How national party policy positions and decision-making in the European Parliament fit together –
A theoretical and empirical view on political behaviour of German parties*

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Abstract
Policy positions are highly relevant for national party competition. Amongst others, they signal parties’ view on policy issues. These policy positions are externally used by voters for their voting decisions. For the internal party dynamics policy positions are relevant as well: They have an inherent function for party members’ identification and are used as reference for legislative decision-making. When policy positions and legislative behaviour dramatically mismatch, parties can lose credibility. A decreasing credibility can raise fundamental problems for parties because it enhances the possibility of electoral defeat and can therefore result in a loss of parliamentary seats or government office. Additionally, the organisational strength of parties can be weakened when party members choose to exit. While that interplay of these two party functions – position taking and legislative behaviour – is known for national party competition, it is less clear for national parties within the European multilevel system. Obviously, the necessity of coherence between national party positions and voting behaviour in the European Parliament is reduced when the lack of public attention towards European legislature is taken into account. However, today’s importance of European decision-making and the resultant adherence by national parties’ policy experts give hints that coherence across these two political levels may be more important than initially assumed. The paper provides a theoretical concept of coherence between national party positions and legislative behaviour in the European Parliament. This concept includes explanations of characteristics and relevance of coherence for the two-level situation. Moreover requirements for (in)coherence between the two party functions are theoretically inferred. The concept of coherence gives new insights into the interdependence of the national party organization and legislative behaviour in the European Parliament.

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1. Introduction

Political parties are said to have several important functions for the operation of democratic regimes. Although the literature on political parties offers different catalogues of party functions, most of these catalogues include the articulation of political interests and the development and implementation of legislative proposals as central functions (Wiesendahl 1980; Beyme 1984: 23-24; Sartori 2005). The articulation of policy positions is highly relevant for national party competition. Amongst others, policy positions signal parties’ view on policy issues. These policy positions are externally used by voters for their voting decisions. For the internal party dynamics policy positions are relevant as well: They have an inherent function for party members’ identification and are used as reference for legislative and executive decision-making.

If policy positions on the one hand and legislative and executive behaviour on the other hand, dramatically mismatch, parties can lose credibility. A decreasing credibility can raise fundamental problems for parties because it enhances the possibility of electoral defeat and can therefore result in a loss of parliamentary seats or government office. Additionally, the organisational strength of parties can be weakened if party members choose to exit. Overall, achieving party unity as consistency between two fundamental functions of party politics – namely articulating and implementing political interests (Dalton/Wattenberg 2000: 5) – is of high importance for parties in national competition.

Since political parties play a central role in European democracies one can model political representation by the means of a specific delegation chain. The first part of the delegation chain describes the relationship between voters and parties. When continuing the delegation chain to the representatives in parliament, there is no direct relationship between voters and representatives but between political parties and parliamentarians as believes and preferences by voters are transmitted through political parties (Müller 2000; Strom 2003; Strom/Müller 2009). Therefore, policy representation can be separated into two dimensions: firstly, the representation of voters’ preferences in parties’ offers of political (programmatic) alternatives and, secondly, the implementation of articulated party policy positions into legislative and executive decisions (Weßels 2007: 842). The former is described as articulating and aggregating political interests, the latter as implementing policy objectives by a functional approach to party politics (Dalton/Wattenberg 2000: 5). However, parties are no unitary actors (Katz/Mair 1993; Katz 2005) and, hence, different party actors are accountable for the output of these two party functions. Achieving consistency not only depends on party’s ideological fundament, but also on intra-party relationships between party actors who announce policy positions and elected party representatives in legislative and executive offices.

The process of European integration and the successive strengthening of the EU’s policy competences lead to an even more complicated situation, since the party’s delegates in the European parliament enter the scene as new actors, who have to be integrated in the internal process of coordination and planning to achieve the goal of party unity. Since 1979 representatives of national parties are directly elected to the European Parliament by national voters. In the course of this, articulating and implementing political interests into legislature is separated between party actors functionally grounded at these two political levels. More precisely, national parties articulate political interests on European policy-making to their national electorate, and representatives in European Parliament are responsible for implementing political interests.
While the importance of party unity is supposed to be important for national party competition, its relevance is less clear for national parties within the European multilevel system. Obviously, the necessity of coherence between national party positions and voting behaviour in the European Parliament is reduced due to the lower level of public attention towards European legislature (Rautio 1999; Norris 2000; de Vreese 2001; Trenz 2004; van Noije 2010). However, today’s importance of European Union’s policy competences and the resulting attention by national parties’ policy experts (Auel 2006; Kropp 2010) give hints that coherence across two political levels may be more important than initially assumed.

So far, the relevance of party unity as consistency between national party positions and legislative behaviour in the European Parliament, and the strategies national parties choose to deal with this potential problem are not well known. Does the relevance of issue accountability diminish when public or media attention as an external pressure for achieving party unity is not given? Do party actors follow different strategies to deal with this subject? How do the two party functions of articulating and implementing political interests match when responsible party actors act on separated political levels?

The paper will provide a theoretical framework for analysing the relevance and characteristics of consistency between articulating political interests and implementing political interests in a two-level situation. The argumentation combines two fields of political science, namely – political representation theory and party organisation approaches. The paper is structured as follows: The first chapter illustrates the relevance of party unity for national party competition. The following chapter shortly describes the political conditions at the European level and their impact on party unity across two political levels. Before the paper turns to explanatory models of party unity as consistency between the two party functions, it will be explained why it can be supposed that national party actors announce policy positions on European issues. Then, different types of intra-party relationships are introduced and developed to explain why issue accountability may be important for political parties under the condition of party politics across two different levels. Based on that, one is able to deduce differences in parties’ level of consistency with these types. The following sections describe the range of the empirical research and the applied methods for measuring consistency. Finally, very primarily empirical data are outlined.

2. Relevance of party unity in national party competition

Party unity is an important aspect in many theoretical concepts of political parties and party competition in European democracies. Roughly, three important dimensions of party unity can be identified – unity in ideology, party unity in voting behaviour and party unity as consistency between policy positions and voting behaviour.

Firstly, party unity refers to the ideology or fundamental principles of political parties that brings together citizens of a society which pursue common political goals. Additionally, a cohesive ideological basis enables labelling of parties what is important for voters but also for party leadership. One the one hand, a clear and cohesive ideological basis enables voters to locate parties in the political space of political competition and to imply parties’ positions on specific political issues even though the voters have no complete information on them (Downs 1957). On the other hand, politicians in European parliamentary democracies are interested in party unity in form of a clear labelling as they get into public office in parliament and/or government by voters.
choice between several parties and not between individual representatives (Dalton/Wattenberg 2000: 6).

Not only short and long term changes in the society but also intraparty dynamics induce a continuous process of ensuring and (re-)formulating parties’ fundamental principles. Possible societal changes are for example alterations of demographic development, of gender role perceptions or of economic mechanisms. Beyond that external shocks like terrorist attacks or environmental catastrophes are conceivable causes for changes. Including intraparty dynamics as a reason for continuous (re-)formulating of parties’ fundamental principles does justice to the range of ideological trends under the umbrella of one party organisation.

Overall, the ideological dimension of party unity involves all party actors, i.e. party members and party elites in party central office and leading public offices. Party unity is a means to an end, but also an aim of political parties as such.

Secondly, party unity plays a central role when behaviour of members in parliament is analysed. The cohesion in parliamentary voting is often named and interpreted as party unity (Weßels 2007: 841). Nevertheless, one has to keep in mind that in this context party unity refers only to one party collective actor, namely the representatives in parliament. This dimension of party unity is often related to institutional setting of parliamentary and presidential democracy (Kailitz 2008; Fritzscbe 2009) and is defined as one of the central characteristics of parliamentary systems (Steffani 1979: 51). As Steffani and others argue, the parliamentary system fosters parliamentary group discipline, or in other words, party unity in parliament (Steffani 1979: 51; Kailitz 2008). Here, party unity is the means for serving functions of governmental and opposition parties.

The third dimension of party unity refers to consistency between parties’ policy positions and parties’ legislative or executive behaviour. In terms of a functional approach this dimension brings together the functions of parties to aggregate and formulate interests as well as to implement political objectives (Dalton/Wattenberg 2000: 5). Beyond that, party unity as consistency between parties’ policy positions and legislative/executive behaviour is part of representation and delegation theories. While in representation theory this consistency is discussed as issue responsiveness or policy issue representation (Weßels 2007), delegation theory primarily addresses consistency by emphasizing whether agents of parties act on behalf of the principal (Müller 2000; Thiem 2009). In that sense, delegation theory infers relevance of party unity from an intra-party perspective, while representation theory mainly addresses the external relevance of party unity. This dimension of party unity relies on several collective party actors as different collective party actors are responsible for formulating political objectives and for converting them into appropriate legislative or executive decisions.

Overall, party unity as consistency between policy positions and legislative or executive behaviour is seen as the means to ensure credibility of parties in the eyes of voters and as it is commonly known, credibility is one of the most important and sensitive assets in political competition.

To sum up, despite different theoretical perspectives, party unity is an important means to ensure different objectives of political parties within the national party competition. Relevance of party unity for national parties in European parliamentary democracies is widely assumed and never contested on normative grounds. Additionally, relevance of party unity is assumed to be quite similar for all parties within one political system.
3. Conditions of the European political system and their impact on national party unity

In addition to their political activities in national political system, national parties act at the European level. The institutional and political conditions at the European level, however, differ from those at the national level (Wessels/Diedrichs 1997; Wessels 2006, 2008).

The most important institutional difference is that one cannot speak of the European Union as a parliamentary democracy, because the European Council as the executive of the European Union (Kreppel 2011) is neither directly elected from European voters nor emerges from the European Parliament (as in parliamentary democracies). Therefore, the European Parliament is not characterised by the dualism between opposition and governmental parties and a strong impetus for party discipline is missing. In addition, the systemic function of the European Parliament differs from its national counterparts. Although named as parliament, the European Parliament has more similarities with a regional assembly (or congress) than with a parliamentary representation (Raunio 1997).

National parties are represented as national delegations mostly within transnational European parliamentary party groups, which are composed along ideological conflict-lines (Hix/Lord 1997; Hix 1999). Even though members of European parliamentary party groups share a common ideological basis they are ideologically more diverse than parliamentary party groups within national parliaments (Corbett et al. 2003, 2007).

Beside these institutional characteristics conditions of public and media attention have to be mentioned. A lively debate about the character of the European public sphere exists (Thiel 2008). Although it can be discussed what is meant by the term European public sphere and why it is so important, one can stress that public attention is at a lower level when it comes to the European Union compared to the Member States. National media exert little or no attention towards the European political level and the European decision making process (Raunio 1999; Norris 2000; de Vreese 2001; Trenz 2004; van Noije 2010). Therefore parties do not have to fear a loss of credibility, if their delegations in the European parliament do not implement policy demands of the national party in corresponding voting behaviour. Contrary to the national political competition, the main linkage mechanism in representation is missing.

If institutional and political conditions are important factors influencing the relevance of party unity and if these conditions vary largely between the national and European arena, the questions arise whether and how party unity and its three dimensions are affected when national parties act at both levels.

The first dimension of party unity, namely the ideological unity, is not affected in its relevance by the structures and conditions of multilevel governance. The EP elections are characterized by the fact that parties do not compete for the votes of a European electorate but of the same electorate as in national elections. The same voters decide in both elections on the parties’ programmatic offer. Many of them use ideology as an “informational shortcut” for their voting decision (Dalton/Wattenberg 2000: 6). So both members of the national parliament and members of the European parliament depend on a party with a clear programmatic offer, which is grounded in a discernible ideology. Therefore it is not likely that the multilevel system undermines the relevance of party unity in its first dimension.
Corresponding to the analysis at the national level, only the collective parliamentary party actor is responsible for achieving the second dimension of party unity, the cohesion of voting behaviour. In the light of cohesion voting behaviour of parliamentary groups has been manifold empirically analysed (Hix 2001, 2002; Faas 2003; Carrubba et al. 2004; Hix et al. 2005; Thiem 2006, 2009). Considering the above mentioned conditions at the European political level, this dimension of party unity is less important for parliamentary groups in the European Parliament. Especially the fact, that no parliamentary group discipline is needed for ensuring stability of a government, leads to a lower relevance of party unity compared to the national level and can be seen by comparing results of several studies on voting behaviour (Saalfeld 1995; Hix 2001; Hix et al. 2005; Kailitz 2008). While ideological cohesion within a parliamentary group may result in voting behaviour cohesion, the necessity to build majorities corresponding to the decision rules and not the stability of any government pushes voting alliances. Additionally, Bartolini emphasizes, as a result of low visibility of parliamentary politics, the existing low ideological intensity in the European Parliament enables compromises and alliances which were ideologically not possible at national parliaments (Bartolini 2005: 336).

Beyond cohesion of European parliamentary groups, party unity of the national collective actor in the European Parliament – the national delegation – is of importance. Again, induced by institutional conditions at the European level, party unity is of a lower relevance for national delegation European Parliament than for their national counterparts in national parliaments. Therefore, enhanced possibilities for individual member of European Parliament exist to pursue interests that differ from her/his national group. Empirical studies on the behaviour of national delegations indicate that they vote coordinated and cohesively (Hix 2002; Thiem 2009), but, if necessary, deviate from their corresponding European parliamentary group (Faas 2002, 2003).

To sum up, institutional conditions may reduce the relevance of party unity, but inferring from existing empirical results it can be said that, party unity is still important when national parties – represented by one party actor, the national delegation – act at the European level.

The third dimension of party unity, the consistency between policy issue positions and legislative behaviour, fundamentally differs from the first two dimensions. While the first two dimensions primarily concern party actors at one political level (either the national one (ideological unity) or the European level (voting behaviour of national delegation)), this dimension of party unity depends on party actors acting at both political levels. More precisely, national party actors serve the function of articulating/formulating policy interests within national party competition and the national delegation in the European Parliament serves the function of implementing policy objectives in legislative decisions.

Due to the (very) low public and media attention towards European policy-making processes the relevance of credibility is reduced. In that particular two-level situation, party unity does not serve the function to secure credibility as this sensitive resource in political competition sticks to the national arena. Again, this results in a missing main linkage mechanism in representation and delegation across two political levels. However, it is less clear whether the absence of an external pressure for issue accountability imply that internal party relevance of party unity reduces as well. Beyond that implication from the non-existing public attention we have little theoretical and empirical knowledge about the third dimension of party unity.
4. Consistency between party policy positions and legislative behaviour

Before thinking about the possible interplay of two party functions and its possible output as consistency, one simple, but fundamental condition needs to be stressed: National parties need to articulate their political demands vis-à-vis European policy-making; otherwise it cannot be judged whether their representatives in European Parliament implement policy objectives consistent with these demands. Therefore it will firstly be argued why national party actors put European issues on their agenda. Based on that, relevance of party unity and its possible diversity between national parties will be discussed.

Why European policy issues are on the agenda of national party actors

At first appearance, it may seem contradictory to expect that national parties put European policy issues on their agenda. In short, three arguments can be brought into the discussion for ignoring European policy-making by national party actors: Firstly, as already mentioned media and general public attention towards the European-decision making within the European Parliament are on a low level. It may be irrational using restricted party resources for those issues. Secondly, many of European legislative decisions deal with very technical matters and, thus, quite unspectacular for any political activity by national party actors. Thirdly, no (governmental) party but the European Commission as a non-party actor sets the agenda of policy-making. Contrary to the national level, national parties have no opportunity to proof their ability to act, rather they only formulate general principles for and demands on European policy areas. Overall national parties behave reactively to and dependently on activities by the European Commission. In other words: Any demands by national party actors on European policy-making are stimulated by activities of European institutions.

Contrary, the following arguments for the appearance of European policy issues on the agenda of national party politics can be made. At first, national parties operate in a political environment where several other national actors are affected by European-decision making. During the process of European integration these actors have reacted to the changes in competences with new organisational or institutional structures and also with adopted action strategies. Empirical research results on Europeanisation processes in the member states clearly show reactions to the shift of competences to the European level. For example, interest groups and business alliances shift at least parts of their attention and resources to the European level (Eising 2004, 2005; John/Schwarzer 2006). Institutional adaption processes of national parliaments (Dimitrakopoulos 2001; Auel/Benz 2005; Auel 2006; Raunio 2009) and of ministries at national or subnational levels (Lægreid et al. 2004; Olsen 2011) are observable.

If societal actors or interest groups are affected by the expected outcome of a European legislative process they send “fire alarms” to political decision-makers (McCubbins/Schwartz 1987). As national decision-makers have also influence on political processes at the European level, they are involved in these lobbying and signalling strategies. National parties for their part serve their function of aggregating interests, if they somehow react to these political demands. Parties are pushed to proof their professionalism and capability to deal with these issues.

1 This does not contradict theoretical and empirical work on party politics within the European Commission (Döring 2007; Wonka 2008).
The latter is directly related to the next argument. It highlights general citizens’
knowledge about the (growing) importance of European-decision making for national
politics. Even though voters may not be interested in and informed about specific
European legislature, they know about its general importance (Gabel/Anderson 2002).
Hence, proofing national parties’ competences by aggregating and articulating policy
interests may be of importance for general party goals.

The final argument refers to the relevance of those policy positions for intra-party
relationships. National parliamentary groups and subnational political (party) actors are
directly faced with European decisions as they have to implement them into national
legislature (Töller 2004; Töller 2008; Kropp 2010). One possible reaction to this external
pressure would be to formulate policy positions to signal support or concerns to their
government and/or their colleagues in the European Parliament before European
decisions have passed legislature.2

Relevance of intra-party relationship for the output of the two party functions

Although we have empirical evidence of party unity as cohesive voting behaviour within
national delegations (Hix 2001, 2002; Faas 2003; Carrubba et al. 2004; Hix et al. 2005;
Thiem 2006, 2009), we have little knowledge whether that policy implementation by
voting behaviour fits to party policy positions of national party actors and party unity as
consistency between the output of two party functions will emerge. Theoretical
explanation of voting behaviour can be inferred from theories on policy representation
and party organisation.

Weßels supposes “If institutionalized visions of democracy leave their imprint in role
orientations of representatives and representational roles gear behavior, then this should
be reflected in policy representation.” (Weßels 2007: 842). Although he deals with the
research on representation between voters and representatives and whether countries’
“institutional structures matter for issue congruence” (Weßels 2007: 843), the hypothesis
on the impact of institutional structures will be transferred to the level of party politics.

More precisely, I assume that intra-party relationships are important for parties’
congruence between articulated policy positions and implementing policy by legislative
behaviour. Therefore, we may observe different levels of party unity in an interparty
comparison.

Contemporary studies on representative role orientation include the party perspective,
but suppose a contrast between representation of party line and representation of
representatives’ constituents (Patzelt 1998, 1999; Weßels 2005).3 This contrast, however,
conflicts fundamental conditions of party democracy. As highlighted before, party
democracy implies that the second part of delegation chain – meaning the

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2 Beyond that, research on Europeanisation of national parties indicates different effects (Ladrech 2002).
For example, it is concluded that national parties give no or rare voting instructions to their MEP (Raunio
2000, 2005). Other authors highlight the implemented monitoring mechanisms of MEP for ensuring
voting behaviour in party line (Thiem 2009). Analysis of election manifestos indicates a rising interest in
European issues (Binder/Wüst 2004; Pennings 2006; Wüst 2009; Brunsbach et al. 2011). Regarding party
organisation incremental organisational changes can be observed, especially a shift in intra-party power
relationship towards European elites or experts (Poguntke 2007; Poguntke et al. 2007).

3 Representation models in the US-American theoretical tradition refer to representation between
representatives and their constituents (for example Miller/Stokes 1963).
implementation of voiced policy positions into legislative decisions – brings together different party actors and does not directly involve voters. Nevertheless, representation theory offers fundamental reflections on representation styles which are important for understanding variations in intra-party relationships.

Amongst other things the party delegation approach emphasises the intra-party-relationship and highlights that voters neither are the direct principal for national parliamentarians nor for national delegations in the European Parliament (Müller 2000; Strom/Müller 2009; Thiem 2009). Hence, the following argumentation brings together both traditions. It starts with reasons for the assumption of deviating intra-party relationship for national parties. Based on that, different types of intra-party relationship are defined, and their effects on party unity as consistency between policy positions and legislative behaviour are explained.

Diversity of intra-party relationship

Parties are collective actors with long institutional paths of organisational patterns. Party organisational theories offer many ways in focusing on organisational structure (Sartori 2005: 6) and, therefore, party theories differ widely (Katz 2005: 88). Prominent historical party models are cadre party which originated in European Parliaments (Katz 2008), the mass party (Duverger 1959), the catch-all party (Kirchheimer 1990) or the electoral-professional party (Panebianco 1988: 264-467). Further party organisation literature on the one hand emphasises the exodus of old party types like mass parties and organisational change into new models of party organisation like cartel parties (Katz/Mair 1993; Katz 2005, 2008). On the other hand, however, authors highlight that organisation patterns like in German parties still exist along with classical differentiation in mass parties, cadre parties or member parties (Grabow 2001; Poguntke 2001).

In line with the last authors I assume the presence of traditional patterns of mass parties and cadre parties regarding their particular intra-party relationship between extra-parliamentary and parliamentary actors. Amongst other things these specific origins of intra-party relationship are still present when role conceptions of representatives are compared between parties (Weßels 2005). We still observe this classical pattern in role perceptions nowadays, although the institutional setting of parliamentary democracy strongly induces an inherent pressure for a cohesive parliamentary group and has shaped the behaviour of German representatives since 1949. Beyond that, system-specific constraints do not completely obscure different candidate selection influenced by organisational development (Scarrow et al. 2000: 140). In other words: traditional settings of party organization and intra-party relationship are of importance despite contradictory conditions of a parliamentary system.4

Even though these patterns of intra-party relationship concern national parliamentary and extra-parliamentary party actors, they can be transferred to the relationship between national party actors and their representatives in the European Parliament. Empirical results clearly indicate that European integration has not induced fundamental rather incremental changes of existing patterns of national party organization (Ladrech 2007; Poguntke 2007), i.e. in the terminology of Europeisation external changes have been

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4 Additionally, other indicators for the intra-party relationship between parliamentarian representatives and extra-parliamentary actors exist, for example the existence of a formal hearing right of national parliamentary group to value tabled motions by party activists for a coming party congress.
National party policy positions and voting behaviour in European Parliament

absorbed (Axt et al. 2007: 140). Therefore, we can plausibly assume that national parties apply their respective intra-party relationship to European representatives as well.

Different types of intra-party relationship and consistency between party’s functions

The fundamental distinction between intra-party relationships lies in the representation approach that parties have implemented for their parliamentary representatives. There are two representation approaches, either party representatives as party delegates or as party trustees. Originally, the classical dichotomy in delegate and trustee is broadly used in representation theory, but often criticized for their inherent inconsistency with the concept of representation (Pitkin 1967; Mansbridge 2003). Beyond that, these two extremes of the continuum of the “style” dimension of representation [are] regarded as relatively useless in representation research … [as] … the old Burkean controversy does not seem to exist any longer” (Weßels 2007: 840) – particularly not under the conditions of party democracy. Despite that criticism and empirical problems this approach is still present in empirical research and theoretical models (Miller/Stokes 1963; Müller/Saalfeld 1997; Patzelt 1997; Andeweg 2003; Andeweg/Thomassen 2005).

Being aware of this controversy, I use the continuum of representation styles due to its principle theoretical reflections on the relationship between representatives and their represented, well aware that one extreme (a trustee) contradicts the model of party democracy. Whereas the classical approach only deals with the behaviour of representatives when representation styles are defined (and not with their represented), the following approach includes the perspective of represented, namely the national parties. More precisely, the mode of representation depends on behaviour of representatives but also of their principals and results in a specific intra-party relationship.

Independently from the representation style, intra-party relationships are always designed as principal-agent relations where national parties are defined as principals of their representatives. This results from universal candidate selection power of national parties in European democracies. In other words, representatives need political parties to get into office (Strom/Müller 2009: 29).

The first end of the continuum – party representatives as “party delegates” – refers to the delegation model where “party representatives in public office ultimately remain the agents of the extra-parliamentary party organization” (Müller 2000: 318) and, thus, parliamentary groups are conceptualized as party delegates. When parties have implemented that type of intra-party relationship, national party actors expect that their parliamentary representatives act in line with defined national party interests. Therefore, party actors formulate clear parties directions (Müller 2000: 319). As mentioned above, possible designs of instructions are party manifestos and electoral programs but also concrete policy issue positions. Here, the latter are highly important as communication

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5 Note that authors in representation theory disagree about the distinction of representative styles. The distinction is either defined as dichotomy (Mansbridge 2003, 2009; Pitkin 1967) or as continuum (Weßels 2007).

6 Nevertheless, in empirical research on role perception of parliamentary representatives the controversy is still alive since questions about candidate independency (related to trustee-model) and dependency on party discipline (related to delegate-model) are highly relevant in most surveys on representatives’ perceptions and behaviour (For an overview see: Thomassen 1991, 1994; Weßels 2007).
channel between party actors and their corresponding representatives. These policy issue positions define the mandate for delegates and, hence, can be interpreted as voting instructions. As a result, this internal signalling function of policy issue positions may be of higher relevance than sending external signals to voters or special interests.

Corresponding to party perspective, the primarily intrinsic motivation of parliamentarian representatives as party delegates is the implementation of formulated national party interests. Hence, representatives strongly rely on continuous input by national parties as policy issue positions and, therefore, watch national party actors.

Based on that, delegates in European Parliament develop a common strategy and common positions as national delegation and pursue to vote collectively with one voice. Conflicts with European parliamentary groups will occur when national party positions oppose the achieved compromise within the European parliamentary group. If representatives act like delegates, however, they primarily follow the position of their national party and, consequently, will vote cohesively against their parliamentary group, if necessary (Thiem 2009). In line with the principal-agent approach any deviation from national party’s policy-issue positions is interpreted as (unwished) agent loss in policy slippage (Lupia 2003: 62; Strom 2003).

As a result, achieving a high level of party unity – as consistency between policy positions and voting behaviour – is an inherent characteristic of the representation style “party delegates”. It seems that party unity is an important goal pursued by national parties and party representatives in parliament, independently from the existence of external pressure like public and media attention.

The second end of the continuum – party representatives as “party trustees” – highlights the role of representatives as experts on all ongoing policy-making issues. Extra-parliamentary party actors accept that their parliamentary actors are experts on policy issue positions as they have enough time and capacity to deal with them (Katz/Mair 1993; Katz 2005) Additionally, extra-parliamentary actors trust in that expertise on policy issues and strategic options within the European Parliament. Trust comes from the common shared ideology and policy goals but also from candidate selection.8

Therefore, members of parliament have large room for manoeuvre to implement collective party positions into legislative behaviour. Staying in the terminology of the delegation approach, the room of manoeuvre accompanies with agent loss. However, not in the negative version as it is usually implied in the principal-agent framework, but as a wished or accepted agent loss. In other words: agents can become policy principals – for example in developing and implementing political objectives – but they are still agents of the parties.

7 This perspective does not deny that parliamentary representatives may actively prepare and shape policy issue positions of their party (Nickig 1999). Probably, these representatives may often pursue a legitimizing strategy of policy issue positions through extra-parliamentary party. Nevertheless, one has to keep in mind that the theoretical framework intends to deliver an explanation of issue accountability or party unity as consistency between positions and voting behaviour. Hence, it focuses on a comparison of outputs of party functions (formulating policy interests and implementing policy objectives into legislature). Therefore, the process of policy formulating is not of interest for my model and is taken as exogenously given.

8 In her normative perspective on political representation Mansbridge (2009) correctly highlights that sanction mechanisms have not to be included in principal agent models if parties are sensitive on candidate selection. Rather, trust is an important part of the relationship between representatives and represented.
While this kind of intra-party relationship strongly implies the formulation of general policy objectives, it seems less clear why national party actors may announce positions on specific (European) policy issues. Contrary to the first approach, policy issue positions have primarily an external signalling function, i.e. underline party’s positions to special interest groups and voters. Additionally, national actors may externally emphasise party unity and, therefore, address policy issues where strong ideological unity exists and inconsistency is not expected. Overall, policy issue positions do not imply that national party actors distrust their representatives in European Parliament. Party trustees for their part may recognize party policy positions, but they feel not obliged to follow them. Consequently, party unity is of less importance for parties which apply this representation approach than for parties following the delegation approach.

So far, I defined the two extreme points of a continuum of intra-party relationship which are induced from applied representation styles in national parties’ tradition. Beyond that, variations are possible on the continuum between these extreme points. Again, it is assumed that these styles are also valid for the relationship between national party actors and their corresponding representatives in European Parliament. Therefore, representation styles are exogenously given and national parties can be assigned to those types.

Party representatives at the European Parliament face a national party consisting of extra-parliamentary actors and national parliamentary actors. This peculiarity of the delegation chain across two political levels leads to an interesting perspective in delegation terms, namely whether national parliamentary party actors will become part of the intra-party delegation chain, or not. In other words: How do European parliamentary party actors treat their national counterparts? Are they excluded from or included in the perception of the national party as a principal for European party representatives? Hence, variations within the two types are induced by the treatment of national parliamentary groups which can be either excluded from or included in the perception of the national party as a principal for European party representatives. Contrary to the representation style, however, no ex-ante assumptions about the chosen strategy regarding the relationship between the two parliamentary party actors can be theoretically inferred and variations can only be tested empirically.

The exclusion of the national parliamentary group results from the legitimized delegation chain within parties. National parties, institutionalized in party congresses, select their candidates for the national and European level. Correspondingly, representatives at both levels are agents of the national party, meaning that they are accountable to their national party, but not to the other agent. In this perspective, national party representatives in the European Parliament directly refer to extra-parliamentary actors like party congress and party leadership.

The inclusion of the national parliamentary group in the principal-perception is basically induced from the important role of that agent, who can become, correspondingly to the European agent, a policy principal at the national level. In other words: There are two parliamentary party actors who have the function of policy experts or policy principals. Although this agent (or policy principal) is an expert for national concerns, his work is...
affected by the legislative output of European policy-making as it defines constraints of national-policy making in many areas.

Therefore, policy positions on European issues by these experts signal whether implications of European legislature fit into the national frame and, thus, these policy positions can be regarded as a gauge of acceptability. As a result, each party relies on two policy experts (policy principals) at two different political levels. The puzzle is whether these experts work together and a relatively higher level of consistency between both expert groups can be observed, or whether there exists high competition between the two expert groups shown by a relatively low level of consistency.

To sum up, the relevance of party unity varies due to the chosen representation style by national parties (results are summarized in figure 1). Consequently, we may observe a higher level of consistency between policy positions and voting behaviour for national parties that apply the representation style “party representatives as party delegates” than for parties that apply “party representatives as party trustees”. Whose policy positions are treated as important, is defined by the range of responsiveness in intra-party relationship.

**Figure 1: Relevance of party unity as consistency between policy positioning and legislative voting behaviour**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Representation style: party representatives at the European level as…</th>
<th>Party delegates</th>
<th>Party trustees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Party congresses</td>
<td>High relevance of party unity</td>
<td>Low relevance of party unity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal party leadership</td>
<td>High relevance of party unity</td>
<td>Low relevance of party unity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Variation I: exclusion of national parliamentary group in the delegation chain from the perspective of national delegation in EP*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party congresses</th>
<th>Low relevance of party unity</th>
<th>Low relevance of party unity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

*Variation II: inclusion of national parliamentary group in the delegation chain from the perspective of national delegation in EP*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party congresses</th>
<th>High relevance of party unity</th>
<th>Relationship between the two parliamentary party actors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(No competition between the two parliamentary party actors)</td>
<td>Cooperation: Middle relevance of party unity</td>
<td>Competition: Low relevance of party unity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Party unity as consistency between policy positions and legislative voting behaviour is expected to be of high relevance for parties which apply the “party delegates” representation style. High consistency levels are important for positions by party congress and party leadership. The same should be the case when the national parliamentary group is included in the principal-concept of the national party. Note that the “party delegates” type does not correspond with competition between both expert groups in national and European Parliament because the national parliamentary actor is
subsumed to national party’s policy will. Overall, the range of responsiveness in intra-party relationship will be the highest compared to other possible variations.

As already mentioned above, party unity is less relevant for the “party trustees” approach. Again, this does not imply that no consistency will be observable and representatives always differ with their voting behaviour from the policy position of their national party. But the lower relevance of party unity will be reflected in relatively more deviations between outputs of the two party functions. Relevance of party unity will increase when the national parliamentary group is included in the conception of party as a principal and treated as a partner rather than competitor.

5. Remarks on the research design for exploring relevance of party unity

German parties and their national delegations in the European Parliament are selected for the empirical research on the interplay of the output of two party functions.

As the existence of a national delegation in the European Parliament is an essential condition for analysing the interplay of party functions between the national and European level, German parties with national delegation in the 5th and 6th European Parliament (June 1999 to June 2009) are included in the empirical research, namely, the Greens (Bündnis90/Die Grünen), the Lefts (Die Linke/former: PDS), the Social democrats (SPD), the Liberals (FDP)10, the Christian Democrats (CDU) and the Christian Social Union (CSU). The last two parties are taken into account separately, but also as an alliance in cases of common positions.

This case selection is influenced by several considerations: These parties are characterized by different organisational and cultural traditions and that allows to discover possible differences in party unity due to characteristics of intra-party relationships. Moreover, the combination of largely explorative study with intensive field research in party archives and of restricted resources in manpower and finances results in the analysis of parties of only one European country.

In general, the empirical research on the third dimension of party unity bases on national party policy positions on European-policy making and voting behaviour of corresponding national delegation in the European Parliament (for further details see next chapter).

Only positions on European policy-making procedures are taken into account and are distinguishes between the three collective national party actors. The focus on those policy issue positions demands a systematic search through released parties’ policy positions. So far, no knowledge exists of the considered European policy issues by national party actors in their process of formulating policy interests. Therefore, the search for those policy positions bases on reading the whole sample of defined policy positions.

While the units of observation are the German parties, units of analysis are single European policy-making issues with attached policy positions and voting behaviour. At the best, 30 cases of European policy issues per political party will be analysed at the

10 Note, the FDP had no national delegation in the 5th European Parliament as the party failed to reach 5% in European Election 1999. Nevertheless, party is part of empirical research due to its role in national party competition and the possible test of national party actors’ policy positioning behaviour during the absence of representation
end of the research. So far, no final decision about issues included in that sample was made, but policy issues will be part of different European policy areas.

6. Methodological approach for measuring consistency

Measuring party unity requires different methods of data collection and analysis. At first, I discuss how the output of aggregating and articulating of political interests can be measured. As political parties are no unitary actors, two main questions will be answered, namely, who is the party and which data resources can be considered as reliable parties’ policy issue positions. Following I shortly describe the measurement of legislative behaviour in the European Parliament which basically relies on roll-call votes. As party unity is defined as correspondence between output of two party functions, I finally introduce decision rules for data analysis on the (non-)existence of consistency.

Who speaks on behalf of national parties

Literature on party organization provides several approaches how parties can analytically be separated. Most common are, firstly, the dichotomy in parliamentary and extra-parliamentary actors, and secondly the three party organisational arena approach by Katz and Mair (1993). The latter proposes a separation in the party on the ground, party central office and party in public office as party actors in parliament and in government (Katz/Mair 1993; Katz 2005). While the dichotomy in parliamentary and extra-parliamentary actors implies a restricted and simplistic view on party organisation, the organisational arena approach widely opens up to many political actors.

My research questions relies on party actors who announce legitimised the party policy positions and, therefore, the following three collective party actors are chosen: the organisational representation of the party on the ground, the elected representation of the party executive and the elected representatives of the party in parliament. By working with these three collective party actors the paper primarily relies on the three organisational arena approach, but ignores included actors like party supporters or non-elected members in party central office (Katz/Mair 1993: 594).

Furthermore, the research project bases on the common assumption that political texts are important resources for estimating policy preferences and party policy positions (Benoit et al. 2009: 495). Due to the fact, however, that mostly election manifestos are used for that estimation, a more detailed discussion of political texts’ quality is useful, because different types of political texts exists, which can vary in their intention and message. Election manifestos, for instance, contain general policy positions which have the function to signal (to the voters) parties’ ideology and their positions on societal problems. Hence, this document type can easily be for estimating positions of parties within one-dimensional, two-dimensional or more dimensional political space. However, when asking whether voting behaviour in the European Parliament reflects (national) party's opinion on European policy issues, election manifestos may not

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11 Consistency can only be measured when both national policy position and applicable voting behaviour exist. Hence, cases will be selected when coding of policy issue positions will be finished and data on voting methods at the European Parliament will be collected for each picked European issue.

12 For example: election manifestos, platforms, political speeches, motions, resolutions or press releases.
provide the best data as positions on particular (European) policy-making are beyond
the main purpose of these documents (Klingemann/Volkens 2001).13

By considering both relevant party actors and the diverse intention of party documents
the following party documents are as reliable policy issue positions of the national party:

1) Resolutions announced by party congresses or small party congresses, as they
are interpreted as the representative institution of the party on the ground,
(Katz/Mair 1993: 598).

2) Resolutions by party leadership at the national level, i.e. resolutions by the
federal party executive and the party executive committee.

3) Positions of the party in parliament including resolutions of the parliamentary
group and statements by individual parliamentary representatives. The usage of
individual press statements can be justified as press releases are one of the main
public relations' instruments for example to illuminate political activity within
the parliament (e.g. move motions) and to show awareness for specific issues.
However, press releases of individual deputies are only a reliable resource if the
working principle in the national parliament bases on a division of labour like in
the German Bundestag and where classical backbenchers are not common like
in the British Parliament (Schüttemeyer 1992; Ismayr 2001; Schüttemeyer 2007;
Ismayr 2008). Division of labour means that individual deputies are specialized
according to their particular committee and they influence parliamentary group’
positions in their working field. Press releases by individual deputies then
represent an important indication of policy position by parliamentary groups. As
the theoretical framework is mainly oriented on the empirical analysis of
German parties, individual press statements are a reliable source.

Note, this broad definition of reliable policy documents also includes party manifestos
which are mostly identified as the best resource for measuring policy positions

Against the background of the research interest only those party documents are defined
population which contain a political statement towards issues of European policy-
making. Nevertheless different types of political texts are used, they are treated equally
for measuring policy issue positions of national party actors.

**Content analysis of party documents: Measuring policy positions**

The main objective of the party documents’ analysis is the identification of policy issue
position of the respective political actor. For this purpose a manual content analysis is
used. This labour-intensive method is applied for several reasons: Firstly, many
diverging European policy-making processes are subject of party documents. As it is
impossible to know the addressed issues in advanced – there is no knowledge about the
chosen European issues by national parties; manual coding procedure allows collecting
them. Secondly, documents differ in view of intention and that influences wording
and/or text style. In other words, context is even more important than in textual

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13 That does not exclude the possibility that parties use electoral manifestos to announce particular
positions on European legislature, but it will be less likely and rarely.
analysis based on similar party documents and, thus, makes the use of computer
programs for textual analysis nearly unfeasible.

As to my knowledge no coding handbook fitting to the research interest already exists,
an own coding handbook was developed. In short, content analysis aims to extract
information summarized in the table below.

Table 1: Coding categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who?</th>
<th>1. Party actor: Who has announced/passed the policy position?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e.g.: Party label, party actor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When?</td>
<td>2. Time: Time point of announced/passed policy position?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e.g.: date, legislative period of EP and BT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What?</td>
<td>4. Political issue: Which issue of European of policy-making is addressed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e.g.: name of directive/regulation, referred European institution(s),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>modus (proposal, decision)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Policy issue position: Does the party actor support or reject the policy issue or is s/he ambivalent?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the first step, all party documents including references to European policy-making
represent the units of observation. The units of analysis are text parts containing
information related to the defined coding categories (Rustemeyer 1992; Mayring 2008).14
According to the research interest each mentioned European policy issue signals a case,
which induces one political text can contain more than one case.

The research objective ascertaining policy issue positions is hampered by the complexity
of the process of European policy-making with its several involved political actors and
(partly long) lengths of time. In other words, national party actors can react at several
stages of European policy-making process to different actions or positions by several
European actors. Manual coding of policy issue positions has to take that into account;
otherwise a systemic bias of data would be a result.

More precisely, policy issue positions by national party actors can refer to another status
of the legislative text than the one the Members of Parliament vote on. In general, the
following reference documents or referred actions are possible:

- Initiative proposal by the European Commission,
- Revised proposal by the European Commission,
- Recommendation/vote by the responsible committee(s) in the European
  Parliament,
- Resolution of the European Parliament in the 1st or 2nd reading,
- Voting behaviour of the European Parliament in the 1st or 2nd reading and
- Decisions of the Council.

14 Otherwise the residual category will be systemically enlarged.
Hence, resolution or announcement of national party actors that directly refers to documents of the European Parliament just before the first or second reading would increase the chance that position and the voting behaviour refer to the same state of the legislative act and measurement errors could reduce which could be linked to varying reference documents.

This strict criterion, however, would exclude many of the national party positions and reduce the database. To keep the applicable party positions as large as possible, I include the reference documents as well. A comparison, for example, between the initiative by the European Commission, the draft by responsible parliamentary committees and the resolution by the European Parliament detect major changes and allow a judgement whether the intention of the legislature has been changed over time. Based on these information policy issue positions by national party actors can be ranged and coded.

Measuring Voting Behaviour of national party delegations in the European Parliament

Three types of voting are applied in the European Parliament: (1) show of hands, (2) electronic votes, where the results of plenary votes are displayed but not individual votes and (3) roll-call votes, where each votes of individual member of European Parliament (MEP) is recorded in the minutes. Voting behaviour of national delegations is only straightforward traceable by the last voting type. Hence, rules for the aggregation of individual voting are required. This includes, firstly, which voting options are considered and, secondly, how many votes of individual members of national delegation are necessary for determining the direction of national delegation’s vote (against, for, no collective opinion).

At first, MEP’s have three voting options: Yes, No and Abstain. Additionally, absence without permission can be a strategic voting option, for example individual MEP do not want to highlight their dissent with the national delegation or the party group. While Yes or No votes are used for calculating cohesion within party groups, the consideration of Abstain votes or even of absences is differently discussed and applied in studies on voting behaviour. Like others I argue for the inclusion of Abstain votes because they indicate individual deviation from the line of the national delegation (Saalfeld 1995; Hix 2001, 2002). Beyond that, I suggest the inclusion of absence without permission on the basis of individual decision: Individual MEP can be absent due to other commitments (Saalfeld 1995: 74) and in these cases no inference on a strategic “voting” choice can be drawn. However, when individual MEP are present during the voting time, but decide not to vote on single amendments or on final documents (i. e. be absent), a strategic choice of signal dissent can be inferred.

Additionally, when measuring collective actor behaviour (national delegation) based on individual data, a rule for evaluating the voting output of the collective actor behaviour is needed. Here, roll-call cohesion scores seem to be an adequate instrument. In general, roll-call cohesion scores are widely used to measure voting unity in diverse legislative

15 I work with the summaries of the content of reference documents published by the Legislative Observatory of the European Parliament (http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/)

16 This is traceable by comparing attendance register with individual voting behaviour on amendments and the final vote.

17 e.g.: Rice cohesion score, index of absolute cohesion, index of relative cohesion or index of agreement.
bodies. When this measurement will be combined with the content of votes, we know how strong the voting unity is in favour or against the analyzed policy issues. Therefore, cohesion scores of German national delegations are calculated for each analyzed issue. The applied Agreement index considers Yes, No and Abstain votes (see Hix et al. 2005: 215) and absences without permission when condition of erratic voting participation is fulfilled.18

The final evaluation of these scores implies a threshold that splits national delegation votes into two groups: (1) the party unity is so strong that the direction of the vote can be inferred and (2) low party unity hinders to infer the direction of the vote. The threshold is an Agreement index of 87, which is the average cohesion of the European Parliament based on weighted agreement indexes per party group from the First to the Fifth European Parliament.19 Thus, this threshold reflects specific institutional conditions of voting in European Parliament what is identified as an important factor of explaining the extent of party cohesion.

Measuring consistency – Coding rules

The outcome of the interplay of the two policy functions – articulating policy interests and implementing policy objectives – is constructed as a dichotomous variable. When policy issue positions of national parties on a single European policy issue are reflected in voting behaviour of their national delegations in the European Parliament I speak of consistency of partisan behaviour across two political levels. Conversely, every contradiction implies inconsistency.

Due to that definition, statements in policy issue positions by national party actors will be compared with the ascertained collective voting behaviour of national delegation in European Parliament. Calling the used variety of party documents in mind, some detailed thoughts on the comparison are necessary. In the first step, the different political texts are treated equally for measuring policy issue positions of national party actors. Especially in cases where inconsistencies are detected the theoretical considerations (summarized in figure 1) become important. More precisely, the discussed delegation chain implies a hierarchy of legitimized national party policy positions.

Preliminary empirical results

As the work package of coding is not finished yet, just few figures will be mentioned. So far, 864 policy issue positions by German parties are identified for the period of the 5th and 6th European Parliament. They address 244 single processes of European policy making. According to functions and resources of party actors the result, that most policy issue positions are announced by the Party groups in the German Bundestag, is not surprisingly. But other party actors also pass resolutions on European policy making (John 2010).

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18 For the sake of the comparison with the Agreement index (AI) of the European Parliament (see below), in cases of assumed strategic use of absences two AI are calculated.

19 This type of Agreement index (AI) considers Yes, No and Abstain votes (for explanations of the AI see Hix et al. 2005: 215-216). Calculation includes in total 11,727 roll-call votes (RCV) between 1979 and 2001. I weighted the calculated Agreement indexes for each party group by Hix et al. per legislative term (Hix et al. 2005: 218). The overall value is the mean of all electoral periods.
Beyond that, the analysis of issue saliencies for each German party indicates interesting patterns of policy-positioning behaviour. Even though the European institutions are the agenda setter for the policy issues analysed, national parties do decide individually which issues are in their agenda of formulating policy positions and, thus, variations in issue saliencies between German parties are observable.

Due to the second work packing – coding (in)consistency between policy issue position and voting behaviour – five randomly selected European policy issues were completely coded.\(^{20}\) This first coding aimed to test whether the method/coding roles for measuring consistency is manageable. Coding shows that both consistency and inconsistency exist, but any summary of the results would be completely misleading at this stage of empirical analysis.

**Outlook**

Policy representation is highly relevant for representative democracies. In party democracy, issue accountability, or more precisely the consistency between two functions – formulating policy interests and implementing policy objectives – relies on responsiveness of party actors in parliament to other party actors. This is also relevant for responsiveness in the European two-level situation, where a missing European public sphere and low media attention do not ensure constant external pressure for credibility. Overall, it is argued that this dimension of party unity depends on intra-party relationship and exists even under circumstances where credibility towards voters is of less importance.

Furthermore, it is assumed that the quality of intra-party relationships differs according to the style of representation. Different styles of representation – on the continuum between party delegates and party trustees – do not only depend on behaviour of representatives but also on attributed functions by other party actors. In other words: Representatives can only show behaviour as delegates or trustees if national party actors accept the chosen strategy. Hence, representation styles constitute mutual agreement between party actors and correspondingly describe intra-party relationships. Related to the representation style the relevance of party unity varies and will empirically result in a different level of consistency between policy positions and legislative behaviour. Overall, differences between and within national parties are supposed because parties have implemented different types of intra-party relationships.

Whether empirics fit into the assumed patterns of party unity will be proven when progress in empirical analysis of policy issue positions by national party actors and voting behaviour of their corresponding delegation in European Parliament has been achieved.

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\(^{20}\) In details: 1) Directive on implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation; 2) Rules on the Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and restriction of Chemicals (REACH); 3) Services Directive; 4) Reform the common organisation of the wine market; 5) Directive on the protection by patents of computer-implemented inventions
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National party policy positions and voting behaviour in European Parliament


