective EP party group. Accordingly, most MEPs usually perceived no conflict between their national party and EP party group membership, as confirmed by the interviewed former MEPs Colette Flesch, Horst Seefeld and Charles McDonald.

Another rather soft aspect should be mentioned here that had some impact on intra-group cohesion: many of the interviewed former MEPs (amongst them Arie van der Hek, Jacques Santer, Horst Seefeld, Heinz Schreiber, and Lothar Ibrügger) emphasised the very good relations, indeed the friendships that existed among party group members from the different member states. Given that the EP was so small—having only 78 members until 1958, then 142, and 198 from the first Community enlargement in 1973 until 1979—the MEPs knew (and got to know) each other very well, not least given the time they frequently shared away from their homes, friends and families. Several delegates also knew each other already from before their time as MEPs: national parties often sent parliamentarians to the EP who were already internationally active, and engaged in other European organisations, such as the Council of Europe and the Western

European Union, and in international associations of trade unions and parties, such as the Socialist International. Having personal connections beyond party group, committee and plenary meetings increased the frequency and depths of informal talks, which could be crucial for finding agreements despite possible national party-related divergences, and for negotiating political trade-offs. Such personal bonds also fostered the feeling of belonging to a group, and thus a sense of loyalty and of responsibility towards the group, expressed not least in the support of the group's guidelines and positions. While personal connections within EP party groups were presumably no dominant driving force behind intra-group unity, their effects should not be underestimated with regard to the group's inner climate.

5. Conclusion

The vast majority of MEPs prior to 1979 situated themselves and got involved in the EP's various party groups, by which they made the groups important fora of everyday work within the EP's institutional structure. The MEPs developed and acted according to party group lines first and foremost to work as effectively as possible in an institution which they intended to make more parliamentary than the Treaties provided. Although there were a number of pragmatic reasons for MEPs to intra-group unity, notably the distribution of positions, information and resources, and the backing of their own initiatives in the EP, this unity in the early EP cannot solely be explained by rational interests. This unity crucially depended upon the MEPs' socialisation in the national parliaments as well as the EP in the course of their mandates, and the preferences they shared with parliamentarians from similar parties in other Member States.

This article has shown what factors in the MEPs' behaviour and socialisation had an impact on the evolution of intra-group unity, and has offered some insights into why this unity was important for MEPs individually as well as for the EP as a whole in its institutional evolution. The analysis has also shed some light on how strictly—or not—MEPs followed and supported intra-group cohesion. This, however, could not be comprehensively covered in this article and deserves some more scholarly attention, as does the unified behaviour of the EP's party groups as actors in Community politics prior to 1979 overall. Furthermore, it would be interesting to investigate intra-committee cohesion in the early EP, which the numerous unanimous votes across party boundaries in the EP committees prior to 1979 suggest. A comparison of intra-group and intra-committee unity could then offer new insights concerning the importance of the two most important structural features of the EP prior to 1979, and indeed until today.

Source Documents

(Consulted in the Historical Archives of the EP in Luxembourg)

Short reference	Full reference
EP 1	Entschliessung über die Einfügung einer Bestimmung hinsichtlich der Bildung von Fraktionen in die Geschäftsordnung, adopted on 16 June 1953.
EP 2	Entschliessung betreffend die Zahl, Zusammensetzung und Zuständigkeit der für eine erfolgreiche Arbeit der Versammlung erforderlichen Ausschüsse, adopted on 10 January 1953.
EP 3	Speech by Lady Fisher of Rednal during plenary debate on 13 November 1975 on the education of migrant children.
EP 4	Speech by Lady Fisher of Rednal during plenary debate on 8 March 1976 on the formation of a European Youth Orchestra.
EP 5	Speech by Lady Fisher of Rednal during plenary debate on 17 June 1976 on equal opportunities and status for women.
EP 6	Speech by Lady Fisher of Rednal during plenary debate on 13 October 1976 on the employment of women.
EP 7	Political Affairs Committee: Working document (and questionnaire) with a view to drafting the report on European Union, 13 January 1975.
EP 8	Political Affairs Committee: Communication aux membres [containing the answer of the Christian-Democratic Group], 20 May 1975.
EP 9	Political Affairs Committee: Communication aux membres [containing the answer of the Socialist Group], 20 May 1975.
EP 10	Political Affairs Committee: Communication aux membres [containing the answer of the Conservative Group], 13 May 1975.
EP 11	Political Affairs Committee: Communication aux membres [containing the answer of the European Progressive Democrats], 2 June 1975.
EP 12	Political Affairs Committee: Communication aux membres [containing the answer of the Liberals and Allies Group], 20 May 1975.
EP 13	Speech by Altiero Spinelli during plenary debate on 9 May 1978 on unemployment difficulties.
EP 14	Speech by Liam Kavanagh during plenary debate on 7 July 1978 on youth employment.
EP 15	Speech by Marie-Thérèse Goutmann during plenary debate on 7 July 1976 on youth unemployment.
EP 16	Speech by Kristian Albertsen during plenary debate on 25 April 1974 on the principle of equal pay for men and women.
EP 17	Speech by Winifred Ewing during plenary debate on 14 June 1977 on discrimination based on sex.

Semi-Structured Interviews with Former MEPs

- Renato Ballardini – Partito Socialista, Italy (Riva del Garda, 17 January 2017);
- Georges Clerfayt – Front démocratique francophone, Belgium (phone interview, 12 July 2017);

- John Corrie – Conservative and Unionist Party, Scotland (phone interview, 21 September 2016);
- Jean-Pierre Cot – Parti socialiste, France (Hamburg, 25 September 2017);
- Karen Marie Dahlerup – Socialdemokratiet, Denmark (Copenhagen, 1 April 2017);
- Doeke Eisma – Democraten 66, Netherlands (phone interviews, 21 and 27 October 2016);
- Maarten Engwirda – Democraten 66, Netherlands (phone interview, 12 May 2017);
- Ole Espersen – Socialdemokratiet, Denmark (phone interview, 1 June 2017);
- Colette Flesch – Demokratesch Partei, Luxembourg (Luxembourg-Ville, 13 October 2016);
- Lothar Ibrügger – SPD, Germany (Brussels, 18 February 2017);
- Liam Kavanagh – Labour Party, Ireland (phone interview, 2 September 2016);
- Astrid Lulling – Sozialistisch Aarbechterpartei, then Sozial-Demokratesch Partei, then Chrëstlech-Sozial Vollekspartei, Luxembourg (Schifflange, 30 September 2015);
- Charles McDonald – Fine Gael, Ireland (Dublin, 14 February 2017);
- Hans-Werner Müller – CDU, Germany (Wadern, 12 June 2017);
- Jacques Santer – Chrëstlech-Sozial Vollekspartei, Luxembourg (Luxembourg-Ville, 12 September 2016);
- Horst Seefeld – SPD, Germany (phone interviews, 23 and 24 February, 14 March, 16 October 2017);
- Heinz Schreiber – SPD, Germany (phone interviews, 27 and 28 June, 11 August 2017);
- Vera Squarcialupi – non-affiliated (member of the Communist Group in the EP), Italy (Milan, 18 January 2017);
- Dick Taverne – Labour Party, then Social Democratic Party, then Liberal Party, UK (London, 10 November 2016);
- Alain Terrenoire – Union des démocrates pour la République, France (Paris, 20 June 2017);
- Arie van der Hek – Partij van der Arbeid, Netherlands (phone interview, 19 October 2016);
- Werner Zywiets – FDP, Germany (phone interview, 21 September 2016).

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