THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND

THE MAKING OF A SUPRANATIONAL ELITE

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Abstract

- Paper should be directly reflecting the topic of the workshop and be close to the text in 
  the brochure
- Paper needs to provide a certain direction of analysis for the workshop and, even more 
  so, for the publication to result from it
- Paper should clearly relate to the four panels of the workshop and be general enough to 
  serve as an integrative tool for the workshop contributions
The ever increasing penetration of national policy arenas by EU politics led to a so-called ‘Europeanisation’ of the parliamentary democracies (Auel and Benz 2005) and spurred research on the parliamentary dimension of a multi-level Europe (Maurer 2002). In this respect, scholarly interest has been refocused on the European Parliament as a key player in European politics. While some of the original hopes vested in the Strasbourg/Brussels assembly (e.g. the view that it could properly address the much debated “democratic deficit”) might not have become reality, there are still good reasons to view the EP as an important institution and as an arena for relevant European political actors.

The European Parliament, overall, has become a prime locus of European power. Hence it is yielding growing academic interest. Broad on field research programmes focussing on European parliamentary representation (Katz & Wessels 1999, Schmitt & Thomassen 1999), on patterns of voting behaviour within the EP arena (Hix, 2002; 2004), on the dynamics of the European parliamentary party groups and their inner cohesion (Kreppel 2002; Faas 2003; Raunio 2000) and on the notion of pro-European socialisation of MEPs (Franklin & Scarrow 1999; Scully 2005) shed lights on the evolution of specific aspects of the European representatives.

Notwithstanding the inflation of studies, one notes that empirical studies of the elite group remain underdeveloped. So to speak, the increase of influence of the European Parliament did not lead to an increase of studies of its social composition. It is within this perspective that we present the current paper. Several issues will be addressed. Obviously, one first has to take into account the institutional changes of the European Parliament since its creation, and their effect on the attractiveness of the European mandate. It is very likely that since the European Parliament plays a more important role in the European decision-making process, the social and professional profiles of MEPs have changed over time.

Secondly, we would like to make an assessment of the effects of the increased career opportunities in the EP since the introduction of the direct elections in 1979. More in particular, we are interested whether this direct election has contributed to the making of a supra-national European elite. And what are the necessary conditions to succeed in creating a European elite? In what way is a common conception of the task of MEP likely, necessary or even merely possible in creating a supra-national elite? This became particularly relevant after the Eastern enlargement of 2004, when ‘the European people’ that had to be represented grew with over 80 million inhabitants. Do MEPs of the old EU-15 have the same conception of the mandate and aspirations for office as their counterparts of the newly accessed countries?
The importance of such undertaking is further stressed from the perspective of a diachronic analysis aiming at exploring the degree of convergence among the components of the domestic elites in Europe (Cotta and Best, 2007, forthcoming). One could wonder whether the recruitment into the European Parliament likewise generates trends of convergence, or whether there remain differences between the original EC-6, or EU-15 member states, and other states which joined the EU in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s? It will be an interesting thing to link the idea of elite convergence to the various degrees of institutionalization reached by the European Parliament, on a critical moment in the historic and institutional evolution of the European Union.

1. **The European Parliament as a legislative body *sui generis***

When assessing the impact of the European Parliament in creating a supra-national political elite, it is obvious that we need to look first to what extent the European Parliament can meet the expectations of the roles that are defined for ‘ordinary’ national parliaments.

*The five functions of Parliaments*

All scholars of comparative politics agree that modern parliaments have five vital roles to play in a political system: representation, legislation, scrutiny, political recruitment and legitimacy (Heywood, 2002). First of all, parliaments represent the people. Although it is a vital role for all parliaments it is a complex principle. In essence, it means that members of parliament are expected to listen to the people, bring forward the ideas, desires and grievances that live among the population and discuss these things over in plenary sessions or in the parliamentary committees. In its most ideal form, there is a clear chain of delegation involved from the population to the delegates in parliament. After such a (public) debate, parliament is expected to take a decision whether the issue needs some follow-up, needs specific legislation, or can be classified and considered as being dealt with.

The second function of parliament is the legislative function. It is the proper lawmaking function, mostly exercised in combination with the executive branch. “Assemblies are typically vested with legislative power in the hope that laws thus made will be seen to be authoritative and binding. (…) Assemblies are constituted so as to suggest that the people (…) make the laws themselves” (Heywood, 2002: 316). But it is clear that the legislative powers of parliaments are mostly idealised. In some systems, members of parliament can not freely take legislative
actions on all domains. This can be linked to either constitutional provisions, to the strictness of governmental agreements (especially in large coalitions) or through tough internal rules and regulations.

Thirdly, each parliament has the right and duty to control the executive branch. This is the so-called scrutiny function, which has gained considerably in importance over the recent years. Nowadays, members of parliament dispose of a wide range of instruments to fulfil this control function. Ministers can be subjected to regular oral or written questioning, or can be faced with an ‘interpellation’ in a more limited number of countries. Moreover, parliaments can veto the budget, or start up research committees to do enquiries in the malfunctioning of individuals or public services.

However, unlike the powerful instruments that parliaments have at their disposal, we witness a growing number of democracies in which parliament is dominated by the executive. In most modern democracies, the control of parliament is nowadays very restricted. In consensus democracies, such as the Netherlands, Belgium and Italy, we see that parliamentary parties are bound by a rigorous coalition agreements (Laver & Shepsle, 1996). As a result, parliamentary control over the executive is limited to the control of the opposition parties over individual ministers, rather than the control over the government as a whole (Poguntke and Webb, 2005). As a result, the power and influence of parliament as a whole and of individual members of parliament in particular may not be overestimated.

Recruitment and training is the fourth function which is traditionally being attributed to parliaments. Assemblies often serve as channels of recruitment, providing a pool of talent from which leading decision-makers emerge. This is obviously a very crucial function in the creation of national elites. In most Western democracies the typical path to a governmental position runs through the parliament with the number of former MPs outnumbering by far the number of extra-parliamentary ministers.

Finally, as being the only state institutions which are directly elected by the population, parliaments also legitimize the political system. “The ability of assemblies to mobilize consent depends largely on their ability to function as popular conventions, endorsing laws and policies in the name of the public as well as in their interest. (...) Parliamentary debates can help to inform and instruct citizens about the affairs of government and the major issues of the day”. (Heywood, 2002: 319).
**The case of the European Parliament**

In trying to transpose the basic ideas of a genuinely operating parliament to the European Parliament, one comes across various problems. Indeed, ever since its start as the Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community, the European Parliament has been regarded as a somewhat ineffectual institution. Although its role was to provide democratic input into ECSC-decision-making, the Assembly did not dispose of all the functions of a regular parliament. Members were not elected but were chosen by national parliaments, and the Assembly’s powers were essentially advisory (Nugent, 2006: 39). In fact, in these early days and all along the 1960s and 1970s, the European Parliament suffered from a deficiency on each of the five aforementioned parliamentary functions. It was unable to represent the European ‘polis’ because only few people knew who represented his or her country in the Assembly. Nor did the Assembly and the European Parliament (as it was called since 1962) have the right to initiate legislation or dispose of effective means to control the governing bodies of the ‘European-Union-under-construction’.

Obviously, a lot has changed ever since (Corbett, Jacobs & Shackleton, 2005). Firstly, the European Parliament has gained considerable decision-making power over the years following the Maastricht (1991), Amsterdam (1997) and Nice Treaties (2001). The introduction (in Maastricht) and consequent extension (in Amsterdam) of the co-decision rule created an enormous boost to the influence of the European Parliament, and hence its attractiveness as locus of power.\(^1\) Secondly, since June 1979 the Parliament has directly been elected by the inhabitants of the EC/EU member states through five-yearly elections. As a result the European Parliament is the only institution which is directly legitimized by the European ‘demos’. This constitutes an important step in underlining the representative function of the European Parliament, and in the establishment of a ‘supranational elite’. Especially when considering that the first directly elected European Parliament consisted of a considerable number of notable politicians (former party leader, former prime ministers etc.). Thirdly, the European Parliament has gained in influence since it is the place in which Europeanisation of domestic political actors becomes apparent, most notably through the formation of transnational parliamentary parties.

In spite of all these efforts to ‘parliamentarize’ the institutional setting of the European Union, it is still hardly possible to qualify the European Parliament as a genuine parliament in the sense that we mostly consider parliamentary assemblies. Various elements argue in favour of a parliamentarization of the European institutions along the classical lines of ‘national’

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\(^1\) For a discussion of the legitimacy and effectiveness of the co-decision procedure see Ionut Sasu’s contribution to this workshop.
parliaments (Costa, 2004). Firstly, a number of typical elements of genuine parliamentary systems have been introduced in the European Parliament: the right to interpell European Commissioners, financial independence of the MEPs, the administrative internal organisation of the European Parliament, the immunities and privileges of the MEPs, a certain convergence of the electoral mode, the etc. Secondly, there is a stronger need for institutional collaboration along the lines of co-decision, and thirdly there is the affirmation of the governmental character of the European Commission (e.g. the investiture procedure).

The European Parliament on the scholarly agenda

Notwithstanding the increased importance of the EP, a couple of issues remain problematic to assess that the European Parliament is a proper parliament. Its role is largely confined to information-receiving and consultative roles in a number of important spheres of EU policy activity; it does not have full legislative powers, its budgetary powers are circumscribed and it cannot overthrow a government (Nugent, 2006). Given their relevance and importance, these preoccupations dominate today’s literature. It is centred mainly on four dimensions: the historical development and the legal functions of the European Parliament, the political behaviours observed during the European elections, the patterns of political competition within the European Parliament and the inter-institutional relationships in the context of the EU system (Hix, Raunio & Scully 2003).

It is striking that in the past only small attention has been paid to the socio-political profiles of the European political elites. Indeed, before a short while ago, the few data available on the careers of Members of the European Parliament either dated from a decade ago (Marsh & Norris, 1997; Scarow, 1997; Norris, 1999), or were collected within the framework of broad functional analyses of the European Parliament (Kirchner, 1984; Corbett, Jacobs and Shackleton, 2005; Steunenberg and Thomassen, 2002). Although some attempts have been made to incorporate the European level in the discussion on the effects of multilevel governance on the careers of individual politicians, publications remain limited (Borchert and Stolz, forthcoming; Edinger and Jahr, 2007, forthcoming) and mostly rely on aggregate data (Pasquinucci and Verzichelli, 2004). In contrast, longitudinal research into the career patterns of individual MEPs has largely been neglected (Verzichelli and Edinger, 2005). Hence, we lack cross-country and longitudinal comparative research on the long term trends and evolutions of political recruitment into the European Parliament. This is partly due to the fact that data on individual MEPs since 1979 (or even 1952) has been poorly collected both by the EU administration and by the academic community. For instance, the last ECPR Joint Sessions that
focused on the European Parliament from the perspective of the MEPs, was held in Grenoble (2001). In sum, until recently we lacked basic data on the profiles and trajectories of the more than 2800 individual MEPs since 1979. Or, as Scully and Farrell (2003, 271) rightfully state, there is: “much more that we can and should know [about MEPs as] individual elected representatives”.

In fact, the first elections after the 2004-enlargement lead to an increase in the scholarly interest for the profiles of the newly elected MEPs from the East and Central European countries (Lodge, 2005; Bale and Taggart, 2005; Verzichelli and Edinger, 2005; Hrbek, 2005). These analyses were particularly interesting in the light of the compelling lack of enthusiasm for the elections to the European Parliament in the newly accessed countries (cf. the low turnout rates at the elections for the EP in June 2004). One could in fact wonder whether the apparent lukewarm enthusiasm for the European Parliament was reflected in the making of the electoral lists. How pro-European were the candidates at these European elections, and did that lead to a different sociopolitical profile of the MEPs in these countries? In this respect, it is worth investigating to what extent MEPs are still bound by the perspective to return to the domestic political forum, or whether they focus exclusively on the European policy level. Beyond this, differences between “old” and “new” European representatives and between parliamentary party groups would need exploration: Are the MEPs from the new accession countries more similar to the first generation of directly elected representatives than to their current West European colleagues? Are we facing a particular (new?) brand of MEPs with the Eurocritics, distinct from the majority of their colleagues not only by political commitment?

A related observation is that there is little knowledge of both career ambitions and political orientations of European representatives (with the exceptions of Kerr, 1973; Katz and Wessels 1999; Scully, 2002). Yet, such attitudinal aspects appear crucial for understanding whether and to which degree a supra-national elite is in the making within the Strasbourg/Brussels assembly. If such process is underway, be it as a long-term trend or more recently as a response to the growing power of the EP, we should expect that it will manifest itself in the behaviour of European representatives. Therefore, linking studies on MEPs’ recruitment and careers and those on role perceptions and orientations with the ongoing field work on voting behaviour is a promising endeavour. Considering that there are few publications addressing these issues the need for detailed research on the political careers of the MEPs, on their attitudes and orientations, and – last but not least – on their related parliamentary behaviour seems obvious.
2. The Conceptual Framework: What is a Supra-national Elite and Why Should we Expect its Emergence?

Claiming the emergence of a supra-national elite as a research issue seems a daring if not dubious undertaking if one considers most of the history of the institution: up until 1979 MEPs were not even meant to represent a European constituency nor were the seats in the EP open to electoral competition. Serving in the EP was clearly subordinate to the main locus of its members’ activities and ambitions: the local constituency, the party and/or the national parliament from which the MEPs were “recruited”, in a nutshell – national politics. Even after the assembly’s first direct election double mandates were common practice, and the European Parliament became “famous” as a haven for political pensioners, many of them notables receiving their “golden parachute”. To sum up: the European Parliament for most of its history was far from representing a plausible candidate for the emergence of supra-national elites.

The perception of the EP as a political dead end where (prominent) politicians either terminate their political life or where they get “parked” before continuing a career in national politics was supported by its limited competences and institutional weakness. Still in 1979, the parliament had little say in European affairs and its apparently subordinate position in the institutional system of the European Communities was one major reason for what has been discussed as the democratic deficit of the EC. Furthermore, as a directly elected assembly the EP started off as an institutionally weak body with high mobility among its members, hardly effective internal structures and no cohesive parliamentary clubs. One might argue that the initial composition of the EP, the recruitment of its members and their political behavior were a proper reflection of its original status in the institutional system, indicating or even illustrating its marginal involvement in the European decision making-process.

The strengthening of the European Parliament that occurred especially during the past roughly fifteen years, starting from the Maastricht treaty, has changed this situation significantly and is certainly one important reason why one could (or should) expect a supra-national elite to emerge. But what is a supra-national elite? How can it be properly defined? And which implications are associated with its emergence?

A supra-national elite: characteristics in a European setting

Historically, the modern concept of elites is strongly linked to the nation state: The most renounced thinkers of the so-called elitist school (like Gaetano Mosca and Vilfredo Pareto)
clearly perceived of the ‘political class’ or the ‘elite’ as a leading group within a given society or nation. Elites and masses were seen as acting in a national context, and processes of elite circulation were expected to occur in such environment. Equally, Robert Michels’ famous ‘iron law of oligarchy’ within parties was developed clearly in a national context, this is after an in-depth study of the German Social Democrats.

Supra-national elites – as a relatively new research object for political scientists – are different as they operate in a political environment which is characterized by its extension across national borders. The implications are two-fold: First, the locus of activity is not – primarily – national politics but it is internationalized and, therefore, more complex. Second, supra-national elites are expected to act not only as guardians of their home country’s national interest – as is the case with heads of governments in debates on international regimes (such as environmental norms or trade regimes) or with diplomats in international organizations. This suggests that supra-national elites are at least partly defined by their roles and associated commitments. Furthermore, it is important to note that they are distinct from international and also transnational elites because the institutional setting in which they work exhibits strong elements of supra-nationalism.

While these characteristics apply to a broader set of respective elites (see, for instance, Magone’s typology of Euro-elites in his contribution to this workshop), the European representatives in Strasbourg and Brussels bear some distinctive features. Unlike the members of the top echelons of international organizations, the Members of the European Parliament are representative elites elected by the people and meant to represent them on the European level. Deriving their legitimacy directly from the people distinguishes them substantially from, for example, the members of the European Commission, the DGs or top leaders of big European lobby organizations (if one considers the latter to be political elites). As elected representatives they are unique because they belong to the only parliamentary body in the world that is genuinely supra-national – and which, therefore, has frequently been labeled a parliament sui generis. From this rather formal perspective any politician elected to the European Parliament could be considered as member of a supra-national European elite, simply through membership in a supra-national parliament.

Yet, the simple membership in the EP can hardly be considered as a sufficient indicator of belonging to a supra-national elite. This is almost obvious if we remember some common recruitment patterns of MEPs shortly after the introduction of direct elections such as the selection of older notables or the practice of ‘parking’ national politicians in the EP after electoral failures on the national or regional level. While a supra-national European
representative elite does certainly require a mandate in the EP as a *conditio sine qua non*, a more meaningful notion must contain additional criteria referring to MEPs’ roles, commitments and behavior. One suitable means to identify candidates of a supra-national European elite is the career pattern, this is the sequence of political posts (possibly also occupational positions) that an MEP has held prior and after his election to the Euro chamber. Euro representatives who *prima facie* used their EP membership only as a springboard (back) into national politics would then, probably, disqualify as candidates.

A related concept relevant to determine the supra-national character of EP membership is ambition: if MEPs obviously consider their current position as subordinate to other parliamentary posts, they are hardly genuine ‘supra-nationalists’. Vice versa, those striving for leadership positions within the EP are likely to focus their career on the Euro chamber – which would make them candidates for a supra-national elite. The fact that the link between the European Parliament and the European Commission is not a link of possible recruitment as what is usually the case in the national political arena where cabinet ministers are frequently recruited from among MPs, is interesting to consider. Why do people aspire for a mandate as European representative if it does not serve as a trump card for entering the European ‘government’?

Next to career trajectories and related ambitions, the contents of an MP’s activity should be crucial. A supra-national orientation should be reflected in Europe-related activities prior to the election into the EP. Such activities could comprise involvement in party politics on the European level, membership in an EU affairs committee in the national or a regional legislature, or a leading position in a pro-European NGO. Becoming actively involved in European politics only after the election to the Euro chamber, on the contrary, would suggest a lack of European commitment. Voting behavior can also be a telling indicator: MEPs constantly following the national interest of their home countries when competing EPPG and national positions are at stake, might not appear as ‘natural’ candidates for a supra-national elite. In addition to career and behavioral criteria some other proxies might serve to indicate a European commitment: European socialization (lengthy periods spent in other EU member countries), multi-lingual proficiency, or occupational experience with European affairs (e.g. in business or academic life).

A substantial concept of a European supra-national elite, to sum up, should be based on both: significant experience as a professional (or rather: full-time) politician on the European level and an observable commitment to European affairs. Such notion of a supra-national elite is, apparently, not limited to members of the EP but it can encompass other European office-
holders as well. EU commissioners, for example, would easily qualify for such status even though most of them have never been members of the Brussels/Strasbourg assembly. Still, there is good reason to assume that the European Parliament is a key institution through which most European political elites pass, thus making it the key locus of the formation of a supra-national elite. For the representative supra-national elite in Europe – as the topic of this ECPR workshop – membership in the Euro chamber is in any case a precondition.

In the long run, a reasonably large supra-national elite could trigger further effects that go beyond common career paths and shared European commitments. At some point in time the European chamber can be envisaged hosting a group of whole-heartedly Europe-minded MEPs who develop some kind of collective identity on the basis of common career interests, strategies and policy focus – and almost irrespective of their national origin. Such a group will then create its own information and policy networks, its communication routines etc. Next to a supra-national elite we might, therefore, witness the formation of a European political class – similar to its counterparts on the national level but distinctive from it in that it has strong European features. Ultimately, the common working environment and the common interests might lead even to a common habitus of the European supra-national elite – similar to what has been observed to emerge among a transnational business elite (Sklair 2001) and even for members of the EU top administrative elite (Bach 1999)

Roles of a supra-national elite

Obviously, the key question to respond is why we should expect the emergence of such a supra-national elite, and why it should matter? One important reason was mentioned above and is closely associated with the institutional development of the European Union: the gradual “empowerment” of the Euro chamber which step by step has turned it into an important (veto) player in EU politics. The ongoing process of strengthening the EP started, at the latest, with the introduction of direct elections which served as a legitimacy boost for the institution. Deriving their legitimacy directly from the people is instrumental for MEPs’ forming among themselves a supra-national elite – despite the second-order character of European elections. It is the distinct source of legitimacy which has provided the European representatives with the opportunity to develop career patterns and orientations that are genuinely European (Cotta 1984). At the preliminary end of the empowerment process sketched in the first part, some authors rank the European Parliament “highly in comparison to other West European legislatures” (Judge and Earnshaw 2003, 294). For some, it is nowadays the prime locus of power on the European level.
A strong (or a strengthened, as is the case with the EP) parliament will, we can assume, attract ambitious politicians much more than a weak legislative body. The growing importance of the European chamber in itself though would not necessarily make it a recruitment pool for supra-national elites. Yet, its new functions and competences vis-à-vis the other institutions serve as an incentive for politicians to take the European career level serious and to thoroughly consider the Euro chamber when facing critical career choices. Over time, therefore, running for the EP might have become an option for those types of politicians for whom previously such a career move had not been attractive.

Beyond the changing institutional position of the EP a more general trend might have affected the likelihood of an emerging European elite: the dynamics of Europeanization. European jurisdiction has extended to more and more policy fields with the *acquis communautaire* covering tens of thousands of pages nowadays – posing an enormous challenge for candidate countries as the two most recent accession rounds have so impressively illustrated. There are less and less policy decisions which are not influenced, one way or another, by European regulations or previous informal negotiations, or the implementation of which needs to be checked with European regulations. The penetration of national law (and state law in federal countries like Austria, Belgium or Germany) by European directives etc. has reached an unprecedented degree.

It is not only the policy-making capacity of governments which is affected by this mega-trend of Europeanization. Even more so, the national (and regional) parliaments loose decision-making competences, partly through a transfer of power to the European level, partly because often it is much harder for them to control their national governments in policy areas which are significantly Europeanized than in others (Maurer 2002). As a consequence, the European Parliament becomes more attractive for individual politicians to the same extent that national and regional parliaments find their impact on policy-making curbed. The presumably increased attractiveness of the EP should be independent from the main motivation of politicians: no matter whether they are more policy-seeking or more office-seeking – to use a rather simplistic taxonomy –, membership in the Euro chamber should become more interesting with its growing importance.

More supra-national orientations and commitments among the parliamentary elite can also derive from other less far-reaching developments in European politics. Thus, the emergence of virtually European parties certainly indicates the increasing relevance of the European political space. For those countries which joined in 2004 and 2007, the existing European party organizations and their respective transnational party groups in the EP were
crucial points of reference in the pre-accession process – even up to the point that they had an impact in party formation in some of these countries (Pridham 2005; see also Attila ‘Agh’s contribution to this workshop). Therefore, the relevance of the European political arena has been of little doubt to politicians in the post-communist countries from early on. But for the EU-15 countries, too, there is growing evidence that many political issues are discussed in a broader European context and that, as a result of this, the European arena is more and more on politicians’ minds.

Finally, we should be aware of a more general development across Europe: compared to some 25 or 30 years ago European integration is closely reflected in the everyday life of citizens, far beyond the realms of politics. It is common for most EU citizens to visit other EU countries, most educated people (and, after all, the vast majority of MEPs have university degrees) speak at least one other European language except their mother tongue, European cooperation is routine in academic life just as for many companies. While back in the 1970s it might have appeared slightly exotic for a politician to specialize in European affairs, this is certainly no longer the case. In as much as Europe and the European Union are visible and present in everyday life, planning a European (political) career is just normal.

It has become clear that the emergence of a supra-national representative elite nowadays is much more likely than in the past due to a strengthening of the EP, a gradual shift of power away from the national to the European political level and a general trend of Europeanization. Nevertheless, it would be naïve if one was to assume that the European Parliament (just as other supra-national EU institutions) is swamped by enthusiastic, whole-hearted Europeans less than three decades after the introduction of direct elections. After all, the recruitment process of MEPs is still almost exclusively under the control of national parties. While they may pay some tribute to European implications of the nomination (such as a certain awareness of gender issues, previous involvement in European politics etc.), they mostly follow their own rationale of candidate selection – determined by inner-party calculations or those based on domestic political considerations. Therefore, it seems much more realistic to expect an expanding supra-national elite in the European Parliament next to other more “traditional” groups of MEPs.

**Empirical proofs?**

Which developments are indicative for such shift towards a supra-national elite in the EP? First and foremost, a European elite in the Brussels/Strasbourg assembly should be observable through new patterns of MEP recruitment. Thus, more representatives should be elected to the EP who specialized in European politics and who can build upon an expertise on EU politics
from their previous occupation. While some experience in national or regional party or elective offices remains crucial for gaining a mandate in the EP, affinity to European affairs becomes more important for the nomination as MEP candidate. Furthermore, an emerging supra-national elite should comprise of a considerable proportion of younger politicians with a strong interest and extra-parliamentary involvement in European affairs. Some of them might even got interested in European affairs after benefiting from one of the European exchange programmes (Leonardo, Comenius, Erasmus/Socrates, etc.)

Next to new patterns of recruitment the formation of a supra-national elite within the EP should go along with changes in MEPs’ career orientations and career paths. Much more than in the past the European Parliament is likely to be considered as the primary career goal by European committed deputies. Especially for younger generations of politicians it is fair to think of a European career as a genuine and distinct political career path. Hence, we expect the new European elite to be less inclined than more ‘traditional’ MEPs to use their European mandate as a springboard (back) into national politics. Rather they are likely to display intra-institutional ambitions (Herrick and Moore 1993), this is they are eager to be promoted into leading positions within the EP such as the heads of committees, the assignment of the position of rapporteur (Corbett, Jacobs and Shackleton, 2005), the board of their EPPG or the EP presidency. If they seek a move into national or regional politics, only executive positions might appeal to them and possibly only if these positions are closely linked to European politics.2 In France, for instance, eight of the last ten Prime Ministers have, at one stage or another in their career, been MEPs (as have the last three Presidents). In the United Kingdom as well, many former MEPs have become ministers (Corbett, Jacobs and Shackleton, 2005: 54).

A third indicator of supra-national orientations becoming more widespread is directly linked to the European Parliament as a dynamic institution. With the maturity that the EP has reached more than a quarter of a century after its first direct election and which is so impressively documented by fragmentation indices, voting patterns and alike (Hix, Noury and Roland 2007; Verzichelli and Edinger 2005), there is good reason to believe that it has also developed a potential to ‘educate’ or ‘socialize’ its members. New members who entered the Euro chamber with national commitments and national career ambitions might find themselves

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2 A good example is former German MEP Dr. Joachim Wuermeling who left the EP in 2005 during his second term for the position of a Beamter Staatssekretär in the Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology, the second highest position below the office of the Minister. In the ministry he is responsible mostly for the relation to the European institutions and for European economic affairs. Upon his appointment as Staatssekretär Wuermeling publicly declared that he would like to strive for a continuation of his work in the EP and emphasized that in his new function he will be strongly involved with European affairs. Before entering the EP in 1999 he used to work in the EU Commission (1993-95) and he was in charge of European affairs in the Bavarian Prime Minister’s Office (1995-99).
exposed to contrasting expectations and pressures which could then redirect their political and career preferences. More specifically, one might assume that MEPs become more pro-European or Euro-committed after some service in the EP. At least one indicator suggests that this might have become the case: i.e. the turnover rates from the ‘old EU-15’ countries in 2004. In contrast to what was the case in 1994 (42.5%) and 1999 (45.7%), in 2004 more than half (54%) of the MEPs from the ‘old EU-15’ countries were outgoing MEPs from the previous legislature (Corbett, Jacobs and Shackleton, 2005).

How to measure the emergence of a supra-national elite?

The indicators for more Euro-committed representatives in Brussels/Strasbourg suggested in the previous paragraphs, do not make up for a conclusive list. Nevertheless they give important hints to how the emergence of a supra-national elite can be studied. The methods used are to some extent determined by the research objects. The argument here is that an in-depth exploration of the dynamics of elite formation on the European level requires studying biographical, career, attitudinal and behavioral aspects alike. Whereas recruitment studies belong to the ‘classic’ approaches of research into the EP, thorough investigations of career patterns are rare and our knowledge about MEPs’ attitudes (including role perceptions, ambitions, European commitment, issue salience etc.) seems still limited. By contrast, certain socialization processes and especially the voting behavior have received a great deal of scholarly attention (Scully 2005).

With regard to research methods, an investigation into the emergence of supra-national elites in the European multi-level political system is likely to benefit substantially from comparative research. Three approaches appear crucial for this purpose: the cross-country, the inter-temporal and the “functional” approaches. A cross-national comparison should indicate nation-specific career patterns of MEPs. This in itself would be a veritable output of comparative research, certainly enhancing our knowledge about the national ‘framing’ of European parliamentary careers. For the EU-15 countries, for example, it would be interesting to see which national groups are heavily populated with ‘political pensioners’ which national delegations display the strongest Euro-commitment. As long as comprehensive data sets are missing, case studies based on a most-different cases design represent an extremely useful tool. On the basis of the existing literature Germany, the United Kingdom and France display rather distinct career logic and recruitment mechanisms. Whereas in Germany the European Parliament often marks the end of a political career, many British MEPs seem to use Strasbourg/Brussels as a springboard to the (more attractive) posts in national politics, and some
French deputies are “parked” in the EP especially after their parties were defeated in national elections. If such national characteristics are confirmed in sound empirical studies, this will be a further incentive to explore more deeply the sources and explanations for national variation.

Compared to the cross-national dimension another form of synchronic analysis is less frequent and for a long time has been almost ignored: the comparison between the Euro representatives and their counterparts in the national parliaments, the MNPs (for exceptions see Marsh and Norris 1997; Schmitt and Thomassen 1999). Should both groups of parliamentarians appear rather similar in most countries, this indicates a common profile of MPs – no matter whether they are elected in EP or national elections. MEPs were then a mirror image of MNPs. Europe-oriented representatives would be just as successful in entering the EP as their colleagues without any attachment to European affairs. In other words: specialization would not pay off. In this instance, the European level in the multi-level system could be comprehended, basically, as the extension of an already existing market of electoral offices. It would influence the career strategies of ambitious politicians only to the extent that more alimented posts were available, thereby slightly improving career chances. Yet, the structure of political careers would not be affected.

Whereas the synchronic comparisons, be they focused on the intra-EP dimension or the cross-parliamentary dimension, provide for snapshots of similarities and differences between different groups of MPs from the same countries, inter-temporal analyses extend our knowledge about the development of recruitment mechanisms and career patterns. With a supranational European parliamentary history of more than a quarter of a century, time seems ripe for in-depth studies of these developments. Almost by definition, the representatives from the EC-9 (of the first direct elections in 1979) qualify best for such comparative approach. Not only do the European elections make up for six points in time to be compared, the competences of the EP and the institutional framework have changed significantly since 1979.

Against this background inter-temporal comparisons can show if changes in electoral rules, the formal and informal powers of the EP and variations in the institutional setting bear an impact on career decisions and profiles of MEPs. More specifically, the hypothesis could be tested that 25 years after the first direct election of Strasbourg/Brussels chamber a new brand of deputies is recruited and whether the status of the EP in political careers (and career preferences) across levels has changed. Beyond this, the diachronic perspective helps to determine whether some convergence of careers has occurred among the national delegations and, if so, which countries are outliers not having followed the overall trend.
Inter-temporal comparisons of European representatives’ careers need not be restricted to MEPs from the initial EU-9 countries. In addition to the relevant developments among members of these national delegations the initial configurations deserve attention. Members from recently acceded countries, sharing both their personal newness and that of their whole national group with the MEPs of 1979, can also indicate the relationship between continuity and change in European parliamentary careers. In this perspective the June 2004 elections make a caesura as unlike in the previous Southern (Greece, Spain and Portugal) and North-Western enlargements (Austria, Finland and Sweden) a critical mass of these double newcomers entered the EP – and almost all of them from post-communist countries. It seems a telling story how much or how little the AC-8 deputies (and, more recently, those from Bulgarian and Romania) resemble the career profiles of the initial set of Western deputies some 25 years earlier. Strong similarities between both groups of initial MEPs would suggest that despite institutional changes, the mechanisms of initial recruitment to the EP remain intact over a longer period of time.

Neither the cross country nor the inter-temporal comparative approaches sketched above pay any reference to the position that a representative holds within the EP. Here the ‘functional’ analyses come in, shedding light on the intra-parliamentary structures and their relevance for careers. With the classical government majority vs. opposition divide missing, the most important functional units and decision-making institutions in the EP are the parliamentary party groups. Like in most national legislatures the PPGs – though sometimes integrating MPs from ideologically rather diverse parties – are formed on ideological grounds. Their interaction is, therefore, determined by the respective position in a multi-dimensional political space. The vast majority, recently almost 95% of MEPs belong to an EPPG, and party hopping does not happen too frequently. While all these observations support the idea that the parliamentary parties are important for the career of individual MEPs, the nomination processes are national in character.

There are at least two career-related aspects in comparing EPPGs: First, the EPPGs function as gatekeepers for the inner-parliamentary career of the Euro representatives. Since for many of them this marks the most important part of their political career, the parliamentary parties are of major importance. Second, like their national counterparts EPPGs might differ by their composition and, thus, by their recruitment patterns. Some EPPGs, for example, might find it useful to attract candidates with rich political experience on the national level, others might prefer younger ambitious freshmen, whereas a third group shows particular openness for career changers, i.e. candidates moving to politics after a successful career elsewhere.
While EPPGs are representing the horizontal differentiation of the EP, there is a vertical stratification, too. Just like in other parliaments MEPs can be distinguished by their position in the parliamentary hierarchy. The most straightforward and well-established distinction here is between parliamentary leaders and their followers, or rather between frontbenchers and backbenchers. More recently, the uneasy relationship between both groups has become an important topic of research on national parliaments (Longley and Hazan 2000). However the leaders as the ‘elite within the (European representative) elite’ are defined – and following the positional approach in elite studies members of the EP presidency, of the EPPG boards and the chairs of the committees would best qualify as such –, it is obvious that most parliamentarians do not hold a leadership position. From a career point of view it is interesting to see what types of European politicians are entrusted with leadership positions within the Strasbourg/Brussels assembly.
4. **Toward a Typology of European Political Careers**

European parliamentary socialisation and the socialisation of new MEPs in the Euro chamber, in particular, are conducive to the emergence of a supra-national elite. Should the political attitudes of Euro representatives and their parliamentary behaviour be different shortly after their election to the EP compared to the time when they terminate their mandate, it would suggest a relevant impact of the Brussels/Strasbourg chamber on its members. Such a re-socialisation of representatives through a legislative body *sui generis* is likely to be accompanied by a shift in career focus, too: away from national or sub-national politics to the European level. Even more than in socialisation processes an evolving European elite with MEPs at its core should be reflected in changing career orientations. It is for this reason that in the following part of this section an attempt is made to come up with a new typology of MEPs.

Since in the context of Workshop 24 the typology serves to identify the core of a supra-national elite among the numerous members of the Euro chamber, two related dimensions need to be accounted for: the objective sequence of relevant career posts on the one hand, and the value and importance subjectively associated with these posts on the other hand. On the objective dimension the typology presented here tries to capture the multi-level nature of European politics. Thus, the primary focus is on career trajectories between the national (and/or state) level and membership in the European Parliament. A mandate in Strasbourg/Brussels can either follow an office in national and/or state politics, or it is held prior to offices on these other levels.

We can then roughly distinguish between three groups of Euro representatives: those who have never held an elective or executive position on the national/state level, those who had them prior to their EP mandate, and a third group which entered the national/state political stage only after their service in Brussels and Strasbourg. This distinction is of analytical value – even as a taxonomy – because we can assume that all three groups show different political profiles. Representatives belonging to the second group should not only be older than members of the third group but we would also, for instance, expect them to have considerably more political experience. Yet, the taxonomy, one-dimensional as it is, proves insufficient for the simple reason that moving from the national/state to the European level, and vice versa, can mean completely different things – both in terms of political power and prestige, and from the career preferences of the individual politician.
That is why the integration of the subjective dimension is important for this typology, and for career research in general. From the perspective of the individual MEP his or her membership in the EP can be associated with contrasting expectations. For some representatives it is almost certain that the EP marks the end of their political career – and that the peak of their political career is already behind them. Still the implication is not necessarily that the European mandate is perceived as an inferior position. Some “elder statesmen” who have been active proponents of European integration might, in fact, consider the election to the EP as a proper and most welcome conclusion of their political/parliamentary life.

Others start their political life in Strasbourg/Brussels but they might have rather different ideas about when and where to continue it. While some are completely committed to the European idea and European politics (and thus strive for re-election, intra-institutional promotion, or non-parliamentary European positions), others will be happy to change the European for the national political arena the earlier the better. Clearly, these two groups of MEPs have little in common except for their lack of previous experience in professional politics. For the purpose of a typology capturing career patterns among MEPs it is imperative not to merge them into one career type. The most obvious distinctive feature between both groups is the focus of their political ambitions and activities: it is either on the European or on the national/state level.
Table 1: Types of Career Patterns among MEPs with regard to national politics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus of ambitions</th>
<th>Experience in national and/or state (professional) politics</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Prior to EP entry</th>
<th>After EP entry</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National arena</td>
<td>“careerists” failed stepping stone politicians</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>political pensioners</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>stepping stone politicians</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European arena</td>
<td>Euro politicians</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Euro insiders</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>nationally promoted politicians</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Orange: components of a supra-national elite  
Bold: frequent type

Crossing the subjective dimension with the objective dimension which captures the experience of MEPs in political offices on the national and/or state level results in six different types of European parliamentary careers (Table 1). Types 1 and 2 comprise all those MEPs that have never held national/regional mandates or government offices, neither prior to their entry nor after their exit from the Strasbourg/Brussels assembly. We expect both types to be frequent, as indicated by the bold letters, and also more heterogeneous than the other types. Among MEPs of Type 1 we certainly find some failed stepping stone politicians, these are deputies who prefer a national or regional position but (so far) have not succeeded to jump to those level(s). A good though not necessarily sufficient indicator is the sequence of candidacies in national or state elections: the failed stepping stone politician enters the EP only after (or rather: because of) failing to get elected in a position on the national level or/and as an MEP he tries to run in the subsequent national/state election.

Careerists are somewhat different because they prefer the national/state level only for pragmatic reasons: as the most common track for political careers. Once they are given the chance to enter the EP the European mandate is almost as good for them. As they are hardly policy-seeking but rather career-oriented it does not matter to them too much in which arena they make their political career. Usually, they will have a record of unsuccessful candidacies before entering the Euro chamber but upon getting elected to it they will seek intra-institutional promotion rather than a cross-over to national politics.
Type 2 displays completely different preferences: for these MEPs the European Parliament is their natural locus of political action. Their decision to run for a seat in Strasbourg/Brussels stems from a strong European commitment. The (presumably few) Euro insiders can even count on their previous work experience on the European level, be it as members of the European administration or as employees of European interest groups. The Euro politicians do not have such occupational experience but they have been active in European affairs in their home countries, usually on a voluntary basis. Typically, they have held posts in pro-European organizations, or they used to be in charge of European affairs within their parties or interest groups.

Euro leaders and Euro experts (Type 4) share the European orientations of Type 2 MEPs but, beyond this, they have had a record of professional political involvement in national/state politics. This is particularly true for the Euro leaders, commonly referred to as the elder statesmen. They conclude their political careers in the EP after often long service in high national functions. The Euro experts, by contrast, were not so visible leadership figures during the time they spend in national offices. Rather did they act as specialists on European affairs, for example as chairs or members of European Affairs committees in the national or state legislatures. Both groups are ‘natural’ candidates for higher offices within the EP, the Euro leaders because of their prominence and rich leadership experience, the Euro experts, apparently, due to their expertise.

In the public mind, Type 4 is hardly distinguished from Type 3 although both types are far from each other when it comes to their focus of political action and their ambitions. Like for the Euro leaders the EP mandate usually terminates the political career of the political pensioners. Yet, the pensioners, in contrast to the Euro leaders, clearly consider membership in the EP as inferior to their previous national posts – and it is in no way related to those previous offices. Frequently, political pensioners do not enter the Strasbourg/Brussels assembly by their own will but the party decides to send them to “Europe”, on occasion simply in order to promote new candidates into the offices previously held by the political pensioners.

Finally, there are two types of European representatives characterized by level hopping in the opposite direction: from the EP to a national/state office. Data from inter alia Denmark and Germany suggest that such moves to either national/state legislatures or executive offices in the country of origin are not very frequent though they constitute a very common pattern in Britain. By definition such mobility cannot be found among the current MEPs.\(^3\) The

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\(^3\) For reasons of simplification we are ignoring here the existence of dual mandates before 2004. For the records it should also be mentioned that current MEPs can, of course, fall into this category provided they re-entered the EP after service in a national/state political office.
stepping stone politicians (Type 5) were successful in using the EP as a springboard to national offices they were striving for. During the current sixth term, for example, two German delegates (Garrelt Duin and Ingo Schmitt) resigned from the EP and became members of the Bundestag after running successfully in the early elections of autumn 2005.

The case is rather different with Type 6. Those MEPs were neither aspiring for nor actively seeking promotion to the national/state level. Rather they were ‘called’ by their parties to serve in usually high-ranking offices – and they followed the call despite their strong European commitment. In some cases their European profile might even have been an important reason to promote them to higher offices ‘at home’. Even though such cases are still rare, they point to a new feature of Europeanization of domestic political recruitment. This means that the role of the EP for level hoppers is no longer restricted to that of a waiting room or of a general training ground, at best. Instead, it can also provide Euro-minded politicians with specific qualifications for which there is a demand in domestic politics.

While the distinction between these six career types among MEPs might seem more or less plane, the operationalization for the purpose of empirical analyses proves more difficult. If we ignore the problems of data access and the costs of data collection, the objective dimension does not pose major problems: once data are available it should be easy to determine who prior or after his/her service in the EP had offices in national or state politics. The operationalization of the subjective dimension, by contrast, is rather complicated. At first glance, the best source for career preferences and ambitions are survey data. Yet, even if such data were available, one should be cautious with the interpretation of reported ambitions. Career strategies and personal career ambitions are certainly sensitive information that a professional politician does not wish to share with others except close friends and family. Therefore, the danger of a systematic bias caused by social desirability is immense.

The typology of MEPs’ careers suggested above and meant to serve as an analytical tool for studying the emergence of a supra-national elite within the Euro chamber displays a number of more or less evident deficiencies. One such deficiency is that the time factor is largely ignored. This is true, first of all, for the time period that an MEP spends in Brussels/Strasbourg in relation to the time during which he serves in national/state political functions. Obviously, it makes no sense to consider somebody a member of the representative supra-national elite if his EP membership was only episodic. It might also be worthwhile considering the length of service in the Euro chamber as compared to the duration of membership in the national parliament or government. An additional criterion for belonging to

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4 In the case of dual mandates even during service in the EP.
the supra-national elite could then be a certain minimum proportion of EP service as part of the overall length of holding paid political offices. Subject to empirical analysis, a close relationship between length of EP service and membership in the supra-national elite is likely. As Table 2 indicates, EP service of most MEP types whose focus of ambition is the national political arena should be short. By contrast, those types making up the European representative elite can be expected to serve for a longer period of time.

Table 2: Expected Length of Service in the European Parliament for MEP Career Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus of ambitions</th>
<th>Experience in national and/or state (professional) politics</th>
<th>National arena</th>
<th>European arena</th>
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<td>none</td>
<td>prior to EP entry</td>
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Orange: components of a supra-national elite

A second, more important deficiency of the typology is its ignorance towards possible changes in career orientations. Career ambitions and, as a consequence, career paths are not only a function of pre-defined individual rankings but they depend upon the institutional framework, or in Borchert’s terms on the attractiveness and accessibility of alternative positions (Borchert 2003). Once conditions change MEPs might adapt their career ambitions or strategic orientations to the new circumstances. The typology does not provide for such changes but, implicitly, treats MEPs’ focus of ambitions as more or less static. A more dynamic typology, providing also for changes of career orientations that occur over time, would therefore be more adequate though much more complex, too.

Thirdly, the typology does not account for the career dynamics within the European Parliament. The Euro chamber like other parliaments is a hierarchically structured institution which allows for intra-institutional promotion. Leading posts in the EPPGs just as the EP presidency or committee chairs represent outstanding positions that distinguish the parliamentary leaders from the majority of ‘backbenchers’. Beyond this, not all EP committees
are equally important and moving from a marginal to a more prestigious committee could also indicate some sort of promotion. Europe-oriented MEPs, by and large, will be more inclined to climb up the inner-EP career ladder.

While none of these deficiencies should be ignored, the typology should still help us to determine whether a significant group of genuinely Europe-minded and Europe-oriented politicians has developed – a group of representatives that might constitute the core of an evolving European political class. On the basis of the typology and with regard to findings from the existing empirical studies, some hypothesis about the future trends of MEPs’ careers in the multi-level European system can be formulated.

The first hypothesis here is that figures (once very frequent) like the political pensioners (Type 3), the careerists and the failed stepping stone politicians (Type 1) will keep populating the EP. The reason for this lies with the persistent dominance of the national parties over their European counterparts in the candidate selection processes (Poguntke and Pütz 2006) and with the well established and yet unchallenged patterns of domestic careers.

On the other hand, it is plausible to argue that recent elections have increased the number of Euro experts and Euro leaders, i.e. representatives with significant domestic career but committed to supranational issues (Type 4) as well as Euro politicians directly recruited with chances of career at the supranational level (Type 2). Both types should become more frequent in Strasbourg/Brussels for two reasons: the growing importance of the EP as the parliamentary body within the political system of the EU and the slow but steady evolution of supra-national patterns of political careers.

The third hypothesis argues that in a multi-level Europe the EP will gain importance even independent from its actual power. It can then serve as a political platform which enables politicians to get specific competences, providing them the opportunity to come back to domestic politics with a more relevant role (Type 6), or to aspire for other supranational offices. The stepping stone hypothesis, in other words, implies changes in terms of stability, visibility and European specialisation of MEPs. Besides the traditional declination of the concept (characterizing the EP as a stepping stone towards national offices; Type 5) one can imagine a minority of MEPs climbing to other positions in Europe. Beyond this, a sub-category of younger stepping stone politicians might assume, with the passing of time, a less marked national vocation, thus considering the career in the EP at least as a valid alternative to the domestic appointments. In other words, while many fresh MEPs keep being committed to “traditional” domestic careers, some others might invest more into European politics. The latter, therefore, should be counted into an ideal political class on EU level.
A fourth hypothesis says that more and more (new) MEPs have little if any connection to politics, thus making their entry into the EP a cross-over career. Usually, these European representatives are prominent figures in their home country, with a career in sports, business, or science. A recent qualitative study suggests that they are more frequent among members from the post-communist accession countries (Stamm 2006). From the perspective of the parties they are “vote catchers” but their motivation to run in EP elections might have to do with a certain degree of independence from party and voters. Among them some might become dedicated European representatives.

Finally, we should remember a ‘hidden truth’ about the Strasbourg/Brussels assembly: while the institutional growth of the EP, overall, appears impressive, the process of it accumulating power has been slow. The development of the representative elite in the Euro chamber bears a high degree of uncertainty (Corbett 1998). Therefore, we can argue that very heterogeneous groups of politicians, with rather different expectations, will keep populating the EP in the next future. Still and partly for the same reasons, we can expect a however modest trend in the direction of a critical mass of representatives in the EP strongly committed to Europe.

5. **Prospects: The Future Research Agenda**

This paper could show that there is good reason to assume that within the European Parliament a set of representatives has emerged which constitutes the core of a supra-national elite, and that this elite might expand over time. The implications and indications of such an elite formation were discussed in the main sections of this paper: with regard to recruitment patterns and socialization, career trajectories and the internal dynamics of the Euro chamber. It is noteworthy that much of the previous research which has been conducted on the MEPs has touched upon the development of a supra-national elite though not necessarily in a very systematic manner. Overall, a bunch of information seems available which can help to determine whether and, if so, to which extent a supra-national elite is in the making – within the sole directly elected body in the institutional system of the European Union.

When drawing some preliminary conclusions from the conceptual thoughts presented above, a first observation is the lack of integration that exists between different streams of research. This is foremost a matter of analysis. Findings on recruitment patterns and career paths are hardly interpreted in the light of survey data indicating MEPs’ career ambitions and
choices. Even less do we know about the relationship between political careers and the parliamentary behaviour of the Euro representatives. Yet, such integrated research would be crucial for addressing thoroughly the issue of a supra-national elite. There are methodological aspects, too, as the linkage between different approaches might suffer from the diversity of the methodological tools used. Data on career ambitions, for example, are often gathered from face-to-face narrative interviews (qualitative method) whereas biographical and recruitment studies tend to be based on parliamentary handbooks and similar sources which are usually connected with quantitative methods.

The second observation to be made concerns the apparent lack of comparative research that so far has been done on some topics closely related to the elite formation on the European level. Whereas recruitment studies and those on representation, voting behaviour and policy preferences tend to cover MEPs from a great number if not all member countries (e.g. Hix xyz; Norris 1997; Wessels and Thomassen …), investigations into MEPs’ careers are not only rare but they are usually case studies covering in depth a single country (e.g. Westlake 2004; see also the contribution of Real-Dato and Jerez to this workshop). To extend the scope of analysis to other countries and basing such a comparative approach on a common research framework would considerably improve our understanding of career-making in the multi-level European setting as a key aspect of the formation of a supra-national elite. For this purpose, the comparative scenarios sketched at the end of Section 2

Some first results from a comparative look at the political experience of MEPs from the EC-15 countries and the ten new post-communist countries, for example, point to some striking similarities between these two groups. At the same time MEPs seem to clearly distinguish themselves from their colleagues in the respective national parliaments (for some rough measures see Verzichelli and Edinger 2005). Altogether, there are also strong indicators of a convergence among the European representatives. The hidden logic MEPs’ selectorates seem to follow is the gradual reduction of traditional differences among national groups in the EP which will diminish the power of some country-specific explanations for representative elite transformations. Provided broad field research was to confirm these preliminary findings, those developments would reflect long-term trends in national legislatures across Western Europe (Best and Cotta 2000; Cotta and Best 2007).

Beyond an integrative framework and a more comparative approach for studying the supposed emergence of a supra-national elite within the EP, there are at least four more salient tasks on the research agenda. First, there is an urgent need for much broader data bases comprising more countries, longer periods and additional variables (such as involvement in
European organizations; activities at different points in time; etc.). At least equally important is a demand for data sets using the same set of variables and for the collection and coding of data by the same standards – rather than having a patchwork of empirical materials that make comparisons difficult if not impossible.

Second, starting from a more sophisticated analytical framework career research would need to specify a set of hypotheses that are linked to existing concepts of both parliamentary research and European studies and that can properly guide the empirical analysis. A prerequisite for the formulation of appropriate hypotheses is a thorough stocktaking: a synopsis of the existing knowledge about the European representatives, no matter which source it comes from.

Third, at some point in the future we will need to extend the research focus beyond the European Parliament. This is already the case when we discuss the pre-parliamentary experience of MEPs. From a career perspective, though, parliamentary positions are only an undoubtedly central and crucial subset of (professional) political posts. We might, therefore, end up with not only studying European parliamentary careers but rather European political careers, in general (see the typology of European elites in Magone’s paper for this workshop, p. 7).

A fourth and final point is that research on European elites, in the long run, must be sufficiently linked to other research traditions. Thus, it is of supreme interest to relate the results of the representative elite studies to the findings of research on European public opinion and Euroscepticism – a crucial aspect of the critical interaction between elites and masses in European politics. It takes then only a little step to place the debate on a supra-national elite into the broader theoretical perspective of a possible federalization of Europe or of the discourses on legitimacy and effectiveness of the European Union’s institutional design.

As could be shown, the research programme sketched here remains insufficient in many respects. The comparative approach does not go much beyond what is common in comparative politics, and the typology of MEPs’ careers certainly needs much elaboration. Yet, as the findings from the ongoing empirical research suggest, the proposed research programme has the potential to shed new light on some heavily debated issues of European politics, such as the implications of Europeanization and convergence. The study of elite convergence can, in fact, also be an useful tool to measure the degree of institutionalization (for this term see Polsby 1968) reached by a legislature like the EP at a time when European integration has reached a critical juncture after the rejection of the constitution by the French and Dutch voters. The first preliminary research results, still resting on a rather thin empirical basis, warn us against to high expectations regarding the development of a genuinely European set of representatives.
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