

Explaining roll call vote request in the European Parliament

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Working Paper

Explaining Roll Call Vote Request in the European Parliament

Janina Thiem

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Parliament**

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Editorial Note:

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Abstract

This paper investigates determinants of roll call vote (RCV) request in the European Parliament (EP) since studies on voting behaviour based on the RCV sample have proved to be vulnerable to selection bias. At first I argue that party group leaders, who mainly initiate RCVs, cannot be regarded as parliamentary principals of MEPs who use the RCV to discipline their parliamentarians. Owing to the organisational structure of the board of political groups which mainly consists of leaders of (larger) national delegations, it is impossible to clearly differentiate between the party group leader and the leaders of national delegations. As the former do not possess instruments to enforce party group discipline they should not be considered as principals of MEPs but rather as their agents.

Party group leaders, I argue, will therefore use RCVs only if they *anticipate* cohesion to express their group's policy position. Based on this assumption I develop and test a theoretical model of RCV request. Therefore I gathered data that comprise all votes from the first year of the sixth EP election period. The findings are in line with the theoretical expectations: RCV request is likely if the national delegations are united along the group line and group cohesion can be ensured. Moreover, the mis-conceptualisation of party group leaders as principals of MEPs and the structure of the RCV sample has led to overestimating the power of political groups in existing studies. My findings suggest that studies based on RCVs need to be interpreted with caution as they do not seem to represent the EP legislative process adequately.

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I. Introduction¹

During the last five years, three topics have dominated research on voting behaviour in the European Parliament (EP). The first deals with the question whether there is party competition at all in this 'supranational' chamber or if the transnational party groups (or, political groups) mainly work together to strengthen the influence of the EU's directly elected legislative body (Kreppel 2000; 2002; Kreppel and Tsebelis 1999). While until the Single European Act the party system in the EP is characterised by a cooperation of party groups, Kreppel (2002) and Hix *et al.* (2003) demonstrate that party competition has intensified with increasing legislative powers. MEPs of one political group tend to vote together and the voting behaviour differs between political groups as they compete for different policies. These findings prompted interest in the structure of party competition. The second topic accordingly concerns the dominating conflict dimension(s) in the EP. Do party groups compete along the traditional left-right dimension, or is the more/less-integration dimension dominating? The third topic deals with the voting behaviour of MEPs. As transnational political groups are composed of MEPs from different national delegations belonging to the same ideological party family, the question of interest has been whether MEPs vote according to the party group line, with their national delegation, or even along national lines, i.e. with MEPs of the same nationality but from different party groups.

Which conflict dimensions structure party competition in the EP? While some scholars (Moravcsik 1998) argue that conflict in the EU/ the EP is mainly about more or less integration, others (Hix 1999; Hix and Lord 1997; Hooghe and Marks 2001) see two dimensions as most important.² The first remains the more/ less-integration dimension dealing with the expansion of supranational competencies, the second is the ideological left-right dimension.³ However, the relationship of these dimensions has been disputed. While Hix and Lord (1997) and Hix (1999) see them as orthogonal to each other, which suggest they are not at all related, Hooghe and Marks (2001) and Hooghe *et al.* (2002) describe the two dimensions as merged.⁴ These theoretical models have been tested empirically on the basis of Roll Call Votes (RCVs). RCVs are the only available measure for revealed preferences in legislative contexts.⁵ In contrast to his theoretical expectations on the structure of conflict in the EP, Hix (2001) found that voting behaviour and coalition formation are predominantly along a single policy dimension,

¹ I would like to thank Simon Fink, Thomas Gschwend, Bernhard Miller, Franz Urban Pappi, Andrea Römmele, Arndt Wonka, the participants of the MZES AB-B colloquium and two anonymous referees for helpful comments.

² An overview of models of political conflict in the EU can be found in Steenbergen and Marks (2004).

³ In a "regulation scenario" Tsebelis and Garrett (2000) speculate that the integration dimension may be subsumed in the domestic left/right dimension with left parties favour common European regulation whereas right parties oppose it.

⁴ RCVs are not the only data source for studies of conflict dimensions. Other authors refer to party manifestos (Gabel and Hix 2002) or expert surveys (Hooghe *et al.* 2002). With regard to the central conflict dimensions, the results vary among these studies. While studies relying on RCVs see the ideological left-right dimension as dominant, the results of studies based on expert surveys suggest that three dimensions of conflict are central. These are the left-right dimension, the integration dimension and a „new politics“ dimension which maps conflicts about libertarian and conservative issues (Hooghe *et al.* 2002). However, this dimension is related to the ideological left-right dimension (Hooghe *et al.* 2002).

⁵ This holds definitely for final votes. In all other votes MEPs may act strategically.

“this dimension is essentially the traditional left-right conflict in domestic party systems” (Hix 2001: 684).

Several researchers (Attina 1990; Hix 2002; 2004; Hix *et al.* 2005; Noury 2002; Raunio 1999) have studied whether party groups are able to act cohesively. Despite the transnational character of party groups, Attina (1990), Hix *et al.* (2005) and Raunio (1999) find high levels of party group cohesion. The literature concluded that strong party group leaders are able to enforce party discipline over MEPs by controlling the assignment of attractive parliamentary positions like rapporteurships⁶ or committee leaderships (Faas 2003; Hix 2002; McElroy 2001). These findings are supported by Noury's (2002) analysis of the relative importance of ideology versus nationality as the main factors influencing voting behaviour. Noury infers that the main actors in the EP are the ideological party groups and not national delegations.

However, political group leaders are not the only actors who can enforce voting discipline. Due to the organisational structure of political groups and the character of electoral competition, the leaders of national delegations also possess sanctioning power through their control of nomination lists for re-election of MEPs.⁷ Therefore, MEPs have been analytically conceptualised as agents of two parliamentary principals. Conclusions differ, however, about the relative importance of these principals. Some see political groups as central actors because of high levels of group cohesion (Hix *et al.* 2005), others regard national delegations as more important since MEPs rather defect from the group line if the interests of their national delegation diverge from the group's position (Faas 2003; Hix 2004).

Furthermore there are methodological objections. Usually, MEPs vote by show of hands or, in rare cases, electronically. In neither case the MEPs' *individual* voting decision is recorded and all studies of voting behaviour in the EP therefore rely on roll call votes (RCVs). Since only one fourth of EP votes is taken as roll call, these studies must (implicitly) make the critical assumption that the roll call sample either represents a random selection of votes or that legislative votes are predominantly taken by roll call (Faas 2003; Hix 2001; Hix *et al.* 2005). In the first case a generalisation of the results to the universe of votes would be unproblematic. In the second case at least general statements about legislative votes would be possible. An alternative third assumption, however, is that RCVs are called for strategic reasons by party group leaders.⁸ In that case generalisations would be problematic if the decision to request a RCV was correlated to group cohesion. If, for example, the RCV sample revealed only votes of high group cohesion, the level of group cohesion and thus the relative influence of party groups would be overestimated. This is problematic not only with regard to the evaluation of party group cohesion but also with regard to the findings about the structure of party competition and

⁶ “It is the job of rapporteurs [...] to prepare initial discussion on the subject within the committee, to present a draft text, and to amend it, if necessary [...]. Once the report is adopted by the committee, the rapporteur presents it in plenary, and is asked to give a view on behalf of the committee on any plenary amendments that have been tabled [...]. The rapporteur must also follow developments after the first Parliament reading, and prepare a recommendation for the second reading (Corbett *et al.* 2000: 117).

⁷ In accordance with the national party leaders.

⁸ In the current EP (2004-2009), a party group or at least 37 MEPs are able to initiate a RCV (EP Rules of Procedure, Rule 160). Usually, RCVs are requested by party group leaders.

conflict dimensions which result from a cohesive voting behaviour of political groups. Therefore, the mechanisms underlying RCV request have to be scrutinised if conclusions about MEP voting behaviour are to be valid.

Carrubba and Gabel (1999) were the first to draw attention to a probable selection bias inherent in EP roll call data. In a later paper, Carrubba *et al.* (2004) demonstrate empirically that the RCVs are neither a random sample nor do they represent the legislatively most important votes. Having collected information on vote requests in the first year of the fifth EP election period (1999-2000), the authors show by chi-squared tests that the roll call sample is biased with respect to at least three dimensions: issue area, requesting group and legislative importance. With regard to the issue area, some committees are over-represented in the roll call sample while other issue areas are totally excluded from the sample. A further disproportionality is shown for party groups requesting a roll call vote. Most interestingly, the evidence suggests that legislative votes are underrepresented in the roll call sample. This is important as researchers are usually interested in votes that impact EC legislation.

The literature has, however, not investigated why the roll call sample is the unrepresentative sample it is. The goal of this paper therefore is to provide a theoretical model in order to explain why party group leaders initiate roll call votes. I abandon the predominant conceptualisation of MEPs as agents of two parliamentary principals since party groups and national delegations cannot be treated independently from each other. The leaders of political groups do not possess exclusive instruments to sanction the voting behaviour of MEPs. Thus they should not be considered as autonomous principals. Rather they remain agents of MEPs. Based on these considerations, I argue that party group leaders do not use the RCV to enforce party discipline but to signal a political position. Therefore, a high degree of voting cohesion is a precondition rather than a consequence of RCVs needed to signal the group's policy position. This means that the decision to initiate a RCV is endogenous to a high level of voting cohesion. Starting from these considerations I formulate hypotheses of when a RCV should be expected and then test them empirically. I collected information on all votes – including amendments – which were cast in the first year of the current election period (2004-2005). With this analysis I hope to improve the general understanding of the mechanisms underlying the decision to request a roll call vote which hopefully will be conducive to a more valid interpretation of voting behaviour in the EP.

II. MEPs as agents of two parliamentary principals?

Before discussing the strategic motivations of party group leaders to request a RCV, it has to be clarified whether both national delegation and party group leaders are able to sanction MEPs and possess the character of principals. Therefore, the organisational relationship between MEPs, national delegations and political groups deserves closer examination.⁹

First of all, the act of delegation in the European Parliament will be discussed since the terminology of party leaders as principals of MEPs dominating the current literature on voting behaviour in the EP (e.g. Faas 2003; Hix 2002; 2004) diverges from classical principal agent theory. There parliamentarians are conceptualised as principals delegating authority to party leaders (agents) in order to solve collective action and informational problems (Lupia and McCubbins 2000; Strøm 2000; 2003).

In a first step of delegation, M(E)Ps become agents of voters. They organise in national delegations and political groups in order to coordinate their voting behaviour: "To the extent that MPs are policy-seekers, they will consider the fact that without party they have virtually no influence in parliament unless their vote is pivotal" (Müller 2000: 325; Cox and McCubbins 1993). The same holds for most of the 111 national delegations which would be ineffective if they did not belong to one of the seven political groups.¹⁰ As unorganised groups of legislators might be electorally inefficient "the [...] party caucus delegates authority to party leaders who in turn promote the collective interests of party members" (Epstein and O'Halloran 1999: 165).¹¹ Inside the EP therefore, MEPs are conceived as principals who delegate authority to national delegation and party group leaders who become the agents of MEPs. The leaders have to coordinate the party's position and to maintain and enhance the electoral value of the party label for which the party's voting cohesion is required (Aldrich 1995; Kieweit and McCubbins 1991).

Theoretically, cohesive voting behaviour can be achieved by three mechanisms. First, it is possible that MPs of one party vote cohesively simply because they have similar preferences (Krehbiel 1993). As there are internal ideological divisions within each political group, voting cohesion does not generally result from similar policy preferences of group members in the EP (Hix *et al.* 2006; Pennings 2002). Second, the majority party or the majority coalition can achieve party cohesion by preventing items in which the party would be less cohesive from appearing on the floor. This "negative agenda power" is realised by securing a super-proportional share of offices for the party's senior members who control floor access (Cox and McCubbins 2005). In the EP, no stable majority coalition exists which is in control of the relevant offices. In addition, neither committees nor party groups are able to withhold bills or amendments from the floor. Therefore, the possibility of ensuring party discipline by

⁹ According to the three faces of party organisations developed by Katz and Mair (1993) this paper concentrates on "the party in parliament".

¹⁰ The number of MEPs in one national delegation varies from 48 to 1. 32 MEPs do not belong to any political group (as of January 20, 2006).

¹¹ The electoral inefficiency of unorganised groups may result from overproducing particularistic benefits and underproducing collective benefits (Epstein and O'Halloran 1999: 165).

negative agenda control has to be excluded for the EP. Third, uniform voting behaviour can be achieved by disciplining the party. According to this view, party leaders are provided with sanctioning power over MPs whereby they gain principal status over MPs. This is necessary as the coordination of a party's position is pointless if party leaders cannot enforce voting discipline (Cox and McCubbins 1993) or voting cohesion cannot be ensured in other ways. For the EP, the central question is whether party group leaders and the leaders of national delegations are able to sanction the behaviour of MEPs independently from each other i.e. if both possess the character of principals.

As principals of parliamentarians, party leaders possess sanctioning instruments like controlling positions on election lists or the assignment of powerful (parliamentary) posts. These 'threats and promises' are effective if one assumes that parliamentarians pursue different goals like vote-seeking, office-seeking and policy-seeking (Mayhew 1974). In recent studies on voting behaviour in the EP the leaders of national delegations as well as political group leaders are said to possess sanctioning power over MEPs (Faas 2003; Hix 2002; 2004; Hix *et al.* 2005; McElroy 2001). Therefore, MEPs are considered as agents of two parliamentary principals. These studies argue that, while the national delegation leaders control the nomination lists for re-election of MEPs, the latter are more influential over MEPs' likelihood of obtaining attractive positions in the EP which is formally defined in the EP Rules of Procedure (e.g. Rule 177 for committee membership, EP Rules of Procedure as of September 2005).

Despite this formal assignment power of political group leaders, they should not be regarded as autonomous principals with capabilities to sanction MEPs independently from the leaders of national delegations. The reason is that the board of a political group is *identical* with the leaders of (larger) national delegations. In addition, the leader of one (larger) national delegation is usually elected as group leader. Therefore, political groups should be considered collective rather than corporative actors (Coleman 1990). Due to this organisational structure it is implausible to assume that the leaders of national delegations do not decide on the assignment of attractive parliamentary positions as well. Although the board of each political group negotiates the respective group's position collectively on the basis of information provided by the group leader and the party's experts (Corbett *et al.* 2000), the assignments of attractive positions are exclusively decided by national delegations:

“Although the Rules of Procedure of the EP, the Rules of Procedure of the two largest groups, and the bulk of the current literature suggest that the power to decide the allocation of such benefits as committee chairs and *Rapporteurships* lies with the group leaders, the fact is that it does not. The unwritten norms of both party groups delegate this authority to the national delegations in their midst.” (Kreppel 2002: 202, emphasis original)¹²

Moreover, Kreppel (2002) found that MEPs who receive a disproportionately high share of benefits like committee chairmanships or rapporteurships are *not* more supportive of the party group line than the

¹² Whitaker (2005) also stresses the influence of national delegations on the assignment of committee positions.

average group member.¹³ This indicates that the leadership of political groups does not, or cannot, reward the voting behaviour of extremely loyal group members with attractive parliamentary posts. For these reasons, the whip power of party group leaders which is highlighted in several articles (e.g. Faas 2003; Hix 2002) has been overstated.

As the theoretical considerations on the organisation of political groups and Kreppel's (2002) empirical findings suggest, both sanctioning instruments (nomination and assignment) lie in the hands of national delegation leaders who accordingly have to be considered the *sole* parliamentary principals of MEPs. They alone are able to ensure party discipline of their members if they support the party group position just as they can enforce voting defection from the party group line if they disagree with it. Thus, they reserve the sanctioning capacities to themselves in order to be able to defect from the group line if necessary.¹⁴ Nevertheless, it is advantageous for national delegations to organise in political groups even if the group leaders are unable to enforce voting discipline. If national delegations agree on the party group position, they benefit from coordination since without the group they would mostly be uninfluential in the EP. Moreover, some national delegations consisting of only a few MEPs lack the resources to position themselves with regard to every issue that is voted on. On those issues which predominantly may be of minor importance they should accept the group's position coordinated by the political group leader and vote accordingly. National delegations thus rely on the group leaders to provide information, as coordinators and group representatives. Without sanctioning capacities, party group leaders remain agents of MEPs.

But how can the high levels of party group cohesion which led to the findings about conflict dimensions, party competition and dominant political groups be explained? They may not result from strong political group leaders enforcing party discipline but be inherent to the data on which the findings are based. As I have pointed out before, RCVs do not present a random sample. Thus, it is likely that party group leaders, who mainly request RCVs, use them for strategic reasons others than ensuring party discipline.

¹³ To examine the relationship between individual MEP behaviour (participation and voting the party line), Kreppel (2002) analysed the distribution of committee chairmanships between 1979 and 1997 and rapporteurships both under the cooperation procedure between 1989 and 1994 and under the co-decision procedure between 1994 and 1996. She compared the voting behaviour and participation of those MEPs who received a disproportionate share of these benefits with the average level of participation and cohesion of the same group (Kreppel 2002: 201).

¹⁴ If the position of national delegations diverges from that of the political group, MEPs will rather vote according to their national delegation whose leader is able to sanction them (Faas 2003, Hix 2004).

III. Why party group leaders request roll call votes

In the sixth EP election period (2004-2009), any party group or at least 37 MEPs are able to initiate a RCV (EP Rules of Procedure, Rule 160). Usually, RCVs are requested by party group leaders in the name of their political group.¹⁵ But why call a RCV? Generally, three reasons that could motivate party leaders to initiate a RCV can be identified. They may use the RCV a) to discipline their parliamentarians, b) to express a certain policy position or c) to reveal the voting behaviour of another group. In this section I will discuss how far these motivations apply for roll call requests in the EP.

Party discipline

Party leaders generally request a roll call vote in order to discipline their parliamentarians (Saalfeld 1995). The public character of the RCV allows party leaders to monitor the voting decision of their MPs and to sanction it if necessary. As has been pointed out in the previous section, voting cohesion is relevant for maintaining the party label. It is especially necessary in parliamentary systems where the government depends on a parliamentary majority. There are also incentives for opposition parties to act cohesively as they thereby present an alternative to the government.

For the EP, Carrubba and Gabel (1999) develop a formal model of how RCVs can be used to discipline MEPs. They argue that party group leaders, or the leaders of national delegations, use the RCV as a strategic tool in order to swing a vote. In consequence of this strategy, the roll call sample will neither display votes in which the distribution of preferences within a political group is highly homogeneous nor will it display votes in which it is highly heterogeneous, or nationally ordered (Carrubba and Gabel 1999). While in the first case, a roll call vote is not necessary to discipline MEPs, in the second case it would be very difficult to enforce party discipline against national delegations (Carrubba and Gabel 1999: 22-23). According to Carrubba and Gabel (1999), party group leaders and the leaders of national delegations are able to sanction the voting behaviour of MEPs. Concerning the sanctioning capacities of party group leaders, the authors refer to the formal power of party groups to assign parliamentary positions. They thus ignore the actual organisational structure of political groups which makes it impossible to clearly differentiate between national delegations and political groups. Herein lies a central shortcoming of their model as for theoretical and empirical reasons party group leaders should not be considered as principals of MEPs who possess instruments to enforce party discipline. Therefore, they are not able to use the RCV to discipline their MPs.

Position-taking

Party group leaders can use RCVs to signal their group's policy position to a third party. Therefore, the public character of the vote and a cohesive voting behaviour of the requesting group are required. Otherwise, the addressee will not be able to identify the group's policy position. Since the leaders of political groups are not able to enforce party discipline they have to anticipate cohesive voting be-

¹⁵ Due to the numerical criteria the leaders of national delegations tend to abstain from RCV request. In the current EP there is only one national delegation that consists of more than 37 MEPs.

haviour of their MEPs. To illustrate, I clarify who might be the addressees of position-taking and why party leaders might want to demonstrate their group's policy position to them.

Parties and their leaders are interested in signalling their position to voters to promote the party label which helps voters to assess which positions an MP will adopt on policy issues (Kieweit and McCubbins 1991). As party competition in EP elections takes place in national arenas, it is not clear whether or to what extent the party label of political groups influences the individual voting decision of citizens. However, voters will notice if their preferred party votes according to their expectations, at least if the issue that is voted on is of high relevance and if the respective RCV is reported in the media. This may not directly influence the decision of voters in EP elections but could shape their view of the party they usually tend to elect. Therefore, party group leaders should be interested in presenting a consistent and cohesive voting behaviour in RCVs.

But RCVs might be even more important as signals to interest groups. If they notice that the party group they have lobbied behaves reliably, one can assume that they will continue to support that group. Supranational *and* national interest groups provide both political groups *and* national delegations with technical and political information (Wonka 2005).¹⁶ This means that parties also profit from good relations to interest groups. This especially holds for party group leaders and for the leaders of national delegations who negotiate and coordinate the party group line on the basis of information provided by committees, (shadow) rapporteurs, the parties' experts and interest groups. Moreover, interest groups are better informed than voters and will definitely receive the signal expressed in RCVs. Interest groups may also relay the voting signal of party groups to voters. Therefore, party group leaders and the leaders of national delegations should be interested in party group cohesion at least if the voting behaviour can be monitored. If central national party interests are not at stake, national delegation leaders are thus expected to discipline their MEPs in RCVs in terms of the party group line.

Party group leaders may further use the RCV to highlight their group's position to other party groups or other EU institutions (Corbett *et al.* 2000; Kreppel 2002). Thereby, they can recommend themselves as reliable 'coalition' partners who are able to ensure cohesive voting behaviour of their group. Moreover, RCVs which are collectively initiated by party groups may be used in votes of highly homogeneous preferences to highlight the EP's position and to distinguish it from other European institutions like the Commission or the Council.

The motivation of party group leaders to demonstrate their group's policy position to third parties is linked to the leader's self-interest in (re-) election as group leader or into another attractive (parlia-

¹⁶ The differentiation between the provision of technical and political information by interest groups is analytical (see Wonka 2005: 165). MEPs should be interested in both types of information as they help them to evaluate the impacts of their (legislative) decisions.

mentary) position like the EP presidency (Cox and McCubbins 1993; Müller 2000).¹⁷ As agents of MEPs (and national delegations), party group leaders have to overcome coordination and informational problems among the respective MEPs/ national delegations. Their main function is to negotiate and formulate the group's policy position within the board (Corbett *et al.* 2000). The success of group leaders should depend on how well they are able to guarantee the party group's reputation which is *inter alia* expressed by high levels of voting cohesion. With regard to these considerations, party group leaders are interested in a cohesive voting behaviour of their group at least if it can be monitored publicly. As party group leaders they know which issues are supported by an overwhelming majority of national delegations within their group. Since they are able to set the roll call agenda, they will only request a roll call vote if they can anticipate a cohesive voting behaviour of their own group. However, one should take into account that party group leaders do not possess negative agenda power and are not able to prevent other groups from initiating RCVs. Therefore, one cannot generalise that the motivations of group leaders to request a RCV automatically lead to an overrepresentation of high levels of party group cohesion in the RCV sample.

Revealing the voting behaviour of another group

A third motivation of roll call request needs to be added: party group leaders can initiate a RCV in order to reveal the voting behaviour of another political group. They can do this for several reasons. Firstly, it is possible to expose incohesive voting of another group or behaviour deviant from a previously expressed policy position. Secondly, the group initiating the RCV may want to distance itself from other groups. As the party system in the EP has become more competitive with the increase in powers of the EP, different parties are now offering different solutions to voters and interest groups (Kreppel 2002; Hix *et al.* 2003). RCVs serve to highlight these positional differences. But with regard to the addressees of RCVs who appreciate cohesive party groups, the party group leader requesting the RCV should be interested in a cohesive voting behaviour of his own party. Thus, the considerations under which conditions a political group leader will request a RCV also hold for this motivation. In my theoretical model I identify such conditions.

IV. A theoretical model of roll call request

In the last section, I demonstrated that only two of three possible motivations of RCV request are relevant in the EP. While political group leaders lack the necessary sanctioning power and hence are unable to use a RCV to enforce party discipline, they can initiate a RCV to express a certain policy position or to reveal the voting behaviour of another political group. Based on these considerations, I now turn to develop a theoretical model of roll call request. The model starts by assuming that party group leaders will request a RCV if they anticipate voting cohesion of their group members. To identify conditions where this is the case, I mainly refer to institutional features: split votes, committee involve-

¹⁷ For example, the following EP Presidents have been group leaders or vice presidents of their group: E. Klepsch, P. Cox, K. Hänsch. The leader of the EPP-ED, H.-G. Poettering is likely to become President in the second half of the current EP election period.

ment, legislative importance of a vote, final decisions, and the authorship of amendments. While the last factor differentiates among party groups, the first four apply equally to all party groups. Therefore, the goal of the model is not to show when a specific group leader will request a RCV but rather to explain the likelihood of roll call occurrence in general.

Split votes

According to the EP Rules of Procedure (Rule 157) a political group or at least 37 MEPs are able to request a split vote.¹⁸ They will do that in order to position themselves with regard to the specific issue of the split vote or in order to achieve a vote result differing from the (committee) compromise in that issue. As it has been pointed out before, positioning requires both roll call vote and cohesive group behaviour. Therefore, one can expect that party group leaders will request a roll call in combination with a split vote. If a political group wants to modify the (committee) compromise in a certain way, then similar mechanisms will be at work as are outlined with regard to the introduction of amendments by party groups (see Hypothesis 5). Thus, the decision to modify the compromise will be in accordance with a clear majority of national delegation leaders who define the party group line and who are able to enforce the required party discipline.

Hypothesis 1: A RCV is likely when a party group leader has requested a split vote.

Amendments formulated by committees

The importance of parties in organising majorities differs with regard to committee involvement. If amendments and reports are negotiated in committees, parties are not necessary to ensure voting majorities on the floor as this is done in committee. This reasoning is in line with two otherwise rivalling theories on committee membership. According to distributive theories (Shepsle and Weingast 1987), committees consist of preference outliers who pursue specific constituency interests to ensure their re-election. Pork is substantial in generating the required voting majorities on the floor among the members of different committees. In terms of information acquisition theories (Krehbiel 1990), committee members specialise in particular policy areas to provide information to the floor. As the membership structure of the floor is reflected in each committee, one can assume heterogeneous preferences of committee members. Therefore, a compromise among committee members should represent the median MEP and thus will find a majority on the floor, as well. As both theories model individual MPs cohesive party group votes are not required in order to receive the relevant majorities. Assuming that party group leaders only initiate roll calls if group unity can be ensured, I expect a roll call vote to be less likely when an issue has been introduced by a committee. This particularly holds for non-split votes in which a committee compromise is voted on.

Hypothesis 2: Party group leaders are unlikely to request a roll call vote when the issue to be voted on is non-split *and* introduced by a committee.

¹⁸ “Where the text to be put to the vote contains two or more provisions or references to two or more points or lends itself to division into two or more parts each with a distinct logical meaning and normative value, a split vote may be requested by a political group or at least thirty-seven Members.” (EP Rules of Procedure, Rule 157)

Final decisions

If party group leaders use the RCV mainly as an instrument of position-taking, they should especially request RCVs in final decisions. These allow a more comprehensive positioning compared to votes on single amendments which sometimes only replace a single word in the bill. However, the expected positive correlation will not necessarily hold for legislative votes and amendments/ reports introduced by committees. In the former situation, the intervention of national delegations is more likely (see below), while the latter usually represent a compromise among all political groups. This compromise need not be supported by all national delegations in a party group in order to receive a majority on the floor (see above). In both cases, voting cohesion cannot be ensured so that the expected occurrence of RCVs in final decisions may not hold for final legislative votes and final votes that are introduced by committees.

Hypothesis 3: RCVs are likely in final decisions.

Votes of legislative importance

Legislative votes have substantial impact on national decisions. If on these important votes a party group's policy position conflicts with the interests of a national delegation, vote defection of the respective MEPs becomes more likely than in votes which do not have direct impact on national policies. This holds mainly for legislative procedures in which the EP's decision influences the legislative result. Therefore, the otherwise positive effect of Hypothesis 3 may be diminished in final, legislative votes. As party group leaders cannot ensure voting cohesion in these votes, they are likely to abstain from requesting RCVs. This particularly holds if the national delegation that announced its defection is of medium size since large national delegations may influence the party group's position according to their preferences so that they need not defect from the group line. In turn, the defection of a national delegation with few MEPs does not have a great impact on the party group's cohesion score. However, as it is hard to identify the national delegation that may have announced its defection, the general hypothesis remains that party leaders are less likely to request a RCV in legislative votes.

Hypothesis 4: RCVs are unlikely to occur in legislative votes.

Amendments introduced by party groups

In the EP, any party group or at least 5% of MEPs are able to introduce amendments; neither party groups nor committees can prevent amendments from reaching the floor (EP Rules of Procedure, Rule 150). Party groups formulate amendments in order to signal their policy position to third parties. As amendments need to be coordinated solely within the party group, the preferences of most national delegations can be incorporated. Therefore, the leaders of national delegations are likely to ensure a cohesive voting behaviour. This, in turn, should encourage party group leaders to request a roll call vote. While all of the above mentioned hypotheses refer to all party groups, some party groups may be more likely than others to initiate a RCV after introducing an amendment. I assume that it is easier to integrate the preferences of a significant majority of national delegations for small party groups. More-

over, to become visible in the political process of the EU, small party groups are likely to depend more on the RCV as a positioning instrument than do large political groups.

Hypothesis 5: RCV request is likely after a political group consisting of few national delegations or a small number of MEPs introduced an amendment.

V. Explaining roll call request in the European Parliament

Data and operationalisation of independent variables

To test the theory I collected information on all votes – including amendments – from the first year of the sixth election period (July 2004 - July 2005).¹⁹ The dataset includes information on 1) the method of vote; 2) the type of motion; 3) the committee responsible (if any); 4) the author of the issue to be voted on and 5) the requesting group for each RCV (if any). The method of vote measures whether or not the vote was taken by roll call. The type of motion indicates whether the vote was non-binding or occurred in the context of a legislative procedure. In the case of the latter, the respective legislative procedure and, if so, the round of the Codecision procedure are recorded, as well. The author of the issue indicates which political group or committee introduced the amendment or report that is voted on. The requesting group measures which party group, if any, initiated the RCV.

To explain the occurrence of RCVs in the EP, I estimate the following logit model:

$$z = \beta_1 split + \beta_2 comnosep + \beta_3 final + \beta_4 leg + \beta_5 pse + \beta_6 alde + \beta_7 verts + \beta_8 gue + \beta_9 id + \beta_{10} uen$$

where z is the likelihood of roll call occurrence in the EP.

split is a dummy variable that captures the effects of split votes as pointed out in Hypothesis 1.

comnosep is a dummy variable which refers to Hypothesis 2 and measures whether the issue that is voted on is introduced by a committee *and* no one requested a split vote. The inclusion of this interaction effect is necessary as I only expect a negative effect if both conditions hold.

final is a dummy variable which measures whether or not the issue to be voted on is a final decision. The expected influence of this variable is described in Hypothesis 3.

leg is a dummy variable measuring the EP's legislative influence in a decision. In accordance with Hypothesis 4 it is coded '1' if the EP's decision has to be considered by the Council of Ministers. This is the case in all legislative procedures except the Consultation and the Cooperation procedures.

¹⁹ This period has been chosen in order to compare RCV occurrence in the first year of the sixth election period with the first year of the fifth election period for which Carrubba *et al.* (2004) collected the data. Unfortunately, the model at hand cannot be estimated for the latter period as the data gathered by Carrubba *et al.* (2004) do not contain information on single amendments.

While in the former, the EP has consulting power only, in the latter the EP's decision can be overruled by unanimity in the Council of Ministers. If the Commission has not incorporated the EP's decision in its proposal in the second round of the Cooperation procedure, the Council may even ignore it and is still able to decide by qualified majority voting. However, the EP is powerful under the Codecision procedure where it possesses veto power and in the Assent procedure where the approval of the EP is also required.

*pse, alde, verts, gue, id, uen*²⁰ are dummy variables capturing which political group, if any, introduced the issue to be voted on. These variables refer to Hypothesis 5 which states that political groups with a small number of delegations or only few MEPs are more likely to initiate a RCV after introducing an amendment/ report. The EPP-ED²¹ is not included as a variable since as the largest group, it serves as a reference category.²²

Table 1 summarises all hypotheses, the respective independent variables, their expected effect and the coding of the variables.

Table 1: Overview of explaining variables and their expected effects

Hypothesis	Variable	Expected effect	Coding
H1: A RCV is likely when a party group leader has requested a split vote.	split	Positive	1 = a split vote is requested 0 = otherwise
H2: Party leaders are unlikely to request a roll call vote when the issue to be voted on is non-split and introduced by a committee.	comnosep	Negative	1 = a committee is the author of the issue to be voted on and the vote is non-split 0 = otherwise
H3: RCVs are likely in final decisions.	final	Positive	1 = final vote 0 = non-final vote
H4: RCVs are unlikely to occur in legislative votes.	leg	Negative	1 = legislative votes (all legislative procedures excepting the Consultation and the Cooperation procedure) 0 = all other votes
H5: RCV request is likely after a political group consisting of few national delegations or a small number of MEPs introduced an amendment.	pse alde verts gue id uen	Positive (at least for verts, gue, id, uen)	1 (pse) = if the issue to be voted on is introduced by the PSE group 0 = otherwise respectively for all other groups

²⁰ PSE (Socialist Group in the EP); ALDE (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe); VERTS (The Greens/European Free Alliance); GUE (European United Left/ Nordic Green Left); ID (Independence/ Democracy); UEN (Union for Europe of the Nations).

²¹ European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats.

²² The EPP-ED consists of 266 MEPs (25), the PSE of 201 (23), the ALDE of 89 (20), the VERTS of 42 (13), the GUE of 41 (14), the ID of 36 (10) and the UEN of 27 (6) (numbers of national delegations, as of November 09, 2005).

Results

Table 2 presents the results of the logit estimation of roll call likelihood in the EP. Two different models were estimated. While the first ('party') model includes all independent variables, the second ('institutional') model is limited to the institutional variables and excludes the party groups. The effects of most variables are statistically highly significant. More importantly, the direction of effects corresponds to my theoretical expectations.²³ In addition, the log likelihood test shows that both models differ significantly from the model in which only the constant is considered. Yet, one might question the value of the independent variables to predict the distribution of the dependent variable due to low Pseudo-R² values. However, if the distribution of the dependent variable is skewed in logistic regressions, Pseudo-R² values below 0.1 are common (cf. Faas 2003; Hix *et al.* 2003).

Table 2: Likelihood of roll call occurrence in the EP, logit model²⁴

	Model 1 ('party model')		Model 2 ('institutional model')	
	<i>Coef.</i>	<i>P < z </i>	<i>Coef.</i>	<i>P < z </i>
split	.2972	[0.023]	.0991	[0.309]
comnosep	-.8513	[0.000]	-.9746	[0.000]
final	1.1601	[0.000]	1.0552	[0.000]
leg	-.3736	[0.002]	-.4007	[0.001]
pse	-.4708	[0.014]		
alde	-.3888	[0.120]		
verts	.4051	[0.006]		
gue	.5256	[0.002]		
id	.9863	[0.000]		
uen	.6885	[0.017]		
cons	-1.3343	[0.000]	-1.1305	[0.000]
McFadden's R ² ²⁵	0.051		0.035	
Nagelkerke's R ²	0.081		0.057	
Log likelihood	-1826.1294		-1855.8284	
Prob > chi2	0.000		0.000	

Log likelihood ratio test Pr > chi2 = 0.000

²³ I have reduced the number of cases to test whether the large N is responsible for the significance of the results. I also ran the models with only the final decisions. In both cases significance is unaffected.

²⁴ For both models, collinearity has been tested which arises when independent variables are correlated with each other. *Tolerance* values of at least .455 for each independent variable indicate that collinearity is not existent in the models (Menard 1990).

²⁵ In logistic regressions, Pseudo-R² values are difficult to interpret and cannot be compared to R² values in OLS regressions (Kohler and Kreuter 2001: 272; Menard 1995).

In split votes, the RCV likelihood is higher than in non-split votes. This indicates that indeed party group leaders initiate a RCV after requesting split votes in order to signal a specific policy position to third parties or to modify the compromise in a given respect. However, the effect of this variable is only significant in the first model.

In both models, the second variable measuring an interaction effect of amendments introduced by committees and non-split votes is negatively related to the likelihood of roll call request. This is in line with the theoretical expectation that party group leaders avoid initiating roll call votes if a committee compromise is voted on. In this case, parties are not responsible for organising the relevant floor majorities and defection from the group line may occur in each party group.

The largest positive and statistically highly significant effects can be found for final decisions. This is not totally in line with the theoretical argumentation as I expected only a limited positive effect of this variable since a higher roll call likelihood in final votes may theoretically not hold for legislative decisions and amendments that are introduced by committees.

According to the negative and significant effects of the variable *leg*, RCV request is less likely if the issue to be voted on is of legislative importance. As these votes, in which the EP is influential, have direct impact on national policies, the defection of national delegations should be more likely. So party group leaders cannot assume voting cohesion of their group members. Therefore, the direction of this coefficient is as theoretically expected.

Looking at the influence of party groups especially the amendments of small party groups (*verts*, *gue*, *id*, *uen*) have positive and statistically significant effects on the likelihood of roll call occurrence. This is also in line with the theoretical argument that it should be easier for leaders of small groups to consider the interests of their members in an amendment. Given this, voting defection of national delegations is unlikely which encourages party group leaders to request a roll call vote. Furthermore, in order to be visible in the political process of the EU, small party groups may depend more on the RCV as a positioning instrument than large political groups.

Since the largest party group (EPP-ED) serves as a reference group and is not included in the model, the coefficients of all other party groups should be positive according to the logic of the theoretical model. However, this does not hold for *pse* and *alde* whose coefficients are negative. This may result from the relative size of these party groups compared to the EPP-ED on the one hand and to the small party groups on the other hand. While the EPP-ED consists of 266 MEPs organised in 25 national delegations, the PSE has 201 MEPs (23 national delegations) and the ALDE consists of 89 MEPs (20 national delegations), the smaller party groups each have less than 43 MEPs and each group consists of less than 15 national delegations. This indicates that the expected positive correlation of party group size and RCV request holds only for party groups which are significantly smaller than the three larger groups EPP-ED, PSE and ALDE. However, the coefficient of the variable *alde* is not statistically significant.

Since an interpretation of logit coefficients beyond their directions and their levels of significance is not straightforward, I also present the probabilities of roll call request in a different way. Table 3 shows combinations of observations on the independent variables that should lead to a high probability of roll call occurrence. While observations of the first four institutional variables are held constant so that roll call occurrence is expected to become most likely, the party groups as authors of amendments vary. Generally, the findings are in line with the theoretical model since the roll call probability increases as the size of the political group that introduced an amendment decreases. After the introduction of an amendment by small political groups with less than 50 MEPs and less than 15 national delegations, the roll call probability clearly exceeds .5. In these cases, even the lower margin of the 95% confidence interval is above .5. If larger political groups introduced an issue to be voted on, the roll call probability is still higher than .23 which is the likelihood of roll call request if no independent variable is considered.

Table 3: Estimated Probabilities of RCV request (party model)

	Amendments by large party groups		Amendments by small party groups			
	Yes (+)	Yes (+)	Yes (+)	Yes (+)	Yes (+)	Yes (+)
split	Yes (+)	Yes (+)	Yes (+)	Yes (+)	Yes (+)	Yes (+)
comnosep	No (+)	No (+)	No (+)	No (+)	No (+)	No (+)
leg	No (+)	No (+)	No (+)	No (+)	No (+)	No (+)
final	Yes (+)	Yes (+)	Yes (+)	Yes (+)	Yes (+)	Yes (+)
pse	Yes (+/-?)	No	No	No	No	No
alde	No	Yes (+/-?)	No	No	No	No
verts	No	No	Yes (+)	No	No	No
gue	No	No	No	Yes (+)	No	No
id	No	No	No	No	Yes (+)	No
uen	No	No	No	No	No	Yes (+)
Pr (y = 1 x)	0.4141	0.4341	0.6292	0.6568	0.7521	0.6926
95% Conf. Interval	[0.2939, 0.5343]	[0.2856, 0.5826]	[0.5237, 0.7347]	[0.5475, 0.7662]	[0.6513, 0.8530]	[0.5503, 0.8348]
N	3568	3568	3568	3568	3568	3568

While Table 3 presents estimated probabilities if RCV occurrence is expected to be high for the party model, Table 4 shows the estimated roll call likelihood for the institutional model. Again, the results are in line with my theoretical considerations. For the combination of observations on the independent variables that should make roll call occurrence most unlikely, the estimated probability is .075 which is clearly below the probability if only the constant is considered (.23). If the expected roll call likelihood is highest, the estimated probability of .51 still exceeds the probability if no independent variable is included in the model.

Table 4: Estimated Probabilities of RCV request (institutional model)

	Expected Roll Call likelihood low			Expected Roll Call likelihood high		
split	No (-)	No (-)	No (-)	Yes (+)	Yes (+)	Yes (+)
comnosep	Yes (-)	Yes (-)	Yes (-)	No (+)	No (+)	Yes (+)
leg	Yes(-)	No (+)	Yes (-)	No (+)	Yes (-)	No (+)
final	No (-)	No (-)	Yes (+)	No (-)	Yes (+)	Yes (+)
Pr (y = 1 x)	0.0754	0.1086	0.1899	0.2628	0.4069	0.5060
95% Conf. Interval	[0.0564, 0.0945]	[0.0814, 0.1358]	[0.1496, 0.2302]	[0.2323, 0.2933]	[0.3115, 0.5022]	[0.4325, 0.5794]
<i>N</i>	3568	3568	3568	3568	3568	3568

VI. Conclusion

This paper has offered an explanation for roll call vote request in the European Parliament. Theoretically, it has been demonstrated that the conceptualisation of MEPs as agents of two parliamentary principals which has dominated the current literature on voting behaviour in the EP cannot be upheld since party group leaders do not possess exclusive sanctioning instruments. Therefore, party group leaders are not able to use the RCV to enforce party discipline. Consequently, they cannot be considered principals of MEPs but rather remain their agents. Their main function is to coordinate the party group position and to provide information to MEPs and national delegations. I have furthermore argued that party group leaders mainly use the RCV to signal the group's policy position to third parties. Thus cohesive voting behaviour of the requesting group is required as otherwise its position cannot be identified. Given their inability to enforce party discipline party group leaders will only request a RCV if they anticipate cohesive voting behaviour of their group. This may be due to similar preferences of MEPs or due to ensuring voting discipline by a clear majority of national delegations within the political group.

The empirical findings of the logit model are in line with the theoretical expectations: Party group leaders are less likely to request a RCV if vote defection of national delegations is likely. This is the case if the respective vote is of legislative importance and has direct impact on national policies. In addition, RCV request is unlikely if the issue to be voted on is non-split and introduced by a committee. In this case, committees are the central units in organising floor majorities so party group cohesion is not required in order to arrive at the relevant majorities. For legislative procedures, Hix *et al.* (2006) find a negative impact on party group cohesion.²⁶ The authors argue that low levels of party group cohesion in legislative votes can be explained by missing agenda control of political groups, since the European

²⁶ Whether party group cohesion also decreases if the issue to be voted on is non-split and introduced by a committee remains to be tested empirically.

Commission determines the legislative voting agenda. However, according to Cox and McCubbins (2005), the positive effect of agenda control on party cohesion results from a majority party being able to prevent items in which it is less cohesive from reaching the floor. As I have shown before, in the EP neither political groups nor committees possess negative agenda power. In addition, political groups and committees are always able to introduce amendments even if the Commission is in control of the legislative agenda. Therefore, the negative correlation between legislative votes and party group cohesion does not result from missing agenda control by political groups. It rather indicates that legislative votes are contentious among national delegations within a political group. Thus, the support of national delegations cannot be ensured and voting defection becomes likely so party group leaders rather abstain from RCV requests in legislative votes.

If a party group introduces an amendment the leadership can incorporate the interests of the respective national delegations whose leaders are responsible to assure voting cohesion. Therefore, RCV request is likely after a party group has introduced an amendment which is supported by the empirical findings presented in this paper. This holds especially for the introduction of amendments by small party groups as it is easier for their group leaders to integrate the interests of only a few national delegations. This is supported by Hix *et al.* (2006) who find a negative effect of the degree of national fractionalization on party group cohesion.

My findings further indicate that party group leaders actually do not control sanctioning instruments to influence the voting behaviour of MEPs. If this were the case, the occurrence of RCVs would be more instead of less likely in binding votes. This is because in these votes the incentives to express a certain policy position should be especially high. The addressees of position-taking like interest groups and voters should be particularly interested in knowing the voting positions of political groups if the vote is of legislative relevance. This means that the analytical conceptualisation of party group leaders as principals of MEPs is misleading and overestimates the power of political groups.

Which impact do my findings have on studies about voting behaviour like those I presented in the introduction? The mechanisms underlying roll call requests suggest that the RCV sample reveals rather high levels of party group cohesion while hiding votes with lower cohesion levels. This has been demonstrated by the disproportionately low number of legislative votes which are characterised by lower levels of party group cohesion. Analyses of party group cohesion in the EP based on RCVs therefore need to consider the possibility of selection bias. The selection effects need to be controlled for as the dependent variable is likely to be correlated with the selection rule of RCVs. If one is particularly interested in the voting behaviour of MEPs in legislative votes, one should abstain from generalising levels of party cohesion from the RCV sample to important votes.

If party group cohesion in the RCV sample is overestimated this would also affect studies about conflict dimensions since the findings about the dominating ideological dimension are based on highly cohesive party groups which are organised along the left-right dimension. If the RCV sample overestimated party group cohesion, the actual conflict dimensions in the EP would differ from the findings based on the RCV sample. Moreover, it is possible that potential conflicts are not revealed in the

RCVs if specific policy areas are systematically excluded from the sample. Carrubba *et al.* (2004) found that in the first year of the fifth election period the RCV sample does not contain any vote on women's rights issues. If this policy area is characterised by a conflict dimension other than the ideological left-right dimension – e.g. the libertarian-authoritarian dimension – it will not be revealed in the RCVs. This may also hold for other policy areas which are underrepresented in the sample.

The findings presented in this paper show that analyses and interpretations about voting behaviour need to be reconsidered if they are based on the RCV sample and do not control for the mechanisms underlying RCV request. More importantly, it has been demonstrated that the power of political groups and their leaders has been overestimated due to a biased RCV sample and a misconceptualised view of party group leaders dominating the current literature on the European Parliament. Thus, interpretations of a supranational EP party system with powerful political groups have to be corrected in favour of influential national delegations.

VII. Literature

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