Party or Expertise? Political Careers and Leadership in the European Parliament[*]

Eugenio Salvati (University of Pavia)
Michelangelo Vercesi (Leuphana University Lüneburg)

DRAFT: PLEASE DO NOT CITE WITHOUT AUTHORS' PERMISSION

1. Introduction

This paper analyzes the relationship between individual turnover and pay-off distribution in the European Parliament (EP). In particular, it argues that previous career experiences increase or decrease the likelihood to be appointed to top positions within this institution. Good reasons prompt to study this organizational aspect of the EP.

Since the first direct election in 1979, the European Parliament has acquired a pivotal role in the European Union's (EU) political system, especially after the establishment by the Lisbon Treaty of the co-decision as the ordinary legislative procedure. Its higher decision-making power has increased the attractiveness of the EP as a career option for ambitious politicians (Whitaker 2014; Daniel 2015; Salvati 2019). The rise of a professional European political class and lower levels of legislative turnover have made the EP a more institutionalized body (Scarrow 1997; Verzichelli and Edinger 2005; Salvati 2016). Career paths of MEPs (members of the European Parliament) before and after entering office can tell us a lot about the legitimacy of the EU. First, it is important that European citizens can vote for candidates with some kind of previous connection with the own constituency; this could make voters feel closer to their representatives, thus working against the democratic deficit of the EU. Second, previous political experience may affect the deliberative quality and the policy outputs of the EU. Variations along these dimensions (closeness with voters and professionalism) have substantial implications in terms of accountability and responsiveness of EU institutions (Scherpereel and Perez 2015).

So far, scholars have mainly focused on the explanation of career models. Relatively less attention has been paid to the effect of career trajectories on the functioning of the EU. As we shall see, the literature has raised the question whether or not individual professionalization and party loyalty determine the chances to occupy more prestigious office

in the EP. In this regard, findings are mixed and limited in their coverage. In this paper, we aim to extend the existing knowledge, by disentangling the linkage between MEP's profiles and appointment to leadership positions in the parliament from 2009 to 2019. One novel aspect of our analysis – based on an original dataset on career paths and parliamentary roles of MEPs – is that we do not focus on a specific office (e.g., committee chair). Rather, we adopt a comprehensive approach, which links together personnel selection in both committees and party groups in the EP. We try to answer two questions: *what defines the allocation of leadership offices in the EP? How do previous career trajectories affect the parliamentary division of labor at the EU level?* The analysis will provide new insights about the intersection between politicians' experience, rules of self-government within the EP, and the efficiency of the EU policy-making process. Our focus is on committee chairs, rapporteurs, and parliamentary party leaders.

After recapping the state of the art about the EP's internal structure and the assignments of parliamentary roles, we derive three expectations based on a principal-agent theoretical framework. Subsequently, we present our data basis and move to the empirical investigation. Finally, we stress findings' implications and research outlooks.

2. Political Offices and Appointments in the European Parliament

Over the years, a core group of specialized and long-serving MEPs has emerged (Salvati 2019). In addition to skilled personnel, the EP has also developed a specialized internal division of labor, based on a strong system of committees (Bowler and Farrell 1995; Mamadouh and Raunio 2003). The prestige and autonomy of EU parliamentary committees encourage MEPs to seek leadership positions within such institutional venues, in order to have firmer grasp on the decision-making process. Indeed, EU committees help overcome informational asymmetries in the policy-making process. It is no coincidence that, under the co-decision procedure, a large part of the legislation is adopted via early agreement procedure in the committees (Burns 2013).

A second indicator of the internal complexity of the EP as an institution is the presence of organized and cohesive parliamentary party groups (Kreppel 2002; Hix et al. 2007). European party groups have proved to be essential to guarantee the efficacy of the EP as colegislator in the EU system. Moreover, they are crucial in the allocation of benefits and office within the EP. As stated by Kreppel (2002: 199), the 'control over desirable positions within the

legislature appear to be under the control of the group leadership'. This does not mean that party national delegations do not play a role in the determination of the daily life of the EP groups. If in the allocation of positions EU party groups are fundamental, the selection and reselection process of candidates remains in the hands of national parties (Hix et al. 2007). This implies that those who seek reelection may follow own national leaders in case of conflict between the EP party and the national one.

From an organizational viewpoint, European party groups have adopted a leadership structure similar to national party groups': a leader, who is elected by all group's MEPs, is the key spokesperson in debates over parliamentary decisions.[1] Moreover, this figure is expected to improve party discipline and cohesion (Bressanelli 2014). In this regard, Bailer et al. (2009) showed that previous career experiences of party leaders account for a substantial percentage of cohesion in the EU groups.

One way to assess the interaction between committees and party groups is to investigate how internal appointments to top positions are made and defined. The EP is organized with 20 permanent committees, whose members are appointed according to the principal of proportional representation of party groups (McElroy 2006; Yordanova 2009). The party group leadership makes the final proposal, which must undergo the final vote of the parliament. This process takes place at the beginning of the new legislative term and it is repeated two and half years later. Every committee elects its chair and vice chairs (up to four), based on a bargaining process between party leaders as well as a proportional allocation between groups and, secondly, between national delegations. Committee chairs are influential figures, who lead committee meetings, shape the committee's agenda, and represent the committee inside and outside the EP (Whitaker 2001).

Rapporteurs are further important figures in the EP's committees. They are responsible for the successful final passage of legislation in the plenary (Mamadouh and Raunio 2003). They prepare and monitor relevant reports on specific bills and, if the committee refuses an EP's proposal, they communicate to the chamber the final committee's decision. Although the principle of proportionality applies to rapporteurs' appointments, it is corrected by a complex system of points, which can be spent by each parliamentary group to appoint own representatives (Häge and Ringe 2019: 212).

Because of their centrality, committee chairmanships and rapporteurships are particularly valuable for ambitious MEPs and for party groups at large. The literature has thus

---

[1] An exception is the Green/EFA group, which appoints two co-chairs for the sake of gender balance.

sought to find what affects committee assignments. In particular, the focus has been on (1) the influence (if any) of individual background and interests and (2) the role of parties as gatekeepers. However, the scholarship has mostly looked at committees at large, rather than top positions.

For example, a first study by Bowler and Farrell (1995) found no evidence that party seniority explains assignments. The authors also found that party groups are the kingmakers for all positions. However, MEPs' occupational background too plays a role, suggesting that parties act as gatekeepers but also check for individual expertise. Furthermore, Whitaker (2001) and McElroy (2006) showed that committees' policy positions are representative of the general ideological orientation of parties. This undermines the strength of distributional explanations, which state that MEPs are assigned to those committees where they can get the best pay-off for their electoral constituency (Shepsle 1979). In contrast, Mamadouh and Raunio (2003) stressed that MEPs aim to enter those committees that best cover their own field of expertise, while national parties have only a small say in the final decision. Finally, we know that party loyalty in the plenary is not an asset to be assigned to the desired committee (Kreppel 2002; Yordanova 2009). Overall, specialization seems to matter more than party. As Whitaker (2019) points out, MEPs obtain the preferred position when they have previously been part of the same committee or have a consolidated experience in the EP. This finding supports an informational explanation, according to which committee members are chosen to reduce transaction costs and to make policy-making easier and efficient (Krehbiel 1991).

With regard to the positions of committee chair, it is worth noting that evidence diverges from this interpretation: in this case, assignments are mainly the result of parties' priorities, whereas individual preferences have only a marginal role (Kreppel 2002; Whitaker 2019). In particular, previous leadership positions within the EP and/or a previous national prominent political career may positively affect chances of being appointed (Salvati 2019). Similarly, the allocation of rapporteurs does not reflect the composition of the chamber: factors such as party affiliation, nationality, and policy preferences do make the allocation more 'disproportional' (Kaeding 2004, 2005; Hoyland 2006). One important empirical insight is that the rapporteurs' appointment process is determined by a mixture of parties' preferences and individual expertise. According to Yoshinaka et al. (2010: 477), this is due to the fact that the rapporteur has to be 'a consensus builder in a setting that is multiparty with constant, ongoing negotiations among groups'.

All in all, Kaeding's (2005: 100) statement 'that puzzles in the internal working of the EP are far from being solved and understood' still holds. Our study provides clues for solutions, by looking at the connection between MEPs' political professionalization, individual turnover, and the assignment of offices within the EP. In particular, we are interested in understanding if specific career paths at both national and EU levels make MEPs more likely to be selected by parties for more influential positions.

3. A Principal-Agent Theory of Assignments in the European Parliament
If we want to have a better understanding of political appointments within the EP, we need a theory to explain why certain individuals would be more likely to achieve apical positions. The literature shows that different logics sustain appointments, depending on the nature of the office. In this regard, top positions reproduce what Putnam (1976: 37) called the 'law of increasing disproportion': the more one approaches apical posts, the more elite's characteristics are biased and do not reflect the composition of the parliament at large. However, we argue that variations can occur not only vertically, but also between different leadership positions.

Our expectations are based on the principal-agent theory of political selection and deselection. Principals select the preferred agents to fill political offices, so that problems of transaction costs, lack of information, and collective action are overcome. Agents are expected to behave in line with principals' will (Strøm 2003). However, who delegates power risks agency loss, which ensues from adverse selection, moral hazard, or agency rent (Lupia 2003; Dowding and Dumont 2015). For these reasons, principals develop both *ex-ante* and *ex-post* screening mechanisms to keep agents accountable. It has been observed that supranational organizations (such as the EU) suffer from the difficulty to connect citizens' preferences and decision-making outputs coherently (Vaubel 2006). In the case of the EU, the chain of delegation between citizens and institutions is more complex than in national democracies. The consequent difficulty to avoid agency loss in the EU has important implications for the legitimacy of the system as a whole (Kassim and Menon 2003: 133-135). To analyze how EU actors seek to minimize these risks by controlling political appointments in the EP, we need to disentangle the shortcuts that principals use to pick the best agent.

Alongside distributive and informational approaches, principals could follow a partisan approach and select those who guarantee party unity and control over the decision-making

process (Cox and McCubbins 1993). Especially in this case, party leaders need agents' loyalty, which can be fed through future candidacies and career promotions of ambitious MEPs (Sieberer and Müller 2017). We have seen that the distributive logic seems applicable to collective bodies, such as parliamentary committees, whereas individual offices appear more likely to be filled based on either expertise or partisan reasons (or a combination of both).

Parliamentary committees are by definition consensus bodies, where inter-party cooperation is the rule, more than in the plenary (Curini and Zucchini 2015). Compromises between parties are requested both for office and policy. The committee as a whole is in charge to select its own chair, who – we can assume – should be able to accommodate different party and individual views. Because of their mediating and representative role, chairs are likely to be chosen because of their ability to 'disempower' party conflicts and to manage committee works in a less divisive way. Assuming that the committee is the collective (inter-party) principal of chairs and committees need to seek consensus, our first expectation is that:

> *committee chairs are more likely to be selected, based on their previous knowledge and ability to manage disagreements and to accommodate policy conflicts rather than their partisan profile (informational skills as tendentially necessary and sufficient condition).*

A perhaps more important committee's agent is the rapporteur, whose work lies at the center of policy production in the multi-party EP. In spite of its centrality, we do not have yet a precise idea of who is likely to occupy such a crucial position. The evidence is mixed: rapporteurs look as both partisan figures and consensus builders, who 'occupy an uncomfortable middle ground' (Yoshinaka et al. 2010: 477. See also Costello and Thomson 2010). At the same time, once factors such as the decision-making role of the EP *vis-à-vis* the Council and the previous membership duration in the EU of the own nation state are kept fixed, assignments appear to be more driven by informational reasons (Daniel 2013; Hurka et al. 2015). However, parties – which remain the main identifiers of MEPs orientations – are interested in prioritizing own policy preferences, having higher control on the rapporteur. Given the central role of rapporteurs in defining policies, different parties might want to check in advance the policy preferences of rapporteurs, so that they can exert mutual control and avoid agency loss. For these reasons, we expect that:

> *rapporteurs will be selected, based on their national party profile more than their expertise in the EU decision-making environment (partisan skills as tendentially necessary and sufficient condition).*

Under our premises, the selection of parliamentary groups' chairs should be informed by a third logic. Parliamentary groups are partisan, interested in maximizing party advantages. Unlike in national contexts, the relationship between voters and MPs in the EP is subjected to a two-step party mediation (against one step in national parliaments). European voters are likely to choose MEPs using national parties as cognitive facilitators (e.g., Schmitt 2005; Koepke and Ringe 2006). National parties, on their turn, bargain at the EU level to form party groups in the EP. This can imply that MEPs feel to be agents also of the own national party, rather than of the European group only. However, European parliamentary groups are the principals of party chairs. Although crossed by intra-party divisions, parliamentary party groups can be assumed to be more cohesive principals than committees (Hix et al. 2005). Parliamentary party leaders are thus expected to comply with partisan goals of intra-party unity and coordination. Because of the second order character of European elections (Hix and Marsh 2011), national party delegations will be more likely to agree on profiles who have proved to be reliable at the national level, where competition is more politicized and partisan preferences are more easily detectable. Nonetheless, parliamentary party leaders are supposed to bargain with other leaders in the EP and sometimes to favor the accommodation of inter-party demands for policy outputs. For this reason, principals would value both party reliability and the previous knowledge of the (formal and informal) parliamentary procedures in the EP. Our third expectation is:

> *party groups' leaders are selected, based on their managerial skills. However, party reliability has a greater impact than in committee chairs' appointment (informational and partisan skills as tendentially necessary and jointly sufficient conditions).*

We argue that, in general, principals will try to minimize the costs of screening. This means that – when possible – they will select the agent with the sufficient combination of experience, without focusing on other (not required) skills. It is worth noting that our theoretical arguments build on the assumption that political parties are the main deciding actors, either when they bargain together in committees to compromise or when they appoint own representatives on their own. Parties will try to find reliable agents, according to their needs. One of the most common proxies of reliability for parties is the previous institutional and party experience (Samuels and Shugart 2010). In our analysis, we will look at these forms of occupational experience.

Our expectations imply conclusions about the legitimacy of the EU political process. The partisan logic seems connected to the notion of input legitimacy, because party leaders select having in mind preferences of national voters. On the other hand, the informational logic is shaped by procedural concerns, thus paying more attention to the 'throughput facet' of EU legitimacy. Finally, both logics can impact in different ways on the EP's decisions, affecting output legitimacy (either in terms of responsibility or responsiveness). Lower turnover rates may increase throughput legitimacy (more skilled MEPs) and decrease input legitimacy (higher detachment of EU elites from citizens). Higher turnover works the other way round.

4. Research Strategy

4.1. *Operationalization*

Our outcome of interest is the appointment of MEPs to leadership positions in the EP. In particular, we focus on two positions (chair and rapporteur) of standing committees and one partisan position (chair of the parliamentary party group). Our explaining condition is the professional background of MEPs before entering office. We assume that previous background affects the likelihood to be selected. However, we build up on the existing literature and we argue that different principals select different profiles, based on the position to be filled. We use institutional positions in the EP as a proxy to assess informational provisions (i.e., if one has worked in the EP, he[2] knows more likely how to manage collective policy-making). Secondly, we refer to national (and sub-national) institutional and party backgrounds to assess the partyness of MEPs, as conceived of by our second and third expectations (i.e., if one has acquired political experience below the EU level, he has more likely demonstrated his party attachment).

With regard to the outcome(s) of interest, we consider an MEP as an agent if he was selected during the legislative terms at issue. With regard to rapporteurs, we only focus on assigned reports and we do not consider shadow rapporteurships. We count only one rapporteur even when the same person dealt with more reports. This is because we are interested in the linkage between a given background and the break of the 'glass ceiling' of top positions, irrespective of how many times this can occur afterwards.

For the explaining condition, we cluster MEPs into a couple of career profiles. First, we distinguish between political outsiders (with previous experience neither in government and

---

[2] In line with the literature on principal-agent relationships, we use 'she' for principals and 'he' for agents.

parliament nor in parties at both EU and national level) and MEPs with political experience. Those with a previous political career are further dichotomized between MEPs who had already held a seat in the EP and those who had not. Finally, for each of them, we check whether they had occupied a national position before their entry to the EP. We assume that regional and local experience can be a proxy of party reliability similarly to central experience, especially in the light of the growing importance of sub-national careers for ambitious politicians in a multi-level Europe (Edinger and Jahr 2015). For this reason, we operationalize national political experience as at least one of the following positions: member of the national and/or regional party leadership; member of parliament and/or sub-national legislative assembly; prime minister, senior and/or junior minister at central/sub-national level (in municipalities of at least 20.000 inhabitants); mayor of municipalities with more than 100.000 inhabitants. For simplicity's sake, we use the label 'national experience' to group all these proxies; we use 'EU experience' to refer to the previous service in the EP. Information is gathered from MEPs' official webpages on the EP's website (www.europarl.europa.de), MEPs' personal websites, and Vote Watch Europe (www.votewatch.eu). Overall, we derive four types of MEPs, based on their political background (table 1).

Table 1. Types of MEPs, based on political background

National experience	EU experience	
	YES	*NO*
YES	Full insider	National insider
NO	EU insider	Outsider

According to our expectations, we should find a relative majority of committee chairs who are EU insiders. The rate of national insiders should be *relatively* high among rapporteurs. Third, most leaders of parliamentary groups should tend to be full insiders. Finally, we expect outsiders to be underrepresented in all leadership positions.

4.1 *Methodology and Data Basis*

For our purpose, we observe the background of top politicians in the EP and we compare the ratios. From a methodological viewpoint, we show both absolute frequencies and percentages[3] and we test the robustness of the expected relations (if any) through chi-squared statistical tests of significance. Although simple, this choice proves to be fruitful when it comes to account for the relation between broader sets of conditions and given outcomes such as

---

[3] Possible discrepancies in the sums of percentages are due to approximations.

political appointments, in contexts where configurational interplays of explaining factors are likely to be present. This especially holds when no integrated theories on the topic of relevance exist (Vercesi and Grimaldi 2019).

Our analysis is based on a unique dataset on the political profiles of all MEPs from 1979 to 2019 (Salvati 2018).[4] However, we focus only on the two legislative terms of 2009-2014 and 2014-2019. By doing so, we can 'fix' some third conditions, which could be potential sources of noise in our investigation. First, our timespan starts one legislative term after the 2004 EU enlargement to Central-Eastern Europe and the 2007 entry of Bulgaria and Romania. This means that, except for Croatia, MEPs from most of the 'new' member states had a chance to get previous experience in the EP before being (re)elected. At the same time, we have an enough compact period, which limits possible long-term effects. In this regard, it is worth noting that the period 2009-2019 is characterized by a homogenous and relatively high level of institutionalization of both the EP and internal parliamentary groups (Salvati 2019). This makes internal appointments less likely to be affected by the instability that characterizes the functioning of new and under-definition institutions. Finally, in both legislative terms, the relative majority of MEPs were part of the European People's Party (EPP), followed by the group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D). Jointly, these two groups comprised – when the parliament was inaugurated – 61% and 54.8% of seats in 2009 and 2014 respectively.

In our analysis, we consider all MEPs who were in office for at least one month and one day, including replacements. The total number of observations is thus higher than the number of seats in the EP. Overall, we investigate the background of 817 MEPs between 2009 and 2014 and 766 MEPs for the subsequent term (total N: 1583 individuals). Out of 1583 MEPs, 1185 (74.9%) held one of the three apical positions we are interested in, 730 men (61.6%) and 455 women (38.4%).

Figure 1 provides descriptive statistics about the distribution of MEPs by gender, previous background, and role in the EP for both legislative terms.

---

[4] For this paper, we collected new data on names and number of rapporteurships. All other data come from the databank on 'Political careers and parliamentary roles of the members of the European Parliament, 1979-2019', constructed by Eugenio Salvati.

Figure 1. MEPs by gender and political experience, 2009-2019 (percentages)
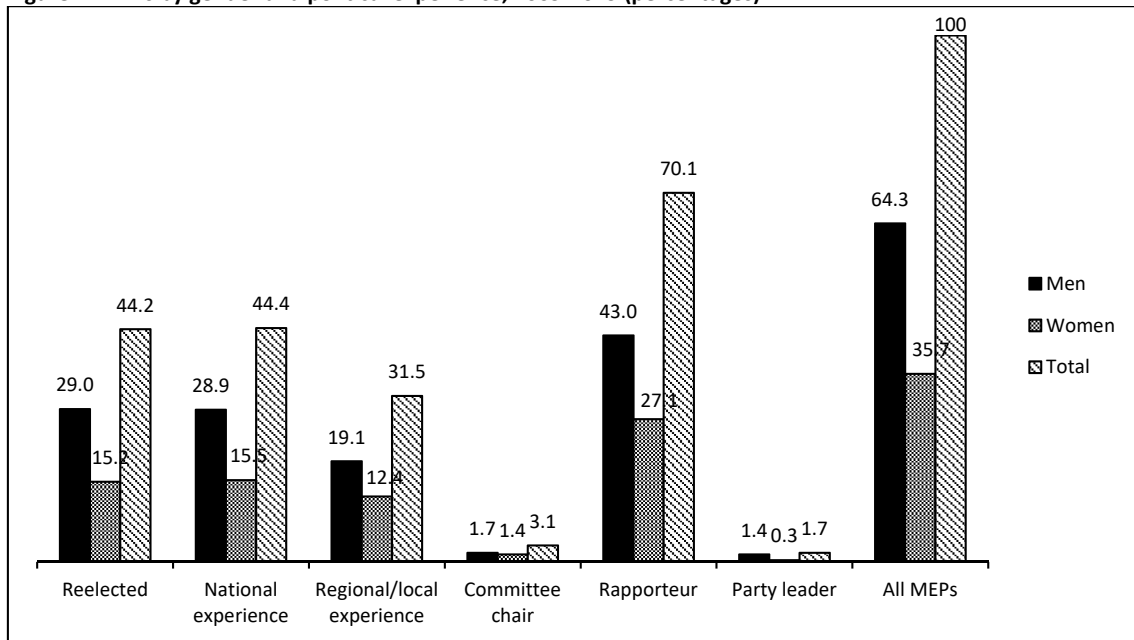
Note: when two positions were held contemporarily at the same level of government, we have counted the most prestigious one. For example, a minister who is also MP is counted as minister. We have considered both national parliamentary houses when applicable. Reelection refers only to the legislative term before the one at issue.

Overall, we see that turnover involved the majority of seats, being the reelected less than 50% of the total number of MEPs. Women are clearly underrepresented both in the EP at large and in single offices. Most of MEPs (75.9%) held a political position below the EU level before entering office. However, this applies less to women, who thus seem to have less national political experience than men. More than 70 percent of MEPs were selected for at least one report.

In the next section, we try to understand how these numbers relate each other.

5. Empirical Analysis

In the first place, we observe how insiders and outsiders are distributed among leaders in the EP (table 2). For the empirical analysis, we exclude from our calculations rapporteurs with only one report per legislative term (442 individuals), to leave out 'flash-cases' and concentrate on those selected on a more regular basis. Overall, we thus deal with 668 rapporteurs (60.2%), of whom only 166 (24.9% of 668 and 15% of the total) were selected more than four times in at least one legislative term.

Table 2. Insiders and outsiders by political office, 2009-2019 (percentages)

	Insiders	Outsiders	Total (absolute)
Committee chairs	92.3 (48)	7.7 (4)	52
Rapporteurs	83.5 (558)	16.5 (110)	668
Party leaders	96.2 (25)	3.8 (1)	26
Tot. leadership positions	77.9 (405)	22.1 (115)	520
Tot. MEPs (all)	81.2 (1285)	18.8 (298)	1583

Note: absolute frequencies between brackets.

A preliminary finding is that insiders are especially overrepresented among committee chairs and party leaders, whereas rapporteurs approach the value of the entire parliament. It is worth noting that this holds although we have included only rapporteurs with at least two reports. If these numbers can be due to relative higher percentage of rapporteurs, this can also be a first clue that the experience required to achieve top positions changes based on the nature of the office (especially for rapporteurs). As expected, party leaders seem to be the 'most experienced' politicians among the categories.

To evaluate if our expectations match the empirical evidence, we seek to understand to what extent agents are characterized by having a European and/or national experience. As said, our expectations are not deterministic, but tendential and findings are assumed to be relative. For clarity's sake, we present data in comparative tables. Moreover, we limit our attention to insiders. If our propositions and theoretical assumptions hold, we should find most committee chairs with a European background, most rapporteurs with a national background, and a balanced distribution among party leaders. Results are in line with the theory, although with caveats (table 3).

Table 3. Type of experience by political office, 2009-2019 (percentagies)

	EU experience	National experience	EU 'bias'
Committee chairs	91.7 (44)	68.8 (33)	+22.9
Rapporteurs	66.8 (373)	74.6 (416)	-7.8
Party leaders	88.0 (22)	72.0 (18)	+16.0

Note: Categories are not treated as exclusive. Relations are not statistically significant for $p < .10$. Absolute frequencies between brackets.

The highest ratio of politicians with experience at the EU level is found among committee chairs (almost 92%). If we compare the frequency of the EU background against the national experience, committee chairs present the higher positive deviation towards the former (+23), while rapporteurs predominantly have an experience at the national level (-8 of deviation). Party leaders are more similar to committee chairs, but with a less biased distribution of the two experiences. However, the level of bias (+16) is higher than among rapporteurs, who are those with the most balanced distribution.

These findings provide interesting insights, but we need to assess the exclusive repartition of agents among the three aforementioned types of insiders (table 4). In this regard, we expect to find a *relative* trend towards EU insiders for committee chairs, one towards national insiders among rapporteurs, and one towards full insiders among party leaders.

Table 4. Top politicians by political background, 2009-2019 (percentages)

	Full insiders	EU insiders	National insiders
Committee chairs	60.4 (29)	31.3 (15)	8.3 (4)
Rapporteurs	41.4 (231)	25.4 (142)	33.2 (185)***
Party leaders	60.0 (15)***	28.0 (7)	12.0 (3)

Note: stars indicate those tendencies that are in line with expectations. Absolute frequencies between brackets.
*** $p < .01$.

The significance test tells us that, all in all, differences are statistically significant at $p < .01$ (with a *p*-value of .00138). Our explaining conditions thus appear dependent, in accordance to the theoretical framework we presented. With regard to the single propositions, tables show that the first is only partially corroborated. The bias towards the experience at the EU level is the highest (see table 3); moreover, we find the highest percentage of EU insiders. However, this was mostly combined with an experience at the national level, suggesting that – if we accept that principals minimize screening costs – EU experience is probably a (tendentially) necessary but not sufficient condition. In this sense, committee chairs can be equated to party leaders, making the third proposition corroborated. Findings match also our second expectation. The proportion of full insiders among rapporteurs is considerably lower than in the two other groups. The ratio of EU insiders too is relatively lower; at the same time, the proportion of national insiders is significantly higher. Finally, it is worth noting that, unlike committee chairs and party leaders, rapporteurs who are full insiders are only a relative and not an absolute majority. While in the other two groups, only 40 percent of individuals were selected with only one type of previous experience, the ratio increases to 60 percent among rapporteurs, overturning the relationship. In other words, the relative weigh of a full experience is higher among committee chairs and party leaders, but lower among rapporteurs. This means that, to be selected as rapporteur, informational and partisan skills are more often sufficient (and necessary) on their own (not in conjunction). Moreover, partisan skills are especially valued compared to the institutional experience at the EU level.

6. Discussion of findings

The results of our research confirm some of the findings of the literature and enlighten interesting novelties. First of all, the preliminary distinction between insiders and outsiders perfectly shows how relevant the individual political background is when it comes to appoint top politicians in the EP. The fact that the organization of the daily work of the parliament is in the hands of expert politicians is a clear indicator of the institutionalization of the supranational parliamentary arena in Europe (Daniel 2015; Salvati 2019). Data points in two directions: (1) even if the general turnover is still high (more than 50%), there is a clear pattern of definition of a core group of European politicians, which guarantee specialization and continuity to the assembly (Salvati 2016); (2) most newcomers are professional politicians, and that confirms that the EP is a powerful and attractive legislature to serve in (Verzichelli and Edinger 2005; Daniel 2015; Salvati 2019).

With regard to our initial expectations, data generally underlines that for both committee and party chairs the combination of EU and national experience is necessary to gain leadership roles, although one role (party leader) is more partisan than the other (committee chair). This means that, for party gatekeepers, selected MEPs have to be both reliable in partisan terms and able to fulfil given tasks. Informational and partisan skills seem to be thus necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for the two roles: this indicates that our first expectation was partially wrong, but it corroborates the third one.

Why is it necessary to have a full experience to become committee chair and/or parliamentary party leader? Why do these leaders tend to be full insiders? This can be explained by the fact that political expertise, political prestige, knowledge of the EP's working conditions, and (formal and informal) rules are all necessary elements to enhance the effectiveness of the offices. For committee chairs, it is fundamental to create consensus and manage political conflicts within the committee. Party leaders, for their part, need to head up a multi-national political group, by fostering cohesiveness in order to influence the legislative process. To fulfil these tasks, parties seem to require a full experience (national plus European). It is also worth noting that the higher incidence of the EU experience among committee chairs is compatible with previous findings about the impact of the informational logic on the appointments in committees in general (Whitaker 2019).

Vice versa, the appointment of rapporteurs is less dependent on a 'full-insider background', following our second expectation. Here, the proportion of national insiders is the highest, while the ratio of EU insiders is the lowest; moreover, the combination of both

conditions is significantly less prominent than among committee and party chairs. This means that we have a partially different selection path for rapporteurs: the national profile – and therefore the partisan aspect – tends to be the necessary and sufficient condition for selection. The centrality of rapporteurs in the definition of EU legislation increases the importance of being reliable from a partisan viewpoint and to support party priorities in the policy-making. This does not mean that rapporteurs apply a sort of conflictual 'take it or leave it strategy' in the legislative process, but simply that the previous experience in the EP is not as important as the skills acquired in the national arena. National experience makes rapporteurs more trustworthy in front of the party leadership, who assigns the appointments.

How can we interpret the differences between the three positions? This diversity can be traced back to the fact that committee chairs and party leaders need a more complex, multifaceted and structured experience to manage effectively European issues both in terms of politics and institutional procedures. In contrast, rapporteurs are more connected to policy than politics. In other words, parties seek especially politically reliable MEPs to fill a position that requires a better knowledge of the policy issues at stake. Overall, rapporteurs are expected to promote and advocate party positions and preferences (Yoshinaka et al. 2010).

To sum up, legislative turnover and intra-parliamentary recruitment models are obviously consequential for the role of the parliament in the broader context of the EU political system. As we have seen in our work, both partisan and informational logics are at work within the EP, with implications for the input, output, and throughput legitimacy of the EU. Theoretically, the partisan logic allows inserting the citizens' viewpoint into the political system with higher intensity: as stated above, this logic pertains to the leadership of parliamentary groups, rapporteurs, and in part committee chairs. The fact that these positions are allocated to party high-skilled MEPs can be an indicator that parties pursue the reinforcement of the input facet of the EP legitimacy. This holds even if the overall turnover in the EP is stabilized at a medium-high level: indeed, the core group of EU insiders is narrow (albeit not marginal); however, more professional national insiders outweigh outsiders in the EP. Potentially, this assures professionalization and better performances in terms of party accountability and responsiveness. These aspects can improve, in the eyes of citizens, the image of both the EP and the EU as a whole, which are often considered remote locations.

Conclusion

Our reflection about legislative turnover and the political-professional background of the elected presents interesting clues about the functioning and institutionalization of the EP. Unlike previous specific research on committee and rapporteur assignments (Bowler and Farrel 1995; Mamadough and Raunio 2003; Whitaker 2019), our investigation contributes to the existent literature by focusing on the relationship between political experience and appointments in the EP at large. Furthermore, we have provided new insights about the role of party leaders within the EP, which has been an underdeveloped field of research (Bailer et al. 2009).

The main aim of our article was to disentangle the linkage between MEPs' background and leadership positions. First, we found that by and large top leadership positions in the EP are assigned to insider politicians. Insiders are overrepresented in all the three categories of interest. Secondly, we have pointed out different paths to power for, on the one hand, committee chairs and leaders of parliamentary party groups and, on the other hand, for rapporteurs. For the first two cases, to be a full insider is a necessary condition to get the position. With regard to rapporteurs, the main predictor is instead the only national political background, while we observe a marginalization of the impact of the European profile.

These results encourage us to make some speculations about the long-standing theme of the EU legitimacy. The prominent role of the partisan feature can be interpreted as part of the strengthening process of the input side of legitimacy. At the same time, one can argue that there is a partial slackness of the throughput legitimacy, due to the relative high level of turnover and the low ratio of EU insiders among committee chairs and (in particular) rapporteurs. We are far from affirming that we are facing a stable trend, but probably the results of this research may help open (or reopen) the theoretical and empirical debate about the impact that European parties, the EP, and parliamentary turnover have on the functioning and legitimacy of EU democracy.

References

Bailer, S., T. Schulz, and P. Selb (2009). 'What Role for the Party Group Leader? A Latent Variable Approach to Leadership Effects on Party Group Cohesion in the European Parliament.' *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 15(4): 355-378.

Bowler, S. and D.M. Farrell (1995). 'The Organizing of the European Parliament: Committees, Specialization and Co-Ordination.' *British Journal of Political Science* 25(2): 219-243.

Bressanelli, E. (2014). 'Necessary Deepening? How Political Groups in the European Parliament Adapt to Enlargement.' *Journal of European Public Policy* 21(5): 776-792.

Burns, C. (2013). 'Consensus and Compromise Become Ordinary – But at What Cost? A Critical Analysis of the Impact of the Changing Norms of Codecision upon European Parliament.' *Journal of European Public Policy* 20(7): 988-1005.

Costello, R. and R. Thomson (2010). 'The Policy Impact of Leadership in Committees: Rapporteurs' Influence on the European Parliament's Opinions.' *European Union Politics* 11(2): 219-240.

Cox, G.W. and M.D. McCubbins (1993). *Legislative Leviathan: Party Government in the House*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Curini, L. and F. Zucchini (2015). 'Legislative Committees as Uncertainty Reduction Devices in Multiparty Parliamentary Democracies.' *West European Politics* 38(5): 1042-1061.

Daniel, W.T. (2013). 'When the Agent Knows Better than the Principal: The Effect of Education and Seniority on European Parliament Rapporteur Assignment.' *Journal of Common Market Studies* 51(5): 832-848.

Daniel, W.T. (2015). *Career Behaviour and the European Parliament: All Roads Lead through Brussels?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dowding, K. and P. Dumont (2015) 'Agency Rent, Adverse Selection and Moral Hazard.' In K. Dowding and P. Dumont (eds.), *The Selection of Ministers around the World*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 1-24.

Edinger, M. and S. Jahr (2015) (eds.), *Political Careers in Europe. Career Patterns in Multi-Level Systems*. Baden-Baden: Nomos.

Häge, F.M. and N. Ringe (2019). 'Rapporteur-Shadow Rapporteur Networks in the European Parliament: The Strength of Small Numbers.' *European Journal of Political Research* 58(1): 209-235.

Hix, S. and M. Marsh (2011). 'Second-Order Effects plus Pan-European Political Swings: An Analysis of European Parliament Elections across Time.' *Electoral Studies* 30(1): 4-15.

Hix, S., A. Noury, and G. Roland (2005). 'Power to the Parties: Cohesion and Competition in the European Parliament, 1979-2001.' *British Journal of Political Science* 35(2): 209-234.

Hix, S., A. Noury, and G. Roland (2006). 'Dimensions of Politics in the European Parliament.' *American Journal of Political Science* 50(2): 494-520.

Hoyland, B. (2006). 'Allocation of Codecision Reports in the Fifth European Parliament.' *European Union Politics* 7(1): 30-50.

Hurka, S., M. Kaeding, and L. Obholzer (2015). 'Learning on the Job? EU Enlargement and the Assignment of (Shadow) Rapporteurships in the European Parliament.' *Journal of Common Market Studies* 53(6): 1230-1247.

Kaeding, M. (2004). 'Rapporteurship Allocation in the European Parliament.' *European Union Politics* 5(3): 353-371.

Kaeding, M. (2005). 'The World of Committee Reports: Rapporteurship Assignment in the European Parliament.' *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 11(1): 82-104.

Kassim, H. and A. Menon (2003). 'The Principal-Agent Approach and the Study of the European Union: Promise Unfulfilled?' *Journal of European Public Policy* 10(1): 121-139.

Koepke, J.R. and N. Ringe (2006). 'The Second-order Election Model in an Enlarged Europe.' *European Union Politics* 7(3): 321-346.

Krehbiel, K. (1991). *Information and Legislative Organization*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Kreppel, A. (2002). *The European Parliament and Supranational Party System. A Study in Institutional Development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lupia, A. (2003). 'Delegation and Its Perils.' In K. Strøm, W.C. Müller, and T. Bergman (eds.), *Delegation and Accountability in Parliamentary Democracies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 33-54.

Mamadough, V. and T. Raunio (2003). 'The Committee System: Powers, Appointments and Report Allocation.' *Journal of Common Market Studies* 41(2): 333-351.

McElroy, G. (2006). 'Committee Representation in the European Parliament.' *European Union Politics* 7(1): 5-29.

Putnam, R.D. (1976). *The Comparative Study of Political Elites*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.

Salvati, E. (2016). 'Towards a European Parliamentary Class? A Proposal for a Typology of the MEPs.' *Journal of Comparative Politics* 9(1): 59-74.

Salvati, E. (2018). 'Political careers and parliamentary roles of the members of the European Parliament, 1979-2019'. Dataset.

Salvati, E. (2019). *Il Parlamento Europeo tra crisi del processo di integrazione e politicizzazione dell'Unione Europea*. Milano: Mondadori.

Samuels, D.J. and M.S. Shugart (2010). *Presidents, Parties, and Prime Ministers. How the Separation of Powers Affects Party Organization and Behavior*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Scarrow, S. (1997). 'Political Career Paths and the European Parliament.' *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 22(2): 253-263.

Schmitt, H. (2005). 'The European Parliament Elections of June 2004: Still Second-Order?' *West European Politics* 28(3): 650-679.

Shepsle, K.A. (1979). 'Institutional Arrangements and Equilibrium in Multidimensional Voting Models.' *American Journal of Political Science* 23(1): 27-59.

Scherpereel, J.A. and L.K. Perez (2015). 'Turnover in the Council of the European Union: What It is and Why It Matters.' *Journal of Common Market Studies* 53(3): 658-673.

Sieberer, U. and W.C. Müller (2017). 'Aiming Higher: The Consequences of Progressive Ambition among MPs in European Parliaments.' *European Political Science Review* 9(1): 27-50.

Strøm, K. (2003). 'Parliamentary Democracy and Delegation.' In K. Strøm, W.C. Müller, and T. Bergman (eds.), *Delegation and Accountability in Parliamentary Democracies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 55-106.

Vaubel, R. (2006). 'Principal-Agent Problems in International Organizations.' *The Review of International Organizations* 1(2): 125-138.

Vercesi, M. and S. Grimaldi (2019). 'Using Large *N* Longitudinal Comparison to Explain Political Recruitment in Changing Democracies.' *SAGE Research Methods Cases – Politics & International Relations*, forthcoming.

Verzichelli, L. and M. Edinger (2005). 'A Critical Juncture? The 2004 European Elections and the Making of a Supranational Elite.' *Journal of Legislative Studies* 11(2): 254-274.

Whitaker, R. (2001). 'Party Control in a Committee-Based Legislature? The Case of the European Parliament.' *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 7(4): 63-88.

Whitaker, R. (2014). 'Tenure, Turnover and Careers in the European Parliament: MEPs as Policy-Seekers.' *Journal of European Public Policy* 21(10): 1509-1527.

Whitaker, R. (2019) 'A Case of "You Can Always Get What You Want"? Committee Assignments in the European Parliament.' *Parliamentary Affairs* 72(1): 162-181.

Yordanova, N. (2009). 'The Rationale behind Committee Assignment in the European Parliament: Distributive, Informational and Partisan Perspectives.' *European Union Politics* 10(2): 253-280.

Yoshinaka, A., G. McElroy, and S. Bowler (2010). 'The Appointment of Rapporteurs in the European Parliament.' *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 35(4): 457-486.