Cautious Voters - Supportive Parties: Opinion Concruence between Voters and Parties on the EU Dimension

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Opinion Congruence between Voters and Parties on the EU Dimension

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses party–voter congruence on European integration matters in the EU member states. Drawing on existing research, we put forward eight hypotheses which are tested with data from the EES2004 survey. We show that parties are closer to their voters on the left/right dimension than on the EU dimension. Parties are also more supportive of European integration than are their voters. Party system characteristics (number of parties, ideological range) did not affect opinion congruence. The responsiveness analysis at the party level shows that government parties were less responsive than opposition parties; party size was related to responsiveness, with opinion congruence higher in smaller parties; and responsiveness was lower among centrist parties. Voters are also better represented on the EU dimension by their parties in the new than in the older EU member states. This difference may result from the EU occupying a more central place on the political agendas of the new member states.

Introduction

Representation is both a complex and a contested phenomenon. It is complex in the sense that it can be approached from a variety of angles, with most of the empirical research focusing on the linkages between the representatives (such as members of parliament and political parties) and those who elect them. It is contested in the sense that there is no commonly accepted normative rule or objective criterion for assessing whether representation works or not.

Nonetheless, students of representative democracy do agree on certain basic conditions that a political system should meet. First, the composition of the representative body (primarily the legislature) should reflect the composition of the electorate, thus ensuring that all main societal groups are represented in public policy-making. Secondly, there should be at least *some* congruence of preferences between the citizens and their representatives. Although there is no consensus on what constitutes a sufficiently high level of such opinion agreement, it is easy to agree with Wessels (1999: 137), who states that 'the smallest common denominator in normative terms, though, is that in a democracy there should be some match between the interests of the people and what representatives promote'.

Considering the dominance of the left/right cleavage in European politics (Huber and Inglehart, 1995), it is not surprising that most studies find political parties to be quite representative of their voters on this dimension. However, any new dimension or issue that enters the political agenda, particularly if that issue is only weakly related to the left/right dimension, is bound to cause problems for parties. The main such new dimension in European politics is undoubtedly the development of the European Union (EU). Indeed, several scholars have argued that the European party-political space, at least in those countries that joined the Union before 2004, is nowadays based on two main dimensions – the old left/right cleavage and the new EU cleavage, often defined as an anti/pro-European integration dimension (e.g. Hix, 1999; Hooghe and Marks, 1999; Marks and Wilson, 1999; Marks and Steenbergen, 2002b, 2004; Mattila, 2004). One of the key arguments of this research is that the low connectedness between these two dimensions creates problems for the established political parties, which hence have an incentive to downplay European issues and to structure competition along the more familiar and thus safer socioeconomic cleavage.

Comparing voters' own policy positions with their assessment of the position of the party they voted for, this article analyses the congruence of preferences between political parties and their voters on European integration in 22 EU member countries. More specifically, we are not just interested

in reporting levels of issue agreement; the main aim is to find explanations for the variation between the individual countries and parties. The article is structured as follows. The next section presents the findings of existing research on policy representation and on the impact of the EU on the party systems of its member states. Drawing on these two strands of research, we introduce the research hypotheses and data, followed by the empirical analysis. The concluding discussion summarizes our findings.

Policy representation and European integration

Representative democracy is based on the concepts of delegation and account- ability. The main act of delegation is that of the voters casting their vote in an election, with the elected representatives then held accountable for their actions in the next election. When choosing their party and/or candidate in the election, voters presumably have at least some knowledge of the prefer- ences of the parties competing in the election. Indeed, according to the so- called party government or 'responsible party model', which has driven much of the policy representation research in the European context (Powell, 2004: 284), cohesive parties should offer competing choices to the voters, who then vote for the party that is closest to their preferences. Once in office, parties will carry out the promises made in the campaign, and hence eventual government policy will be in line with the preferences of the majority of the electorate (Thomassen, 1994). Whether these conditions are met is obviously an empirical matter.

Policy representation is a crucial aspect of the act of delegation in the responsible party model. Not only should parties offer competing policy bundles to the voters, but voters should be aware of these differences and then choose their party accordingly. Because European party systems are based on the left/right dimension, it is likely that citizens' most accurate knowledge is about the parties' positions on that dimension, and that, the further one moves from traditional socioeconomic questions, the less informed voters are about party positions and the less representative parties are of their supporters (Thomassen, 1994). According to Kitschelt (2000: 851), political parties stick to the established patterns of competition and reduce the dimensionality of the political discourse for at least two reasons:

> First, in representative democracy, . . . representatives are charged with represent- ing their constituencies over an infinite and uncertain range of issues. Thus, to enable voters to anticipate candidate positions on issues in which voters do not know the parties' positions or in which parties do not (yet) have positions, parties . . . signal to voters more fundamental principles for generating policy stances that

would apply to new and ex ante unforeseeable political issue conflicts. Second, voters are information misers and typically lack time and resources to review the candidates' and parties' specific issue positions. Instead, they are looking for simple underlying principles according to which parties generate issue stances.

Thus the dominance of the left/right dimension, the familiarity of that dimension among voters, and parties' own strategic interests all contribute to attention in European politics focusing on socioeconomic matters. Hence it is not surprising that research on policy representation has found European political parties to be fairly representative of their voters on the left/right dimension. Both comparative analyses and country studies testify that, by and large, European citizens are well represented on that key dimension of party competition (e.g. Dalton, 1985; Klingemann, 1995; Widfeldt, 1995; Thomassen and Schmitt, 1997, 1999a; Kitschelt et al., 1999; Pierce, 1999; Holmberg, 2000).[1]

It is easy to concur with Kitschelt (2000: 845) who argues that 'it is a key task for political scientists to identify the conditions under which politicians are responsive to citizens' preferences'. However, there appears to be no consensus on which factors work for and against effective policy representation in left/right matters. The only broader study that focuses exclusively on comparing policy representation in different countries is Miller et al. (1999), which employs largely comparable elite and citizen data from France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United States. Interestingly, the authors of that book reach quite divergent conclusions. Wessels (1999) did find a link between party system features and policy representation, with the median voter better represented in countries with majoritarian electoral systems, and party voters better represented in countries with proportional representation (PR) election systems. Wessels (1999: 153) also concluded that 'the stronger the polarization – the more differentiated the supply – the better the match between party voters and MPs of that party'.

However, Holmberg (1999: 94) reached a different conclusion:

> Given the differences in measurement techniques and measurement scales and the very limited number of issues included in some studies, the conservative conclusion is that the degree of collective policy congruence between elected leaders and voters did not differ in any substantial way between the five political systems . . . [T]he political system does not matter when it comes to degrees of policy congruence between leaders and voters in Western democracies.

Pierce (1999: 31) also found no connection between the fragmentation of the party system and the effectiveness of policy representation.

With data from Eurobarometers and from a survey of MEP candidates carried out in 1979, Dalton (1985) compared policy congruence in the then nine European Community countries. At the system level, Dalton found that

PR electoral systems and higher party diversity (operationalized as the number of parties in parliament and the fractionalization of the legislature) produced better issue agreement: 'As the number and variety of parties increases, it becomes easier for voters to locate a party that simultaneously represents their views on all issue dimensions' (Dalton, 1985: 287). At the party level, Dalton showed that parties on the right and, particularly, on the left (as opposed to being centrist) had better opinion congruence, and that having a centralized party organization also facilitated issue agreement. Comparing issue congruence on the left/right dimension between the median voter and the government in 12 industrialized countries, Huber and Powell (1994) showed that congruence increased when the effective number of parties and the proportionality of election outcomes also increased.

However, the reality is altogether different when we examine attitudes towards European integration, which arguably has become the second main cleavage in European politics. Recently an increasing number of studies has focused on the role of parties in the EU system. Perhaps the most significant finding of this research is the divisive nature of the European question. Regardless of the data used – voting behaviour in legislatures, surveys of citizens and MPs, expert surveys, or more descriptive approaches – European integration is clearly a destabilizing factor for national parties.

Although European questions have led to severe conflicts among and within parties in several EU countries, European integration has nonetheless not altered the basic structure of national party systems by resulting in the formation of new parties (Mair, 2000). This is not surprising. Indeed, there are very strong reasons to expect that we would not witness the entry of new parties as a result of European integration. The main explanatory factor for the observed stability is that the established national parties have an interest in sustaining the status quo and the prevailing structures of party competition. After all, despite the gradual partisan de-alignment, parties still have their 'natural' pools of voters and they have reputations for particular programmes and policy objectives. Giving the EU dimension a stronger role in the competition for votes would potentially lead to instability that might weaken the role of the main national parties (Marks and Steenbergen, 2002a: 881–2). As Hooghe et al. (2002: 970) argue:

> Parties that are successful in the existing structure of contestation have little incentive to rock the boat, while unsuccessful parties, that is, parties with weak electoral support or those that are locked out of government, have an interest in restructuring competition. The same strategic logic that leads mainstream parties to assimilate the issues raised by European integration into the Left/Right dimension of party competition leads peripheral parties to exploit European integration in an effort to shake up the party system.

Viewed from the perspective of the responsible party model, mainstream parties are thus offering competing choices to voters in left/right matters but not in European questions.

Whereas studies have shown parties to be fairly representative of their voters on the left/right dimension, the picture is much bleaker in European matters. First, parties are ideologically less cohesive on integration than on traditional left/right issues (e.g. Hix, 1999; Ray, 1999; Thomassen and Schmitt, 1999b). Moreover, within parties the elected representatives are considerably more supportive of integration than are their voters, with the European dimension revealing a wide gap between citizens and MPs. The first comparative study on issue agreement on integration matters did, however, find considerable congruence of opinion. Comparing voters' perceptions of where parties stand and voters' own preferences from a survey carried out right after the 1989 EP elections, Van der Eijk and Franklin (1991: 124) showed that most parties were representative of their voters on integration matters, with 'only a few parties' taking positions that were clearly out of line with the position of their voters.

Comparing the preferences of citizens and candidates in the 1994 EP elections on concrete policy issues concerning the EU (abolition of borders, unemployment, single currency), Thomassen and Schmitt (1997: 181) concluded that the elite and the electorate were 'living in different European worlds'. And, when comparing the views of MPs, MEPs and citizens on those issues, the authors stated a couple of years later that, 'across the board, voters' attitudes appeared to be less pro-European than those of the political elites, whether they were members of the European Parliament or of the national parliaments' (Thomassen and Schmitt, 1999a: 206). Using the same data, Marsh and Wessels (1997) showed that MEPs from countries with highly proportional electoral systems were more likely to represent citizens better than were MEPs from countries with less proportional systems.

In another article, based on elite and citizen survey data from 1979 and 1994, Schmitt and Thomassen (2000) showed that, although the policy preferences of the voters and the parties did diverge, issue agreement between voters and party elites about the general development of integration ('are you for or against efforts being made to unify Europe?') was as high as on the left/right dimension. Thus they argued that, whereas policy representation may be failing on specific EU policy issues, it does seem to work fairly well as far as the overall development of integration is concerned. Finally, using data from the 1999 European Election Study (EES), in which voters were asked to place both themselves and the parties on the anti/pro-integration dimension, Van der Eijk and Franklin (2004) showed that the diversity of opinion among the electorate was not reflected at the level of the parties. There was

thus, according to those authors, 'potential for contestation' on EU matters, with the EU issue being a 'sleeping giant' in European politics. The study also showed the parties to be far more supportive of integration than were the voters.

Most of these previous studies on policy representation in EU matters have basically just reported the preferences or positions of voters and parties. Only a few of them have gone beyond descriptive analysis. Our study constitutes an attempt at explaining variation in levels of issue agreement both between countries and between individual political parties. Moreover, the existing body of research on policy representation has produced somewhat contradictory findings, with no consensus on what explains variation between individual countries or parties. Drawing partly on that previous research, we shall introduce our research hypotheses in the next section.

Research hypotheses

The primary goal of this article is to explain variation in party–voter congruence on European integration in the EU member states. Our analysis proceeds in three stages. First, we compare opinion congruence on the EU dimension with congruence levels on the left/right dimension. Next, we examine representativeness at the system level by comparing the responsiveness of party systems in the different EU countries. Then, we shall change our focus to the party level, and explain variation between individual parties.

In line with this approach, our research hypotheses are also broken down into three categories. First we put forward two hypotheses relating to political dimensions. Because previous research indicates that elites are more supportive of integration than are citizens, *we expect to find that in 2004 too the parties were more pro-integrationist than were their voters* (Hypothesis 1). We also expect, again in line with the findings of previous research, *opinion congruence to be higher on the left/right dimension than on the anti/pro-integration dimension* (H2).

Moving next to explaining variation between individual countries (the system level), we test the impact of three factors. Party system characteristics have been argued by several authors to affect the effectiveness of policy representation. Although previous studies have produced mixed findings, they seem to lean towards arguing that greater party system fragmentation improves the congruence of opinion between the masses and the elites (e.g. Wessels, 1999). Hence we also hypothesize that *the more fragmented the party system, the greater the congruence of opinions between voters and parties* (H3). The idea is simply that a larger number of competing parties means voters have

more options to find their 'own' party in the elections. Of course, it is quite possible that parties decide to compete in the election on policy dimensions other than the EU dimension, but this is a question for empirical analysis.

Our second system-level variable is ideological range, sometimes also called wing party distance (Gilljam and Oscarsson, 1996), operationalized as the distance on both the left/right and the EU dimensions between the most left-wing and the most right-wing or the most anti-EU and the most pro-EU party in the country. According to this hypothesis, *greater ideological range will produce better representativeness* (H4), as parties offer more policy options to voters.

Our final system-level hypothesis is not derived from previous research on policy representation, and focuses more specifically on European integration. We expect that *the timing of membership matters, with lower congruence on EU matters in the new member states that joined the Union in the spring of 2004* (H5), just under two months before the survey, from which our data are taken, was carried out. The reason for this expectation is that, in these newly democratized member countries, European questions are new to the parties and to the voters, and therefore parties have had less time to adopt positions on integration and there has been less time for parties and their supporters to 'find each other' in EU matters. Another factor that speaks on behalf of this hypothesis is that stable party systems should produce higher opinion congruence (Holmberg, 1999), with the newly democratized post-communist countries still characterized by much higher party system instability than the older EU member states. However, a valid counter-argument is that, because the June 2004 EP elections took place so soon after EU membership referenda, the higher salience of European integration on the political agendas of these countries may have produced better congruence between parties and their voters.

Turning to the explanation of variation between individual parties, we put forward three hypotheses. We expect government status to make a difference, with the level of congruence depending on whether or not a party is in the government. We argue that *government membership makes parties less representative of their voters* (H6), the logic being that participation in government, particularly the bargaining involved in multi-party coalitions, distances parties from their voters. Additionally, government parties represent their country at the EU level in the Council and the European Council, and this may present them with further restrictions.

Our second party-level variable is party size. We expect *representativeness to be higher in small parties than in large parties* (H7). The rationale is simple: small parties are likely to be ideologically more homogeneous than are larger parties, which necessarily have bigger and thus more heterogeneous

electorates, hence ending up with lower party–voter congruence than small niche parties have.

The final party-level variable tests the impact of party ideology. This variable is derived from Dalton (1985), according to whom ideological centrism had a negative effect on policy representation. Hence we also expect that ideological centrism produces lower congruence, with *parties that are further from the political centre on the left/right dimension being more representative of their voters* (H8). The rationale behind this hypothesis is that parties that are situated on the left or the right have clearer policy profiles than have centrist parties, with this ideological clarity facilitating higher responsiveness.

Data

Our data are taken from the European Election Study 2004 (EES2004) project, which consisted (for the most part) of identical surveys carried out in the EU countries just after the European Parliament elections held in June. Unfortunately, not all countries were included in the survey, and hence our data set covers only 22 political systems.[2] Of these political systems, 21 are EU member states; additionally we have data from Northern Ireland, in which a separate survey was conducted because Northern Ireland has its own unique party system different from the rest of the United Kingdom. Although Northern Ireland is not an EU member state, for the sake of simplicity we will refer to our 22 political systems as member states or as member countries in the text.

We use questionnaire data for locating both the parties and their voters on the anti/pro-integration dimension and on the left/right dimension. Hence our approach differs from the majority of previous studies on policy representation that have compared voter data with elite-level data (mainly surveys of MPs or MEPs). Of the studies dealing with policy representation in EU matters, only Van der Eijk and Franklin (1991) relied exclusively on voter data as we do here.

We compare voters' own policy positions with their assessment of the position of the party they voted for. Basically, we assume that when the distance between voters and their party is small, parties do a good job of representing their voters and vice versa. For each party we calculated two measures. First, using only the respondents who indicated that they voted for a particular party in the 2004 EP elections, we calculated their average positions on the EU and left/right dimensions. Second, we calculated from the same respondents where they perceived their 'own' party to stand on these dimensions. Comparing the resulting two average values, it is possible to analyse how close or far voters feel that their parties are to themselves. In

order to avoid a situation where our results are dominated by a large number of small parties that even collectively obtain just a fraction of the vote, we weigh the observations by the parties' share of the votes in the 2004 EP elections in the empirical analysis.

We acknowledge that voter perceptions of party locations may not be accurate reflections of reality, with the majority of European citizens probably having quite limited information or knowledge of party policies, at least concerning European integration. More specifically, voters may be engaging in wishful thinking, projecting their own preferences onto their preferred parties. If this is indeed the case, then our data systematically underestimate the distances between parties and their voters. However, it is important to emphasize that, although voters may not be able to place parties accurately on political dimensions, they are likely to base their vote choices on their own perceptions of party and/or candidate positions. Other approaches to inferring parties' positions, such as expert surveys and content analysis of party programmes (Mair, 2001) or using elite data, do not allow us directly to compare the positions of voters and their perceptions of where the parties stand.

The main interest in this article is the distance between voters and their parties on the EU dimension, which was operationalized in the EES2004 questionnaire as a 1–10 scale measuring respondents' attitudes towards European unification. The exact wording of the question was: 'Some say European unification should be pushed further. Others say it already has gone too far. What is your opinion? Please indicate your views using a 10-point scale. On this scale, 1 means unification "has already gone too far" and 10 means it "should be pushed further". What number on this scale best describes your position?' This question was followed by several questions where the respondents were asked to indicate, using the same scale, where the main parties of their respective countries were located. In the following, we refer to this dimension as the anti/pro-EU dimension or simply as the EU dimension.

In addition, and in order to put our results into perspective, we compare policy representation on the EU dimension with representativeness on the conventional left/right dimension. Measures from this dimension are based on the following question: 'In political matters people talk of "the left" and "the right". What is your position? Please indicate your views using any number on a 10-point scale. On this scale, where 1 means "left" and 10 means "right", which number best describes your position?' As with the EU question, this question was followed by a set of questions in which respondents were asked to indicate the positions of the main parties in their country on the left/right scale according to their perception.

Our data set comprises 122 parties from 22 political systems (79 from the old and 43 from the new member states). In the case of some smaller parties,

only a handful of respondents voted for them. In this study, only parties with 10 or more voters among the respondents are included to avoid calculating policy position averages from a very small group of voters. This restriction means that some small parties are dropped from the analysis. Furthermore, a much more severe restriction on the inclusion of some parties is caused by the system of joint lists in several member states. In some countries, the respondents voted for lists that included two or more parties, and hence the data do not reveal which particular party they supported. These parties also had to be dropped from the analysis. For example, in Portugal the joint list of two parties, the Social Democrats (PSD) and the People's Party (PP), gained 35% of the votes in the 2004 EP elections. However, from the questionnaire data we know only that some respondents voted for the PSD–PP list but not which of the two parties they supported. Hence, these two parties cannot be included in the data set and as a result we were able to include only three parties from Portugal in our study. Fortunately, for most of the countries we were able to include all or, at least, most of the major parties (see the appendix for more information).[3] Put together, the parties included in our analysis won on average over 84% of the votes in the 2004 European elections. In many countries, such as Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany and Greece, they won over 90% of the votes.

There are several ways of measuring the representativeness of individual politicians or political parties (see Achen, 1978). We begin our analysis with two very simple measures. First, we analyse the distance between the average position of party voters and the position of their party on the EU and left/right dimensions. This distance measure does not tell us anything about the direction of possible differences between parties and their voters – for example, whether parties have adopted more favourable positions towards European integration than have their voters. The second measure, called 'bias', is simply the difference between the party position and the voter position. Positive values of this measure indicate that parties have more pro-integration stances than their voters on the EU dimension or that they have more rightist views on the left/right dimension, whereas negative values indicate the opposite.

Analysis of political dimensions

Distance and bias averages for the 22 political systems are presented in Table 1. The second and third columns of the table show how close or far an average party is located from its voters on the EU and left/right dimensions. On the EU dimension, parties in Northern Ireland are closest to their voters.

Table 1 Opinion congruence between parties and their voters, 2004.

Country	Distance		Bias	
	EU dimension	Left/right dimension	EU dimension	Left/right dimension
Northern Ireland	0.10	0.21	0.05	0.19
Cyprus	0.32	0.43	0.20	−0.07
Czech Republic	0.46	0.67	−0.13	0.04
France	0.59	0.33	0.59	0.30
Netherlands	0.59	0.22	0.48	0.02
Slovakia	0.61	0.66	0.42	0.60
Spain	0.62	0.29	0.58	0.28
Ireland	0.73	0.43	0.70	0.26
Italy	0.81	0.42	0.64	0.29
Germany	0.81	0.48	0.54	0.17
Slovenia	0.86	0.60	0.86	0.60
Denmark	0.91	0.40	0.44	0.18
Estonia	0.96	0.43	0.73	0.12
Latvia	0.97	0.54	0.97	0.34
Greece	0.99	0.34	0.44	0.19
Poland	1.03	0.73	−0.13	0.41
Portugal	1.04	0.81	0.64	0.51
Austria	1.20	0.51	1.20	0.18
Finland	1.39	0.43	1.39	0.21
Luxembourg	1.42	0.76	1.43	0.71
Hungary	1.51	0.31	1.52	0.23
Great Britain	1.60	0.51	1.60	0.51
All countries ($N = 122$)	0.90	0.47	0.70	0.28
Old member states ($N = 79$)	0.92	0.43	0.77	0.28
New member states ($N = 43$)	0.86	0.54	0.56	0.27

The average distance between a party and its voters in Northern Ireland is only 0.1 on the 10-point EU scale, which means that parties are indeed very close to their voters. On the left/right dimension, too, Northern Irish parties seem to be close to their voters. This is quite surprising because the traditional left/right dimension and the EU dimension are hardly defining political cleavages in Northern Irish politics.

Other countries where parties are located very close to their voters on the EU dimension are Cyprus and the Czech Republic. On the EU dimension, the biggest gap between parties and voters can be found in Great Britain, where the average distance is more than 10 times bigger than in Northern Ireland.

One would be tempted to say that this is related to the British majoritarian political system, but this is clearly not the case because distances are also large in some countries with proportional electoral systems, such as Finland and Austria.

When looking at the average distance measures in the bottom panel of Table 1, one can see that parties are closer to their voters on the left/right dimension than they are on the EU dimension, which supports our second hypothesis. Similar conclusions can be reached when one compares the distances in the old and in the new EU member states. Basically, parties in the new member states are as close to their voters as are parties in the old member states on both dimensions. The small differences in the actual figures are not statistically significant. Thus, our hypothesis (H5) expecting better representation in the old than in the new member states on the EU dimension is not supported in this initial analysis.

Turning to the bias measures, shown in the last two columns of Table 1, it can be seen that parties are indeed more favourable to European integration than are their voters, as our first hypothesis expected. On the EU dimension, positive figures mean that parties have adopted more pro-EU positions than their voters. Only in the Czech Republic and Poland are voters on average more favourable to European integration than are the parties they voted for. However, the figures for these two countries are very small, indicating that the anti-Europe bias among parties is practically non-existent. The biggest differences between parties and their voters are found in Great Britain, Hungary, Luxembourg and Finland.

The pro-European integration bias among parties can be seen both in the new and in the old member states. However, the average bias seems to be bigger in the old member states (0.77) than in the new (0.56), but the difference is not statistically significant. The bias on the left/right dimension is considerably less than the bias on the EU dimension, indicating, again, that parties represent their voters better on the left/right dimension than on the EU dimension.

System-level analysis

In Table 2 the relationship between political system characteristics and representativeness on both the EU and left/right dimensions is analysed with regression analysis. The distance and bias figures are from Table 1. According to our hypotheses (H3–H5), the number of parties, the ideological range they represent and whether the country is a new/old member state would have an impact on representativeness. The number of parties is measured

Table 2 Regression analyses of opinion congruence and political system characteristics

	Distance		Bias	
	EU dimension	Left/right dimension	EU dimension	Left/right dimension
Constant	0.85**	0.39**	1.04**	0.35
	(0.22)	(0.14)	(0.32)	(0.22)
Number of parties	−0.07	0.01	−0.04	0.02
	(0.44)	(0.03)	(0.07)	(0.04)
Ideological range	0.11*	0.02	−0.04	−0.03
	(0.05)	(0.02)	(0.07)	(0.04)
New member state	0.00	0.10	−0.18	0.00
	(0.11)	(0.07)	(0.11)	(0.11)
R^2	.07	.03	.02	.01

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, $N = 122$.

with the Laakso–Taagepera (1979) index of effective parties (calculated from the distribution of seats in national parliaments at the time of the elections). The ideological range, i.e. the distance between the extreme parties, is measured both on the EU and on the left/right dimensions using the EES2004 data set.

The results in Table 2 are rather disappointing. Most of the regression coefficients are small, with only one being statistically significant and even its sign is contrary to what we hypothesized. We expected greater ideological range to make parties more representative of their voters on the EU dimension, but the positive coefficient seems to indicate that, in party systems with large wing party distance, parties are further away from their voters than they are in countries with less ideological breadth. All in all, none of our three political system-level hypotheses gained support in the empirical analysis.

Party-level analysis

Next we turn to analysing voter–party opinion congruence at party level using Achen's (1978) regression-based approach, which he calls the responsiveness measure of representation. This approach has already been used, e.g. by Dalton (1985), Herrera et al. (1992), Wessels (1999) and Kitschelt et al.

(1999). The basic idea behind the responsiveness approach is that, the better we are able to predict party positions on policy or issue dimensions using party voter positions on these same dimensions, the better the responsiveness. This can be expressed as a regression equation as follows (see Dalton, 1985: 281):

$$\text{Party position} = a + b(\text{voter position})$$

The degree of overall party responsiveness is determined by both the intercept, a, and the regression coefficient, b, of the model.

According to this perspective of political representation, ideal responsiveness occurs when the intercept of the regression line is 0 and the slope coefficient is 1. This means that, for example, if the party voter average on the EU dimension is 7, the position of their party is also 7. If the average party voter is located at 2, so will the party be, and so on. Different combinations of a and b correspond to different types of deviation from ideal responsiveness. If both b and a equal 1, parties have a positive bias in the policy positions, meaning that they are on the average located 1 point 'to the right' on the dimension. For example, if parties adopt more pro-European integration positions than their voters, as our first hypothesis expected, we will see positive intercepts in our regression models.

It is not only the intercept that affects the degree of responsiveness. The regression coefficient b also has an interesting interpretation. When b is less than 1, parties adopt more convergent positions than their voters do, that is, the opinion differences between parties are smaller than the opinion differences between their supporters. On the other hand, if b is greater than 1, the party system is more polarized and parties accentuate the differences between voters. This means that, at both ends of the policy dimension, parties adopt more extreme positions than their voters do.[4]

Table 3 presents the results of the responsiveness analyses (Model A) for all parties in the data set and then separately for parties in the old and in the new member states. Next, we included some additional variables in the analyses (Model B) to see how they affect party responsiveness. These new variables are related to our last three hypotheses, which concerned the effects of government participation (H6), size of the party (H7) and ideological centrism (H8) on representativeness. Government participation is measured with a dummy variable, coded 1 if the party was in government at the time of the 2004 EP elections and 0 if it was in opposition. The size of the party is measured as the vote share it gained in the same elections. Finally, ideological centrism (or extremism) on the left/right dimension is measured with two dummy variables that indicate whether the party was a left-wing or a right-wing party, where the reference category is a centrist party.[5]

Table 3 Regression analyses of party responsiveness on the EU dimension

	All parties		Parties in old member states		Parties in new member states	
	Model A	Model B	Model A	Model B	Model A	Model B
Constant	1.65**	1.32**	2.11**	1.93**	0.11	−0.46
	(0.45)	(0.37)	(0.47)	(0.40)	(0.96)	(1.00)
Voters' EU position[a]	0.83*	0.79**	0.75**	0.68**	1.07	1.03
	(0.08)	(0.06)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.15)	(0.15)
Party in government	–	0.50**	–	0.44**	–	0.67*
		(0.13)		(0.15)		(0.28)
Party size	–	2.28**	–	2.20**	–	3.62*
		(0.50)		(0.57)		(1.15)
Right wing party	–	−0.09	–	−0.03	–	−0.28
		(0.15)		(0.18)		(0.29)
Left wing party	–	−0.41**	–	−0.36*	–	−0.43*
		(0.15)		(0.17)		(0.33)
Adjusted R^2	.54	.66	.50	.68	.55	.67
N	122	122	79	79	43	43

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.
[a] The statistical null hypothesis is that the regression coefficients equal 1.

Examining the results of the responsiveness analysis (Model A) containing all parties in Table 3, we see that European parties deviate from the ideal model of responsiveness in a statistically significant way. The intercept of the model is 1.65, indicating that parties are, according to voter perceptions, more favourable to European integration than their supporters are. Moreover, the slope coefficient (0.83) is less than 1, showing that the variation among parties on the EU dimension is smaller than among their voters. Basically, this confirms the results obtained by Van der Eijk and Franklin (2004) using data from the 1999 EP elections, who concluded that European parties do not differentiate themselves clearly enough on EU matters to offer competing alternatives to voters.

When the new and old member states are compared, interesting results emerge. In the case of parties from the old member countries, the pro-Europe bias is even clearer, over 2 points on the 10-point scale. In addition, the slope coefficient is smaller (0.75), indicating smaller variation among parties than among their voters. However, the case is definitely different in the new member states, where the voter–party opinion congruence corresponds

almost exactly to the ideal responsiveness situation, a result that certainly refutes our fifth hypothesis. Clearly parties in the new member states do a better job of representing their voters in EU matters than do parties in the old member states. Perhaps EU matters occupied a larger role on the political agendas of the new member states at the time of the EES survey, with the enlargement (and the preceding membership referenda) taking place only shortly before the 2004 EP elections. This stronger salience of EU matters may have forced parties to be more responsive towards their voters than was the case in the old member states, where parties have mostly been trying to avoid making EU matters a central component of their electoral campaigns or discourse (see, e.g., Van der Eijk and Franklin, 2004).

Model B in Table 3 shows how our additional variables are related to responsiveness. Government parties both in the new and in the old member countries occupy more positive positions towards European unification than do opposition parties. This may be related to the fact that government parties often have to make compromises that may distance them from their voters. These compromises are made with their government partners and, perhaps more importantly, at the EU level with other European governments and EU institutions. Opposition parties do not face similar restrictions.

Party size too is related to responsiveness, with larger parties being, on average, further away from their voters on the EU dimension than their smaller counterparts. This effect can be seen both in the old and in the new member states. Perhaps the catch-all nature of most of the larger parties, with broad and diverse supporter bases, enables them to avoid strong dependence on any specific group of voters (Dalton, 1985: 289).

Finally, we can see that ideological extremity on the left/right dimension has an effect on responsiveness. In the regression analysis containing all the parties, the left-wing dummy has a negative coefficient, showing a smaller pro-Europe bias among these parties than among centrist and right-wing parties. Again, the differences between the old and the new member states are small: the coefficients are by and large similar in size to those of the new member states. All in all, these results give at least tentative support to our last hypothesis, which expects a smaller bias in responsiveness among parties that have clearer ideological profiles than among catch-all centrist parties. According to our analysis, this applies particularly to left-wing parties.

Figure 1 depicts the results in graphical form, both in the new and in the old member states. These illustrations are based on predicted values for various types of party using the results from Table 3. When depicting the results for different types of party, it is assumed that independent variables other than the one under consideration at the time take on their average values. Furthermore, in the figures 'large party' denotes a party with 40%
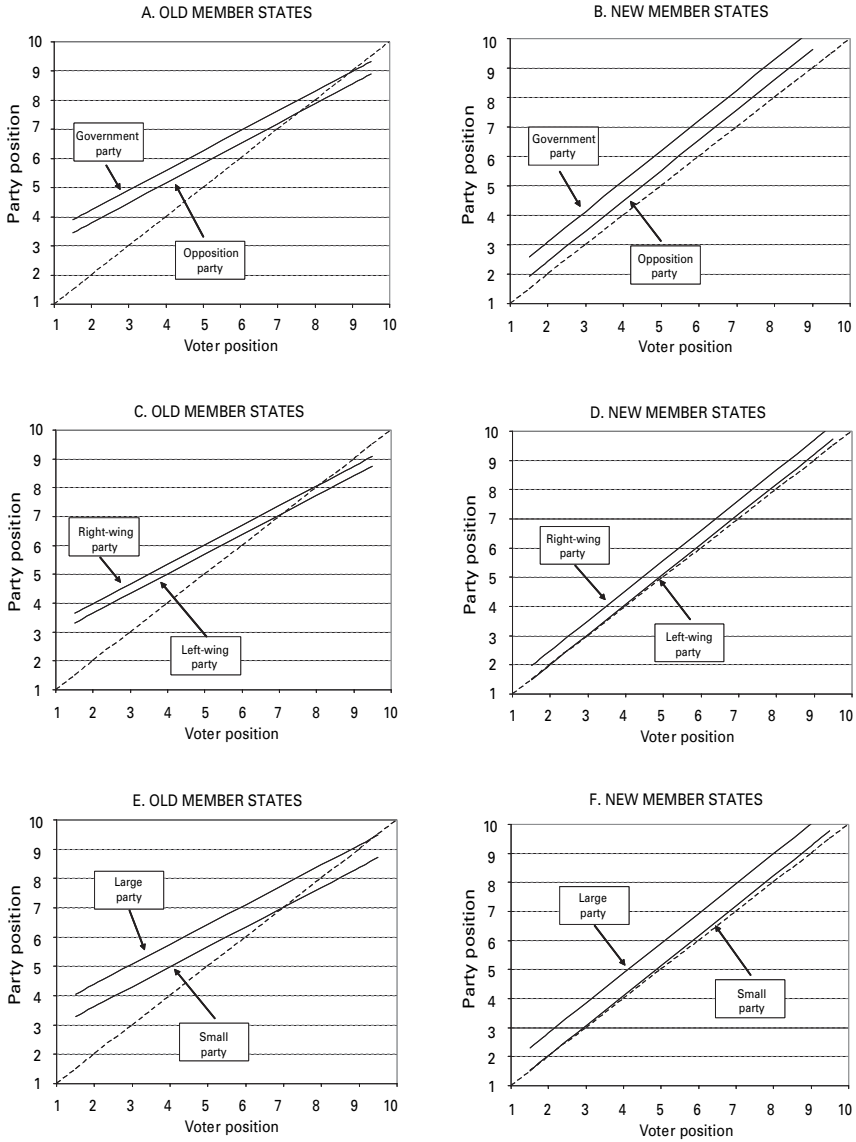
Figure 1 Responsiveness of different types of parties on the EU dimension.

support whereas 'small party' denotes a party with 5% electoral support. The dotted lines depict the situation where the ideal party responsiveness is realized: parties and their supporters occupy the same location on the EU dimension.

From Figure 1 it is easy to see that voters in the new member states perceive that they are rather well represented by their parties. This is especially the case with small parties, opposition parties and left-wing parties. The situation is very different in the older member states, where a notable difference between pro-EU and anti-EU voters exists. Voters who are supportive of the EU perceive their parties' positions on the EU dimension to be on the average close to their own positions. The situation is worse for voters who have more reserved positions towards the EU. These people feel that their parties do not reflect their EU attitudes. The stronger the voters' anti-EU positions are, the further away from their own parties they feel they are located on EU matters. Thus, the problems of party responsiveness in the old member states are manifested among the EU sceptical voters, not among EU supporters.

Conclusions

The main objective of this article has been to analyse variation in party–voter congruence on European integration in the EU member states. In fact, because previous research had largely focused on merely reporting the positions of parties and voters, this study has constituted one of the first attempts at explaining variation in policy representation on the EU dimension between countries and individual parties.

Drawing mainly on existing comparative research on policy representation, we put forward eight hypotheses, which were tested with data from the EES2004 survey carried out immediately after the June 2004 EP elections. Our findings offered only partial support for the hypotheses. In line with previous research, we first showed that parties are closer to their voters on the left/right dimension than on the EU dimension. Then we confirmed that parties are more supportive of European integration than are their voters. We expected party system characteristics (number of parties, ideological range) to have an effect on opinion congruence, but this was clearly refuted by our analysis. The responsiveness analysis at the party level produced several findings: government parties were less responsive than opposition parties; party size was related to responsiveness, with opinion congruence higher in smaller parties; and responsiveness was lower among centrist parties. Our study also confirms that European parties, at least in the old member states, fail to offer enough competing alternatives to voters over European integration. This bodes ill for the 'responsible party model', whose basic premise is that parties offer competing choices to the voters, who then vote for the party that is closest to their preferences. However, the importance of this lack of

congruence between parties and their voters depends on the salience of EU matters. If voters care mainly about left/right issues, and not about issues related to European integration, then parties may be considered to be acting 'responsibly' even if they offer fewer choices to voters on the EU dimension than on the left/right dimension.

Perhaps the most interesting result concerns policy representation in the new member states. Contrary to our hypothesis, voters are actually better represented by their parties on the EU dimension in the new member countries than in the older EU member states. We assume that this difference between the old and new member countries might result from the EU occupying a more central place on the political agendas of these countries. After all, the June 2004 EP elections took place just over a month after the enlargement, which had in 9 out of 10 new member states been preceded by membership referenda. Hence parties had been forced to express their positions on European integration, or at least on membership, with citizens thus exposed to information about parties' European policies. This stands in quite striking contrast to the old member states, where major parties have in most countries done their best not to have real debates over Europe's future.

The key to improving the quality of policy representation in EU matters would thus seem to lie in making the EU dimension more salient in national politics. However, this appears to be a slim prospect. Strategic considerations of national parties aside, the European Union – lacking a common identity and the power to raise taxes or to carry out major redistributive policies – will remain 'distant' from the voters for the foreseeable future. Hence opinion congruence on the EU dimension will continue to be lower than on the conventional left/right dimension.

Notes

1   For excellent reviews of empirical research on political representation, see Thomassen (1994) and Powell (2004).
2   The EES2004 study included all the EU member states with the exception of Malta. Unfortunately, in three countries the questionnaire did not include the EU and left/right scale questions necessary for our analysis. Therefore, the data set does not include Belgium, Lithuania and Sweden. More information about the EES2004 project is available at http://www.ees-homepage.net/.
3   The appendix is available on the EUP website. See http://www.uni-konstanz.de/eup/issues.htm.
4   For a more thorough discussion and illustration of various combinations of

the intercept and the slope coefficient and their implications for political representation, see Kitschelt et al. (1999: 80–7).

5   We defined parties that had average values below 4 on the 10-point left/right scale as left-wing parties. Parties with values over 7 were classified as right-wing parties.

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