

A matter of identity: Measuring groups' agenda-setting power in a fragmented parliament

Abstract

One of the important means through which legislators convey their priorities is public speaking. Which topics do legislators choose to focus on in their speeches, and to what extent is their discourse affected by their group identity or identities? To address these two questions, the paper assesses legislators' speeches in the European Parliament (EP). It maps the political-discourse space in the EP by automatically topic modeling the discourse from the 6th EP session, and then quantifies the attention allocated to each of the topics thus identified. Next, a discourse regression-model is developed to estimate the net effect on the discourse of the various groups and subgroups operating in the EP. The results show that the political-discourse space in the EP is divided such that different groups control different agendas. Moreover, the discourse divisions in the EP are not aligned with EP ideological boundaries alone but are also determined by member-states – this, on issues that are pivotal to furthering their interests. EP parties, on the other hand, control what we term here ‘core European issues,’ i.e., issues that are central to the EP mandate. At the same time, as expected, Eurosceptic niche parties are shown to own matters related to the European identity, a peripheral and highly contested issue. All in all, we reveal that, while organized along transnational lines, the EP gives voice to groups with different political affiliations, transnational and national alike.

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In the political arenas of democratic states, groups play a critical role in legislation: Nearly all legislation in such countries is the work of groups rather than individuals. In the European Parliament (EP), especially, the decisions are reached in discursive group interactions. Effective collaborations benefit decision making *per se* (e.g., in co-decision procedures or legislative work of committees) but are also indispensable for individual legislators, who are affiliated with multiple groups and thus hold multiple identities. Understanding the nature and structure of discourse in democratic parliaments and, through this, identifying the groups that control the legislative agenda, is thus a key to the study of politics.

Who shapes and possibly dictates the discourse in the European Parliament? It is well documented that, in the national chambers of every member state, the discourse is shaped by political parties. One can correctly predict a legislator's vocabulary and prominent themes debated on the floor based on her party affiliation alone. But can one anticipate the discourse of European legislators if one knows their respective EP party affiliations? Insofar as an EP legislator holds multiple affiliations, could her national affiliation be relevant as well? In other words, what is an accurate predictor of an MEP's (Member of the European Parliament) discourse at the EU level: her national, EP or national-party affiliation?

In many of its frameworks, the democratic system endeavors to balance the representation of different groups in the legislative process. A salient example is a bicameral legislature, in which the lower house represents the people while the upper house – the states. Yet although, in the EU's institutional setting, the EP represents the numerical power of European voters while the Council – the member states, it would be logical to assume that EP legislators, who are affiliated with multiple groups, might espouse different group interests, and consequently, their discourse would reflect different group belongings. Information about which groups and subgroups set the EP legislative agenda and why is scarce. This is surprising, as the structure and protocol of the EP makes it possible to obtain such data. As already mentioned, MEPs are affiliated with several groups, including a country, a national party, and a European party, and therefore might identify with these three groups. This raises the possibility that legislators will forefront EU issues, but will also promote their country's interests. Moreover, integration processes have rendered the

EP an important legislative venue where decisions are made – and amply documented – on economic, immigration, police, home and foreign issues (Hix 2002; Jensen and Spoon 2010). Scrutinizing the EP legislative discourse on every given topic would reveal not only the group-identity it reflects (i.e., national or partisan) and the groups that control it, but also who dominates the legislation on European issues. This would, in turn, indicate whether, overall, the EP is run by transnational parties, or its decisions are largely determined by individual countries or national parties.

The first question that this paper explores is whether EP discourse reflects the considerations of national interests, national partisan belonging or supra-national (EP) affiliation. On the face of it, one would expect that the speeches delivered in the EP must necessarily reflect the platforms of EP parties rather than other identity groups (either the speaker's national belonging or national party). This supposition is supported by studies on voting patterns in the EP (e.g., Hix et al. 2007; Kreppel 2002) – a logical finding, given that the EP is organized along transnational party lines and not according to nationality or other group affiliations (Hix 2002; Noury and Roland 2002). In this regard, therefore, we anticipated that our findings would concur with those of previous studies. However, contrary to these studies' results and to our own expectations, we found that, in debates related to high politics, i.e., involving such issues as security and foreign affairs, it is the *countries* that exert a greater influence on the discourse as compared to *national* or *transnational parties*. Further investigation brought yet another surprise: The players that dominate the discourse and shape the agenda on these issues are not powerful states but weak and/or small ones.

Next, we examined on which issues EP parties control the agenda and which of these parties dominate the various topics. Drawing insights from agenda-setting and issue-ownership literatures, we set forth two hypotheses: Of the topics discussed in the EP, (a) niche parties are the ones that control the discourse on peripheral issues, and (b) large parties shape the discourse on core issues, i.e., issues that are central to the EP mandate. Results confirmed these expectations: Using estimates of legislators' preoccupation with various topics, we found that the two largest EP parties control the agenda on core issues such as the economy, trade and customs union. At the same time, the Eurosceptic EP parties were found to set the agenda on more peripheral issues such as European identity.

In summary, this paper assesses legislators' discursive interactions in order to gauge the agenda-setting power of various groups within the EP. First, we map the discourse

space in the EP by automatically topic-modeling the discourse in its 6th session. Second, we extract each group's net effect on the discourse, thus mapping the structural division of the political-discourse space in the EP, wherein different groups control different agendas. Finally, we demonstrate that, although the EP is organized along transnational lines, it gives voice to both transnational and national groups, irrespective of their political affiliation. Whose voice is the loudest depends on the issue at hand.

I. The quirks of the European Parliament: Coexistence of multiple groups

The European Parliament offers the ideal context to study interactions among elected officials and their respective European and national group affiliations. It stands to reason that, on the EP floor, an MEP will represent her EP party rather than her member state or the national party to which she belongs. Thus, Noury and Roland (2002) found that one could correctly predict an MEP's voting behavior in light of her European political group affiliation, while knowing her country of origin alone gave only a 10 percent chance of a correct prediction. For all that, EP party members are not penalized by their national electorate if they do not agree on key issues (Hix, Noury and Roland 2007), since their fellow citizens voted for a national and not a transnational party. Moreover, the European Parliament has become highly variegated in terms of its member states and participating MEPs: Its first session in 1979 numbered 410 MEPs from 10 member states and 51 different national political parties, while its 6th session, less than 30 years later, comprised 785 MEPs from 27 member states and 179 national political parties. Despite the heterogeneity of the European parties and the multiple affiliations of its legislators, a European party has at its disposal at least two 'whips' to enforce party discipline: it controls the allocation of speaking time and financial resources (McElroy 2001). These incentives appear to work: Hix, Noury and Roland (2005) noted that, despite the growing national and ideological diversity within the EP, EU parties are becoming increasingly more cohesive.

Between 2004 and 2009, these parties numbered eight, representing the entire spectrum of ideological leanings within the EP. Those of the MEPs who are not affiliated to any political group are called "non-attached" members. EP parties have the power to decide which issues will be discussed in plenary. They can also table amendments to committee reports to be put to the vote. However, an EP party has no authority to dictate

its members' votes. National parties, on the other hand, control the selection of legislators and influence their allocation to committees in the EP (Whitaker 2005). Furthermore, the elections take place in the national setting, with each country deciding on the procedure and characteristics of its elections. In this respect, national parties can also exert control on their representatives in Europe. Indeed, some studies have shown that it is the national party that controls its representative MEPs' conduct, not the European parties. For example, Hix (2002) divided the cohesiveness feature of voting patterns into transnational- and national-party components and demonstrated that the main factor behind voting patterns in the EP are national parties rather than EP parties. Thus, while the agendas promoted by most of the 785 MEPs are dictated by their affiliation to a European political party rather than by their nationalities, the role of national party affiliation has been found to be a powerful factor in regard to their voting behavior.

It has been shown (McElroy and Benoit 2010) that national and transnational parties belonging to the same party family share similar ideology and policy positions. As most national parties join congenial transnational party groups, forming a kind of aggregate agents, it is expected that, on most issues on the EU agenda, the policy preferences of a national party will be closer to parties from the same party family from other member states than to parties from a different party family from their own member state. For example, legislators from the Portuguese Socialist Party are expected to be closer in their ideology, and consequently also in their discourse, to legislators from the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party than to right-wing Portuguese legislators. It would seem, then, that the question of whether it is national or transnational parties that hold sway over the discourse in the EP is irrelevant. Nonetheless, we think that the relationship between national and supranational parties is worth examining, for a number of reasons. First, studies have documented regular defections of national party delegations from EP party lines in the European Parliament (Faas 2003; Hix 2002). Second, with the eastward enlargements, the transnational parties now include more party delegations from more countries, thus increasing heterogeneity and decreasing congruency between the national and transnational parties. Third, national political parties change their policy preferences on many issues, and the importance they ascribe to each fluctuates as well. These changes impact congruency between the national and the transnational parties and possibly also affect discourse, creating disparities on certain issues. Finally, it stands to reason that, on specific issues, legislators from the same country will share similar interests and views with

their fellow citizens to a greater extent than with co-members in their transnational political party.

EU member states differ in their status as net contributor or net receiver of EU money; in addition, their membership in the EU differs in length – some have been members only a few years while others were founding members of what was initially the ‘coal and steel community.’ These, in turn, might lead to different levels of identification with the EU (Oshri et al. 2016). Member states also differ in their perception of what EU membership entails, with respect to both identity and interests. For example, countries with a maritime border benefit more from EU subsidies for fisheries than those without. From a structural point of view, seats in the EP are allocated on the basis of each member state’s population, so that each of these wields different “power.” It is plausible that these differences, regardless of each legislator’s ideology or party affiliation, either inside her country or in the EP, will split representatives along national lines, and that this divide will be reflected in legislative talk. Such a case is especially likely when it comes to issues on which the state still operates as an important and independent actor, or wishes to retain its autonomy.

In sum, there are strong reasons to believe that transnational parties are the most significant group and dominant players in the EP and its discourse. However, as has been argued above, individual countries exert power on the agenda in situations where their interests are at stake. Metaphorically speaking, the venue for the contest over discourse that is played out among the three identity groups – countries, national political parties and European political parties – is the *legislator’s mind* (see Figure 1). Hence the title of this section: *The quirks of the EP*. Each legislator has three affiliations; s/he wears three hats, as it were, and chooses one to place at the top in any given discursive interaction. The question is whether these choices are rule governed, and if so, what is the nature of these rules.

II. Political agenda setting in the EP

We approach the issue of who dictates the discourse in the EP by examining two related but more specific questions. The first is, which group in the EP influences the discourse in a given set of circumstances. As indicated above, we examine three identity groups, i.e., countries, national political parties and EP parties, and their interactions and debates over

policy issues. These groups are presented in the inner triangle in Figure 1. In light of the discussion in the previous section, we can conceptualize these debates as involving two dimensions. The first is the *within-legislator variability*, under the rationale that legislators choose to identify with one of the three identity groups depending on the situational context and the issue at hand. Based on the discourse, we can determine which of the three identity groups is more salient in a legislator's speech for every topic discussed in the parliament. This, in turn, will enable us to understand if, overall, discourse in the EP is contingent on transnational party lines, and if so, to what extent the debate is controlled by EP parties.

At the same time, if each of the three identity groups (EP parties, national parties and countries) is considered in isolation, we can also posit that the debates in the EP involve a *between-legislator variability*. This approach targets public debates rather than those played out inside the legislator's mind, as explained previously. For example, if a debate is examined through the prism of legislators' transnational affiliations, it is possible to learn which EP party is dominant in a given issue. If the focus is shifted to countries, we can see which of the 27 member states participates in more debates and on which issue. In Figure 1, this logic is represented in the middle triangle. Such contestation between EP parties as agenda-setters is carried out in public since it is part and parcel of the parliamentary game. Put differently, in public, inter-group interactions, the various groups act as agenda setters. The second question we address is therefore, Which EP party determines the agenda on which topic?

Regarding the question, which of the three identity groups has a greater influence on legislators' discourse in the EP, we hypothesize that EP parties trump the other two. This assumption is anchored in the organizational features of the EP setting, in which conflict tends to arise among transnational political groups, and not over other group belonging (Hix et al. 2007). Thus, literature on voting behavior shows that voting patterns in the EP align, by and large, with EP party divisions. In other words, parliamentary work takes place mainly at the level of a transnational party. That said, the idiosyncratic character of this forum, in which legislators have at least three group identities, at times conflicting, complicates the question of which identity group controls the agenda. It would be plausible to assume that, on issues touching state interests, the agenda is controlled by countries. Countries also enjoy an institutional advantage over the other groups when it comes to issues with low EP mandate, i.e., those traditionally decided upon in the Council, such as security and foreign affairs.

Accordingly, our hypothesis on group identities and their influence on legislators' discourse in the EP is as follows:

H1. Institutional power. Of the three identity groups that influence the discourse in the EP (EP parties, national parties and countries), EP parties are the most dominant players.

In addressing the second research question, namely, which transnational political parties control the agenda, we rely on the literatures on political-issue ownership and agenda setting. The thesis expounded in these studies has traditionally encompassed the national setting. In what follows, we rework it to apply to transnational parties operating within the EP.

To the extent that an agenda is a set of issues arranged hierarchically in terms of importance, agenda-setting is a process involving competition for attention to the various issues (Dearing and Rogers 1996). The goal of issue-ownership studies is to explain party competition at the national level. The prevailing rationale is that parties do not compete through direct confrontation or by assuming diverging positions on an issue (e.g., Vliegenthar and Walgrave 2011), but rather by politicizing and selectively emphasizing issues advantageous to themselves (Petrocik 1996). Politicization can be achieved in a number of ways, one of which is saliency, in the sense that the issue should be high on the agenda not only of political parties but of the electorate at large. However, regarding the question of which EP parties set the agenda, this literature offers conflicting answers. Some studies found that large and mainstream political parties controlled the agenda, as these were central actors at the party level (e.g., Gailmard and Jenkins 2007); others attributed this power to opposition or niche parties, since these enjoy a structural advantage over government parties, which are constrained in their issue foci (e.g., Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2009), as explained below.

Our hypothesis regarding the agenda-setting at the supranational level draws on the above conflicting findings. According to the issue-ownership literature, parties politicize issues which they consider relevant to their own interests and which resonate with their ideological positions (Petrocik 1996). For instance, issues pertaining to the welfare state have often been appropriated by social democratic parties. Applying this logic of issue-ownership theory to the EP context, we hypothesize that the two largest parties in the EP, the center-right European People's Party (EPP) and the center-left Party of European Socialists (PES), would control the agenda on issues pertinent to the EP activity.

These two parties form what is known as the “grand coalition” – an alliance based on the common interest to create internal organizational structures within the EP that historically benefited these two-party groups (Kreppel, 2002; Kreppel and Hix 2003). While originating from competing party families, by cooperating with each other these two EP parties have, over the last decade, effectively minimized the role of – or altogether excluded – smaller party groups from the EP governing structures. We argue that this pact enables the above two parties to control the EP discourse on core issues and to exclude small parties that do not share their interests from participating in discursive interactions.

H2. Power to the powerful: On core European topics, the largest parties in the EP (European People's Party and the European Socialists) exert greater influence on the agenda than do small parties.

H3. Small and niche parties set the agenda on peripheral issues: Insofar as niche parties, by definition, concern themselves with a limited set of issues, sometimes even a single issue (Mudde 1999), we hypothesize that such parties would monopolize the EP debate over peripheral issues.

To conclude: Based on literature on voting behavior in the EP, we expect that it is EP parties, rather than countries or national parties, that dominate the discourse in EP. Also, drawing on insights from the literatures on political-agenda setting and political-issue ownership, we hypothesize that the two largest EP parties set the agenda on issues that are pertinent to the EP's work, while niche parties control the discourse on peripheral issues.

The following section lays out the structure of debates in the EP, the electoral fortunes of EP parties in the 2004 elections, and broad-brush descriptive statistics on the breakdown of speeches for each group.

III. Speeches in the European Parliament

Plenary discussions in the EP take place every month in Strasbourg/Brussels and last a week. While all the legislative work done in the committees and the political parties culminate in plenary discussions, speeches in this forum can concern both legislative and non-legislative reports. In plenary discussions MEPs express their standpoint vis-à-vis the Commission and the Council, and take part in EU decision making. For many years the

EP was a consultative body, but with changes in EU treaties, it has acquired an equal status to the Council in decisions pertaining to most areas of EU legislation (e.g., economic activities, energy, transport, immigration and environment). However, on certain topics (e.g., taxation) the European Parliament gives only an advisory opinion (in the so-called 'consultation procedure'). A MEP working in one of the parliamentary committees draws up a report on a proposal for a 'legislative text'; the parliamentary committee votes on this report, which is subsequently presented in plenary by the European Commission, the only institution empowered to initiate legislation. When the text has been revised and adopted in plenary, Parliament can be said to have adopted the position it promotes. If no agreement with the Council is reached, the process is repeated.

Table 1 presents information regarding the EP parties, their ideology and the number of seats they occupied in the EP. The two largest political parties are the conservatives (EPP) and the socialists (PES), which together hold more than 60 percent of the seats. The 6th plenary session had two presidents (on a rotating basis), Josef Borell (Spain) who came from PES and was the incumbent from 2004 to 2007, and Hans-Gert Pöttering (Germany), from the EPP, who was the incumbent from 2007 to 2009. This rotation of presidents in the same parliamentary session is a consequence of a deal made by the EP's two largest parties to establish a grand coalition. The radical left and right Eurosceptic parties are niche parties whose vote shares in the 6th session are the lowest; they are the *Independence and Democracy* party, the *Non-attached Members*, the *Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty* party and the *Union for Europe of the Nations*.

Table 2 presents the summary statistics of the speeches in the 6th European Parliament. Overall, more than 56,000 speeches were delivered in the plenary between 2004 and 2009, nested in 334 daily discussions. The speeches of Council and Commission representatives, who also debate in the EP, are omitted from Table 2 (they number 18,523). As shown in Table 2, on average, each EP party gave 8,823 speeches, but the median value stands at 11,749. In terms of the number of speeches, the most active of EP parties is the EPP, which is also the largest, while the least active is the anti-European *Independence and Democracy* party. If considered from the country-level perspective, the mean number of speeches per country amounted to 3,043, with Britain the most loquacious member (5,571) and Northern Ireland the least so (only 73 speeches). Looking at the data from the perspective of national parties, we find that the mean number of speeches per party is 740, and that the PSOE yielded the greatest number of speeches, while Plaid Cymru the least.

The average number of speeches per MEP is 109, with Mr. Josef Borrel (President of the EP) responsible for the greatest number.

IV. Text as data: Rough classification of the text into topics

This paper joins a growing body of literature that uses text as data in the study of parliaments (e.g., Laver and Benoit 2003; Martin and Vanberg 2008; Proksch and Slapin 2010; Proksch and Lo 2012; Zoizner et al. 2017), in preference to more traditional materials such as vote records and surveys (Ceron 2015; Hix 2002). For the study of the EP, relying on EP vote records would prove problematic on account of the paucity and selectivity of roll-call votes. Text, on the other hand, encompasses the total verbal output of each MEP speaker. Furthermore, text constitutes more nuanced data than vote records, as it allows quantifying an MEP's discourse and the salience of the issues discussed, rather than merely measuring whether s/he supports or opposes a certain policy. If an issue emerges as high in salience, this means that it has been put forward and debated by an MEP. Voting decisions, on the other hand, are the result of strategic calculations and may reflect an MEP's obligation to toe the party line. Thus, using text instead of voting patterns affords a more fine-tuned and reliable measure of an MEP's stance on important matters.

The EP politics is best unraveled by investigating the policy space, in the sense of the broad topics discussed. Which actors are pivotal in the decision making in every given case, and hence the likelihood and direction of a respective policy change, depends on a range of factors, including the number of policy dimensions that are debated; the salience (weight) of each such dimension in the parliamentary discourse; the way legislators divide their attention across the dimensions; and which groups lead the legislative discourse. Lately, academic spotlight has been increasingly directed to estimating the ideal positions of actors, whether individual legislators or parties, based on a variety of methods, such as scaling of roll-call voting data (Poole 2000), hand coding of party manifestos (Budge et al. 2001; Lo, Proksch and Slapin 2014), surveying expert opinions on party positions (Bakker, Jolly and Polk 2012; Gerrish and Blei 2011, Huber and Inglehart 1995; Laver and Hunt 1992), or computer coding of political statements (Laver 2001; Laver, Benoit, and Garry 2003). This article differs from previous work in its objective, which is not to locate MEPs or their respective groups on an ideological scale (e.g., left-right), but to identify the discursive topics that different groups put on the agenda and endeavor to push through the legislative procedure.

Our first analytical step was to coarsely classify the text (MEPs speeches) into topics. To this end, we used a modified version of a probabilistic topic-modeling algorithm, Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) (Blei, Ng and Jordan, 2003; Blei, 2012; Grimmer and Stewart, 2013; Jacobi et al. 2016). In political science, topics are usually identified by an “unsupervised” method of topic modeling, wherein the models employed infer the content of a corpus’s topics from the corpus itself; an alternative, “supervised” method is to define the topics ex-ante and allocate coded documents accordingly (e.g., Laver, Benoit and Garry 2003). The algorithm used here is a mixed-membership model, which assumes a distribution of topics within the *same* document. Conversely, in non-mixed-membership methods, a given document is regarded as containing a single topic and is relegated to a group of documents under the same rubric. In mixed-membership models, a topic is identified based on the co-occurrence of certain words across the corpus.

To increase the signal-to-noise ratio, we removed from the corpus all stop words (Blei, 2012) and speeches with fewer than 30 words, and also reduced words to their stems. Next, we trained an LDA model on a subset of the corpus and with a predefined number of topics (25 in the case in point) and then applied it to the entire corpus to extract the topics discussed. As Quinn and colleagues (2010) aptly note, unsupervised models require less work when identifying the topics discussed in text, but more effort to interpret their content. As the first step in interpreting and validating the model’s output, for every topic identified, we examined the most frequently occurring words, as well as several articles in which the respective topic appeared relatively dominant. We then labeled every topic according to its content. Of the 25 topics generated by this procedure we were able to devise appropriate labels for 24; these topics and their share in the total EP discourse are presented in Figure 3. Not surprisingly, the topics match most of the standard rubrics of EU policy and also align with the findings of academic research on the EP’s 5th session (e.g., Proksch and Slapin 2009). The two most salient topics are procedural, focusing on voting protocol and time devoted to questions following speeches, and on decision-making procedures, respectively. Next come issues related to the economy, such as *Internal market*, *Trade* and *Budget*. On the other hand, *European identity* emerged as a peripheral topic, surfacing only in 5 percent of all debates.¹ Following Quinn and colleagues (2010), we validated the LDA output and the human labeling by examining variations in the

¹ In Proksch and Slapin’s (2009) article on the 5th EU parliamentary session, European identity is not discussed at all.

prevalence of topics over time. By juxtaposing discourse against real events, we found that spikes in salience correspond with major EU landmarks (see Figure A2 of the appendix).

Table 3 illustrates and fleshes out the methodology employed in the analysis by displaying representative sentences for several topics. The sentences include a high proportion of the respective topics' most frequently occurring words and thus help in labeling the topics. Examples of four topics, *Foreign affairs*, *Human rights*, *European identity* and *Economic affairs*, are presented in Figure 2, which lists the most frequent 50 words for these topics. The next section introduces and elaborates our data, model, and approach to estimating the contribution of the various groups and subgroups in agenda setting.

V. Data structure, estimation strategy, and methods

We analyze data at the 'speaker-discussion' level, by taking as the unit of analysis a single speech delivered by a specific MEP at a specific point in time. Our corpus comprises 56,755 such units. As indicated, we removed speeches delivered by non-legislators (Commissioners, Council representatives, etc.), which left a total of 38,232 speeches. The 24 topics generated by the LDA analysis are dependent variables in the regression models. These variables are continuous, range from 0 to 1, and for each legislator, measure the percentage of every speech (in decimal fraction) devoted to a given topic. For instance, we may find that a specific speech given by Mr. Josef Borell (a row in our data) comprises 0.2 *Regulation*, 0.6 *Decision-making*, and 0.2 *Foreign Affairs*. The regression models gauge these proportions of topics for the three identity groups (country, national party, EP party), thus indicating which of these controls the agenda on each topic. The independent variables in our analysis are legislators belonging to the three identity groups. The regression models incorporate measures tapping the characteristics of the identity groups, as elaborated in what follows.

Independent variables: Three measures classifying national parties

To test our first hypothesis, which targets the effect of national parties on the EP discourse, we implemented three measures, created based on the ParlGov data. tapping a national party's position on European integration, as well as its location on the ideology (left-right) and the liberty-authority scale. Furthering European integration is a highly politicized and divisive issue which has been the focus of numerous studies on the EU (Marks and Steenbergen 2002; Tsebelis and Garrett 2001). Regarding the second measure, it has been argued that, since the EU increasingly authorizes policies related to domestic areas

traditionally decided upon by the nation state (such as social, environmental, economic, and trade matters), its politics should have evolved a left-right dimension. The above three 'positioning' measures were generated by using three different sources, all of them surveys: The Chapel Hill expert survey (2010), Benoit/Laver 2006, and Ray 1999. The survey questions measured how parties position themselves on the European integration, the general left/right, and the libertarian/authoritarian dimension, all three measures ranging between 0 and 10. The appendix displays a kernel-density histogram on which we plotted the above three dimensions, and which reveals a high correlation between the left-right and the liberty-authority scales (see appendix Figure A1).

Classifying countries and EP parties

In our 24 regression models, EP party membership serves as a dummy variable (one for each EP party), coded 1 if the MEP is a member of a respective EP party and 0 if s/he is a member of the *PES* party, which serves as a reference category. Countries are also dummied, with Hungary the omitted category.

Measuring control over the agenda

As already stated, in our regression models, each topic is a dependent variable. All of the 24 models are matched with ordinary least squares (OLS). Between 2004 and 2009, each legislator gave several speeches (number of speeches per MEP ranges from 1 to 535, see Table 2), and it would be fair to assume that these speeches are highly correlated. To address this correlation and control for an MEP's individual characteristics, we included a *legislator fixed effect*. Since speeches delivered within the same discussion are also expected to be highly correlated, we clustered standard errors by discussion.

The empirical analysis comprises several stages. First, groups' (countries, EP parties and national parties) standardized regression coefficients were compared, to identify the differences in the amount of attention devoted by each group to a given topic (DV). Since we control for legislators' group affiliations, these coefficients represent the groups' respective net effects on this topic. For example, the coefficient of the PPE in the *Human rights* discourse (DV) is the net effect of belonging to that group on the discourse. The results of the first stage are presented in Table 4 and in Figures 4 and 5. Second, based on the results of the regression analysis, we calculated the each group's mean predicted effect for each EP party on each topic. These results are displayed in Figure 6. Third, we proceed to estimating the predicted discourse share for each EP party. This calculation

takes into account both the relative size of each EP party and its representative legislator's propensity to focus on the topic in question (see Figure 7).

An explanation is in order at this juncture. Our regression results (24 models, one for each topic) offer ample information for concluding regarding agenda-setters and inter-group power relationships. The conclusions derived from the analysis here are based on a set of what appeared to be the most prominent topics (ones that the EU emphasizes most in its documents): out of the 24 models we cherry picked 5 such topics. It stands to reason that choosing and analyzing a different set of topics may have yielded different conclusions.

VI. Findings

The power wielded by identity groups in the EP

According to our first hypothesis, it is EP parties, rather than national parties or countries, that are expected to dominate the discourse in parliament. In this assumption, we relied mainly on the literature on voting behavior, to the effect that voting in the European Parliament has become more 'partisan' and less 'nationalist' or 'intergovernmental' (Hix, Noury and Ronald 2005). However, results presented in Table 4, which displays the OLS regression output for five topics, show that EP parties do not always control the discourse, the exceptions being the topics of *Foreign affairs and security* and *Human rights*.

Regression results for the above topics show that neither European political parties nor national parties lead that particular discourse. Rather, it is governed by countries. Issues pertaining to *Foreign affairs and security* and *Human rights*, which comprise the second pillar of the European Union structure (Common Foreign and Security Policy), have traditionally been resolved in the Council and not in the EP. Hence, the power of the EP to decide upon these issues appears to have been rather limited. And indeed, our regression models show that, even when discussed in the EP (in our corpus), these subjects were put forward and debated mainly by the countries (see grey cells for a significant effect). Recall that EP legislators have three affiliations (country, national party, and EP parties). For all that, the regression findings show that debates on *Foreign affairs* and *Human rights* are structured around and led by countries.

Figure 4 displays regression coefficients and their CIs, for EP parties, for four topics: *Foreign affairs and security*, *Human rights*, *Single market* and *Economy*. Results confirm

that EP parties have no significant effect on *Foreign affairs and security* and *Human rights* discourse, but do impact on *Single market* and *Economic issues*, both of which have been at the core of EP decision-making since the Union's early days. The proportion of speeches incorporating issues pertaining to *Economy* amounts to more than 10 percent of total parliamentary discourse (Figure 1). Figure 4 shows that the discourse on this topic is led by EP parties. Of the countries, only a few have a significant effect on that discourse (see grey cells, Table 4), while many do not; conversely, most EP parties do influence it.

Figure 5 examines which countries control the discourse on *Foreign affairs and security*. To our surprise, we found that greater control over the agenda (measured as the regression coefficient) is exerted not by strong countries but by weak or small ones – mainly Eastern European states that joined the EU as late as in 2004 or 2007. The literature on small states, and particularly on small states in Europe, offers at least two explanations why, in an organizational forum, major issues (in our models, *Foreign affairs and security*) are discussed by weak or small states. The first is that such countries perceive the organization as a platform and a means for enhancing their status in the international arena (Jakobsen 2008; Steinmetz and Wivel 2010; Thorhallsson and Wivel 2006). Eastern European countries face security problems and foreign policy dilemmas which differ substantially from those experienced by great powers. By influencing the actions of the great powers on which their security depends, these weak states are able, through their organizational membership, to further their security interests. Furthermore, they use the organization as a venue to construct a playing field governed by laws and rules, thus making military power less important (Beyer et al. 2006). Therefore, it serves these countries' vital interests to assume a meaningful role in setting the agenda on issues pertaining to security and foreign affairs.

The second explanation appeals to small countries' special needs and interests. Eastern European states share problems similar to those of Third World countries. They are also affected more directly and deeply than great powers such as Germany or France by security problems similar to those facing Third World countries. Thus, Russia is the most important energy supplier for some Eastern European countries; for others, such as Hungary and Greece, the immigration route to Europe starts at the Russian border. The organizational power in the international arena benefits these weak countries by providing them with opportunities to voice their concerns (Steinmetz and Wivel 2010; Wivel 2005), by reducing the importance of power asymmetries, and by facilitating conflict resolution. To conclude, results of the regression models on *Foreign affairs* and *Human rights* show that EP parties do

not always control the parliamentary agenda. This is especially so with regard to discourse that traditionally was outside the EP mandate. It is also evident that the agenda on the above issues is largely owned by weak states.

Assessing EP parties' agenda-setting powers in the EP

Building on regression results, we generated a second measure for groups' agenda-setting power. The measure estimates the mean predicted values for EP parties with respect to discussing economic (core EP) and identity (peripheral EP) issues. Using legislators' observed values and regression coefficients, this analysis first calculates the predicted value for each legislator to debate the issue at hand. It then averages the predicted values for all legislators in each EP party and generates the mean predicted value for EP parties to debate the issue. This figure can be understood as the prediction for the average legislator in each EP party to discuss the topic at hand. The results are displayed in Figure 6, which shows the mean predicted values for EP parties to discuss issues pertaining to *Identity* and *Economy*. Results show that legislators originating from the two largest parties (PPE and PSE) are expected to devote more attention to economic issues (black), while Eurosceptic and niche parties (ITS, IND, NI) are expected to devote substantially less attention to these issues. It is also evident from Figure 6 that the largest parties (parties' size is presented in grey bars) are expected to debate peripheral issues less (grey) while niche parties pay more attention to these issues. In fact, Figure 6 shows that niche parties are the ones that push peripheral issues to the agenda, in the sense that they control the discourse on these matters, and address the issue of *European identity* more than any other party.

With respect to *European identity* we found that a substantive part of the related discourse revolved around the treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe (TCE) and the failure to ratify it. One of the most representative sentences on this topic is brought below (and also in Table 3):

“Europe will not shake itself down into a core Europe and a fringe Europe, maybe; on the contrary, without a European Constitution, the European Union will degenerate into a patchwork Europe, confusing the public at home and destroying Europe's credibility in the eyes of the world.”

Eurosceptic parties, on the other hand, objected to TCE and politicized the failure to ratify it and related issues (Crum 2007) – a stance that is reflected in their discourse. In Figure 5,

we plotted the longitudinal raw data pertaining to the discourse share on this issue for two parties – the PPE, a mainstream party, and the Non-attached Members, most of whom held a radical right position at the EP's 6th session. It is evident that non-attached radical right MEPs almost always lead the discourse on *European identity* (black line), while the mainstream party devotes less attention to this issue (red line). The recent literature on the European affairs concurs that the success of radical right parties leads established parties to adopt more anti-immigrant positions. Our findings may shed light on this observation: By putting a new issue on the agenda and thereby raising its salience, niche parties can act as issue entrepreneurs, compelling established parties to change their stance regarding it. The graph also shows that spikes in the discourse on *European identity* occurred around the period when the TCE failed to be ratified (June 2005).

The above two measures for agenda-setting power operate at the (representative) legislator level. The third measure is different: It produces estimations at the party level. We multiplied the mean predicted values for all legislators in a given party by its relative size in the EP. For example, the mean predicted discourse of the PPE is multiplied by that party's relative vote share in the EP. The same procedure was carried out for each EP party. The results of the third measure, which are presented in Figure 8, account for the amount of attention legislators in a given party tend to devote to a given issue in relation to that party's size. Thus, for example, the relatively high amount of discourse on *European identity* predicted for Eurosceptic parties is balanced against their relatively small size in parliament. In effect, the third measure calculates each party's contribution to the total discourse with respect to each topic.

Each EP party's expected share of the discourse on European identity and Economy is plotted in Figure 8. Comparing results displayed in Figure 8 against those in Figure 7 makes it clear that Eurosceptic groups (NI, IND and ITS) do not contribute more than mainstream parties to the discourse on *European identity*; in fact, quite the opposite. According to raw data, the overall EP discourse on *European identity* constitutes 5 percent of the total discourse. The two mainstream parties, together, contribute 2.5 percent to the total discourse on this topic, and the combined share of the three Eurosceptic parties is 1.5%. Summing up the discourse contribution on this topic across all EP parties, we obtain a total of about 5%. In other words, our regression model predicts that 5% of parliamentary talk will be devoted to *European identity* issues – similar to that found in the raw data (see Figure 3). Thus, the third measure reveals that, even though PPE/PSE

legislators tend to devote less attention than Eurosceptic parties to the topic of *European identity*, these two parties, together, contribute the most discourse on issues related to it.

The choice among the three measures described above must depend on the object of investigation, that is, the aspect of the agenda-setting targeted by researchers. As already pointed out, the first (regression coefficient) and second (mean predicted discourse) measures estimate agenda-setting power at the level of the representative individual legislator, while the third measure estimates the expected discourse share of a given party as a whole. Our findings refuted the first hypothesis, to the effect that EP parties dominate the parliamentary discourse. Instead, countries emerged as controlling the agenda on high politics, albeit on issues that have traditionally been outside or on the margins of the EP mandate. The second and third hypotheses, which relate to issue ownership and differences therein between mainstream and large parties, on the one hand, and niche parties, on the other, were confirmed. Specifically, we show that large parties control the discourse on issues related to *Economy* (this was established using all three measures), while niche parties own the discourse on peripheral issues (this was established through the first and second measures). On this latter point, the third measure confirmed existing findings, namely, that niche parties, and especially those with radical right-wing leanings, have the power to arrange the parliamentary discourse to their benefit, compelling mainstream parties to devote discursive attention to issues that niche parties own.

VII. Conclusion

This article pursues two main objectives: the first is to identify the groups that shape and dominate the EP discourse, while the second – to investigate which EP party controls agenda on specific topics discussed in the EP. The analysis encompassed European legislators' speeches (n~38,000) delivered at the EP's 6th session (2004–2009). To the extent that European legislators are members not only of transnational party groups but also of national parties, and besides come from different countries, this paper analyzed the links between their different group-belongings and affiliations, on the one hand, and the nature of parliamentary discourse they produce, on the other.

Of what relevance is the question of how and according to which group lines discourse in the EP is constructed? First, the EP has become a powerful institution: Most of the issues vital to the European Union are subject to its legislation and approval.

Second, investigating parliamentary discourse and identifying groups that control its different topics may yield insights that are relevant to other parliamentary arenas as well. In national parliaments, too, legislators belong to different groups and espouse multiple identities; therefore they likewise may be subject to pressures from different interest groups and lobbies. Future research could extend the investigation presented here and adapt its theoretical rationale to other parliamentary arenas.

This article joins a growing body of literature on parliamentary activity and legislative discourse. From a theoretical standpoint, we explore hypotheses relating to a supranational forum by drawing on and reworking the existing research on political agenda-setting and issue ownership, which deals almost exclusively with political parties operating in national chambers.

The procedure implemented here involved indexing legislators' speeches from the 6th EP parliamentary session to identify each legislator's multiple group affiliations. We mapped the parliamentary discourse space in terms of the salience of different discourse dimensions, or topics. Next, we developed a discourse regression model to estimate the net effect of different groups on the discourse. Methodologically, the article offers three measures for estimating the attention devoted to the various discourse topics by legislators and groups by aggregating discourse quantities to three different identity-group levels, namely, EP parties, national parties and countries. The first two of these agenda-setting measures are at the level of the representative legislator, while the third is at the party level. Based on these measures and on the analysis of the results obtained, our first hypothesis proved incorrect. Specifically, we found that EP parties do not control all topics in the EP; countries also exert influence, albeit on specific issues, mainly those pivotal to furthering their interests. Our second and third hypotheses, however, were confirmed. Thus, we found that EP parties dominate issues that are at the core of the EP mandate (termed here "core European issues"). At the same time, as expected, niche Eurosceptic parties were found to control peripheral issues, in case in point, *European identity*.

It is noteworthy that legislators' multiple group affiliations in the EP find expression in the relations among its different parties. As already stated, we found that large parties promote the agenda on core EP issues, which typically concern furthering European integration, while Eurosceptic parties dominate discourse on *European identity* – a contested topic that is generally understood as not conducive to further integration.

Such a situation is characteristic for a fragmented parliament, divided along group-identity boundaries. All in all, we show that, as a supranational assembly organized along party lines, the EP is also influenced by voices from different national and political sectors. Put differently, legislators operate in a supranational arena, yet the nation-state speaks out loud and clear on matters of national importance. We have shown in this study that discourse in the European Parliament is shaped to a great extent by the identity of the actors that produce it, with different topics raised and promoted to the agenda by groups with different political ideologies.

While classic democratic theory posits that an informed and attentive electorate is a precondition for an effective democratic process, the fact of the matter is that the general public is for the most part ignorant about who their representatives in parliament are (Lau and Redlawsk 2001). To make reasonable voting decisions with minimal cognitive effort voters employ one of the most common heuristic “shortcuts,” basing their choice on the candidate’s party affiliation. As mentioned above, a candidate’s party affiliation is a crucial cue to his or her policy preferences. Yet MEPs’ behavior is influenced not only by the several identity groups to which each of them belongs. As this study has convincingly shown, in different issue domains a different identity-group affiliation comes to the fore, affecting MEPs behavior in a specific discussion. What kind of considerations, then, should guide European voters in choosing their representatives at the supranational level? This question poses a challenge to theories of democracy which is pervasive not only at the European supranational context but in the national settings as well.

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Tables and Figures

Table 1. EP parties in the 6th European Parliament

Party	Ideology	Number of seats	Abbrev.
European People's Party– European Democrats	Conservatives	288	PPE-DE
Party of European Socialists	Socialists	217	PSE
Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe	Liberals	104	ALDE
Union for Europe of the Nations	Natioanls	40	UEN
Greens–European Free Alliance	Greens	43	Verts_ALE
European United Left–Nordic Green Left	Radical left	41	GUE_NGL
Independence and Democracy	Anti-Europeans	22	IND_DEM
Non-attached Members	Independents	30	NI
Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty Group	Anti-Europeans	21	ITS

Source: European Parliament²

² <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/map.html>

Table 2. Summary statistics of the speeches in the 6th European Parliament (2004–2009)

	Mean	Median	Max	Min
Speeches per EP party	8,823	11749	13,608 (PPE)	78 (ITS)
Speeches per country	3,043	3175	5,571 (GB)	73 (NIE)
Speeches per national party	740	556	2,448 (PSOE)	1 (Plaid Cymru)
Speeches per MEP	109	73	535 (Josep Borrell)	1
Total number of speeches			43,181	
Total number of discussions			334	
Number of national parties			179	

Table 3. Examples of sentences representing the various topics examined

Labeled topic	Quote
Foreign affairs	“So far as the European Union's political and security dialogue with its Mediterranean partners is concerned, the Hague ministerial meeting confirmed the progress that has been made with cooperation in counter- terrorism, regional security and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, as well as European security and defense policy”
Foreign affairs	“Following the G8 Summit of Heads of State or Government, at which agreement could not be reached in relation to Kosovo, the EU Presidency called on participating parties to intensify their efforts in order to adopt a new UN Security Resolution at the earliest possible juncture”
European identity	“Europe will not shake itself down into a core Europe and a fringe Europe, either; on the contrary, without a European Constitution, the European Union will degenerate into a patchwork Europe, confusing the public at home and destroying Europe's credibility in the eyes of the world”
European identity	“Thanks to Solidarity, many people in Western Europe came to understand that the fundamental values revived by Solidarity had to become part of the fabric of the reorganised and reunited Europe”
Human rights	“Mr President, I would like to propose the following oral amendment: 'Calls upon the Chinese authorities to reveal the whereabouts of human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng and to release him unless he is to be charged with a recognised criminal offence; similarly calls for the release of Chen Guangcheng, who has helped citizens in their attempts to sue their local authorities for carrying out forced abortions and sterilisations, and of Bu Dongwei, who has been assigned to two and a half years of "Re- education through Labour" (RTL) and who is detained at an undisclosed location; therefore urges the authorities to ensure that all human rights defenders can carry out peaceful and legitimate activities without fear of arbitrary arrest, torture or ill-treatment and that they be given access to proper legal representation in the event of arrest”
Human rights	“The Commission follows the human rights situation in Russia very closely and, through the EU's political dialogue with Russia, as well as the regular human rights consultations, we are able to raise issues relating to democracy, human rights and the rule of law with Russia.”
Economy	“As well as the confidence problem, we have a problem of disparity of situations, which, since we have decided to have a single monetary policy, presents us with a challenge on which both the Commission and the Council and, in particular, the Eurogroup, are working: how to respond, within a context of budgetary discipline - we are going to discuss the reform of the Stability and Growth Pact in this Parliament in a few days time - and on the basis of coordination of economic policies, of the broad economic policy guidelines, to that disparity of situations in such a way that, by applying recommendations adapted to the specific circumstances of each of the national economies, the whole of the euro zone and the whole of the European Union can coordinate their economic policies and we can all achieve a better result.”
Economy	“The question I would like to ask very briefly is, if we are facing the interest rate rise that the European Central Bank is promoting, and you have explained that again this morning, firstly, why does the market not believe that interest rates are on the rise in the long term, over ten years? Why are long-term interest rates so stabilised if we are really facing the risks that you have laid out this morning in your speech and in your text? If there is an expectation in Europe of solid growth and significant job creation, why is the market so stabilized in the long term, Mr President?”

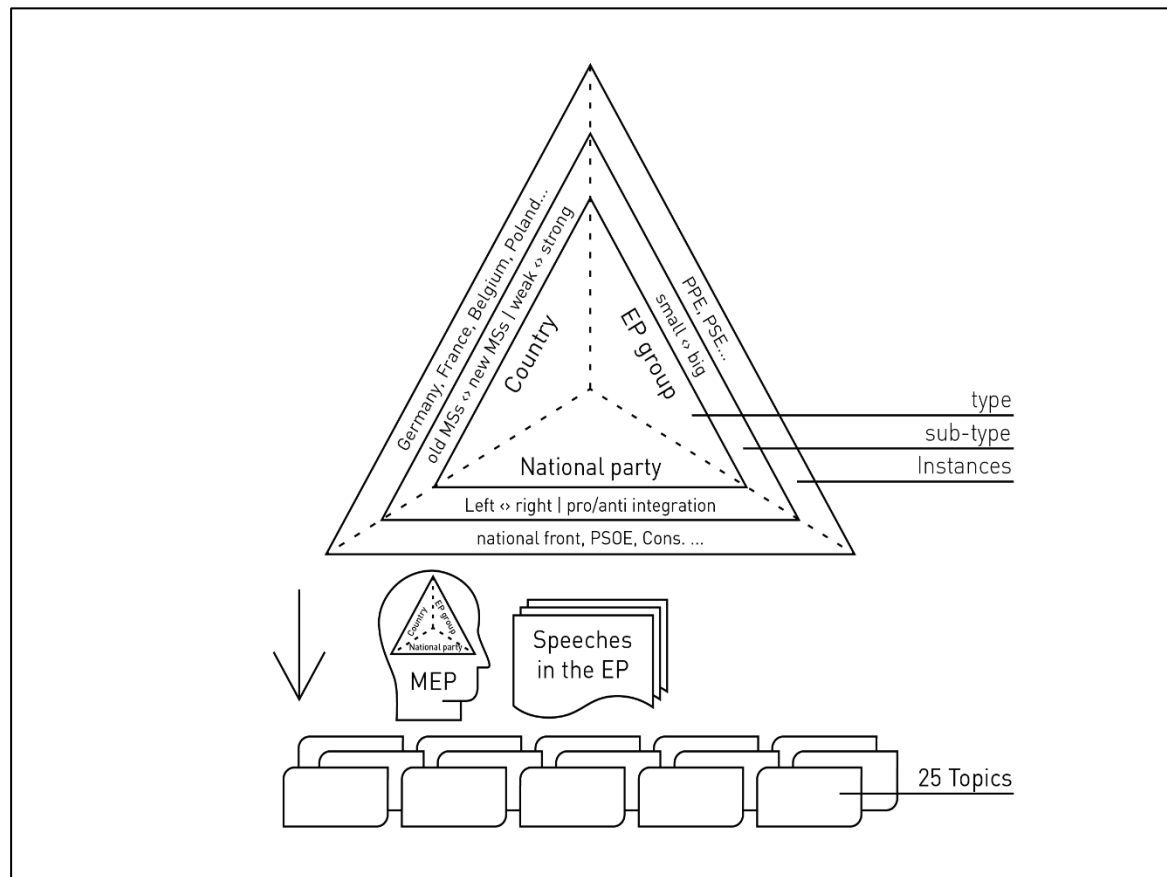
Table 4. OLS models predicting discourse on different topics, w/country, and party dummies

	(1) European Identity		(2) Foreign Affairs/ security		(3) Human Rights		(4) Economy		(5) Single Market	
ALDE	0.01**	(0.00)	-0.01	(0.00)	0.00	(0.00)	-0.02***	(0.00)	-0.00	(0.00)
GUE/NGL	0.02***	(0.00)	0.01	(0.01)	0.01*	(0.00)	-0.02***	(0.00)	-0.00	(0.00)
IND/DEM	0.05***	(0.01)	-0.01*	(0.00)	-0.00	(0.00)	-0.03***	(0.00)	-0.02***	(0.00)
ITS	0.08***	(0.02)	-0.02**	(0.01)	-0.01	(0.01)	-0.03**	(0.01)	-0.01	(0.01)
NI	0.03***	(0.01)	-0.01	(0.01)	-0.00	(0.00)	-0.02***	(0.00)	-0.02***	(0.00)
PPE	-0.01***	(0.00)	-0.00	(0.00)	-0.00	(0.00)	0.00	(0.00)	-0.01***	(0.00)
UEN	-0.01*	(0.00)	-0.01	(0.01)	0.00	(0.00)	-0.02***	(0.00)	-0.02***	(0.00)
VERTS	0.02***	(0.00)	0.02**	(0.01)	0.01***	(0.00)	-0.02***	(0.00)	0.01***	(0.00)
AT	-0.05***	(0.01)	-0.00	(0.00)	-0.00	(0.00)	-0.01	(0.01)	0.01	(0.00)
BE	-0.03***	(0.00)	0.00	(0.00)	-0.02***	(0.00)	-0.02**	(0.01)	-0.01	(0.00)
BU	-0.03*	(0.01)	0.01**	(0.00)	0.03	(0.02)	-0.02	(0.01)	-0.01*	(0.01)
CZ	-0.03***	(0.01)	0.03***	(0.00)	0.01	(0.01)	0.00	(0.01)	-0.01***	(0.00)
DK	-0.05***	(0.01)	-0.00	(0.00)	-0.01**	(0.00)	-0.02***	(0.01)	0.02*	(0.01)
EE	0.01	(0.02)	0.11***	(0.00)	-0.01	(0.01)	0.00	(0.01)	-0.02***	(0.00)
FI	-0.05***	(0.01)	0.01***	(0.00)	0.02**	(0.01)	-0.01*	(0.01)	0.00	(0.00)
FR	-0.03***	(0.00)	-0.01***	(0.00)	-0.02***	(0.00)	-0.00	(0.01)	-0.01***	(0.00)
DE	-0.04***	(0.00)	-0.00	(0.00)	-0.01***	(0.00)	-0.01	(0.01)	-0.01*	(0.00)
GR	-0.02***	(0.01)	-0.00	(0.00)	-0.01***	(0.00)	-0.01*	(0.01)	-0.01**	(0.00)
IE	-0.03***	(0.01)	-0.01**	(0.00)	-0.01***	(0.00)	-0.01	(0.01)	0.00	(0.00)
IT	-0.03***	(0.01)	-0.01***	(0.00)	-0.01***	(0.00)	-0.01*	(0.01)	-0.01	(0.00)
LT	-0.02	(0.01)	0.07***	(0.00)	0.00	(0.01)	0.03	(0.01)	0.00	(0.01)
LIT	-0.03***	(0.01)	0.06***	(0.00)	0.03***	(0.01)	0.01	(0.01)	-0.01***	(0.00)
LU	-0.02**	(0.01)	-0.01***	(0.00)	0.02*	(0.01)	0.05***	(0.01)	0.00	(0.01)
MT	-0.02	(0.01)	-0.01*	(0.00)	-0.01*	(0.00)	0.00	(0.01)	-0.02***	(0.00)
NL	-0.04***	(0.01)	0.02***	(0.00)	-0.01***	(0.00)	-0.01	(0.01)	0.00	(0.00)
PL	-0.01	(0.01)	0.02***	(0.00)	-0.01	(0.00)	-0.01*	(0.01)	-0.00	(0.00)
PT	-0.05***	(0.00)	-0.01**	(0.00)	-0.01***	(0.00)	0.01	(0.01)	-0.01*	(0.00)
RO	-0.04***	(0.01)	0.00**	(0.00)	0.02**	(0.01)	-0.02**	(0.01)	0.01	(0.01)
SK	-0.02*	(0.01)	0.01**	(0.00)	-0.01	(0.01)	0.01	(0.01)	0.00	(0.00)
SL	-0.02*	(0.01)	-0.00***	(0.00)	0.01	(0.01)	-0.01	(0.01)	-0.02***	(0.00)
ES	-0.04***	(0.00)	-0.01***	(0.00)	-0.02***	(0.00)	-0.02***	(0.00)	-0.02***	(0.00)
UK	-0.03***	(0.00)	-0.00*	(0.00)	-0.01**	(0.00)	-0.02***	(0.01)	-0.01**	(0.00)
CYPRUS	0.03**	(0.01)	0.02***	(0.00)	-0.02***	(0.00)	-0.02**	(0.01)	-0.02***	(0.00)
NIE	0.01	(0.02)	-0.00	(0.00)	-0.01	(0.01)	-0.00	(0.02)	0.01	(0.01)
SE	-0.08***	(0.01)	0.01	(0.00)	-0.00	(0.00)	-0.01	(0.01)	0.01	(0.00)
Gender (Male)	0.00**	(0.00)	0.01**	(0.00)	0.00*	(0.00)	-0.00**	(0.00)	-0.00	(0.00)
Left/right	0.00***	(0.00)	0.00	(0.00)	-0.00	(0.00)	-0.00	(0.00)	-0.00	(0.00)
EU anti/pro	-0.00***	(0.00)	0.00	(0.00)	0.00	(0.00)	-0.00	(0.00)	-0.00	(0.00)
Liberty/authority	0.00**	(0.00)	0.00	(0.00)	0.00**	(0.00)	0.00	(0.00)	0.00***	(0.00)
Constant	0.08***	(0.01)	0.00	(0.01)	0.02**	(0.01)	0.06***	(0.01)	0.02***	(0.00)
Observations	38,232		38,232		38,232		38,232		38,232	

Standard errors in parentheses. Reference and omitted category for countries: Hungary; for European groups: PSE

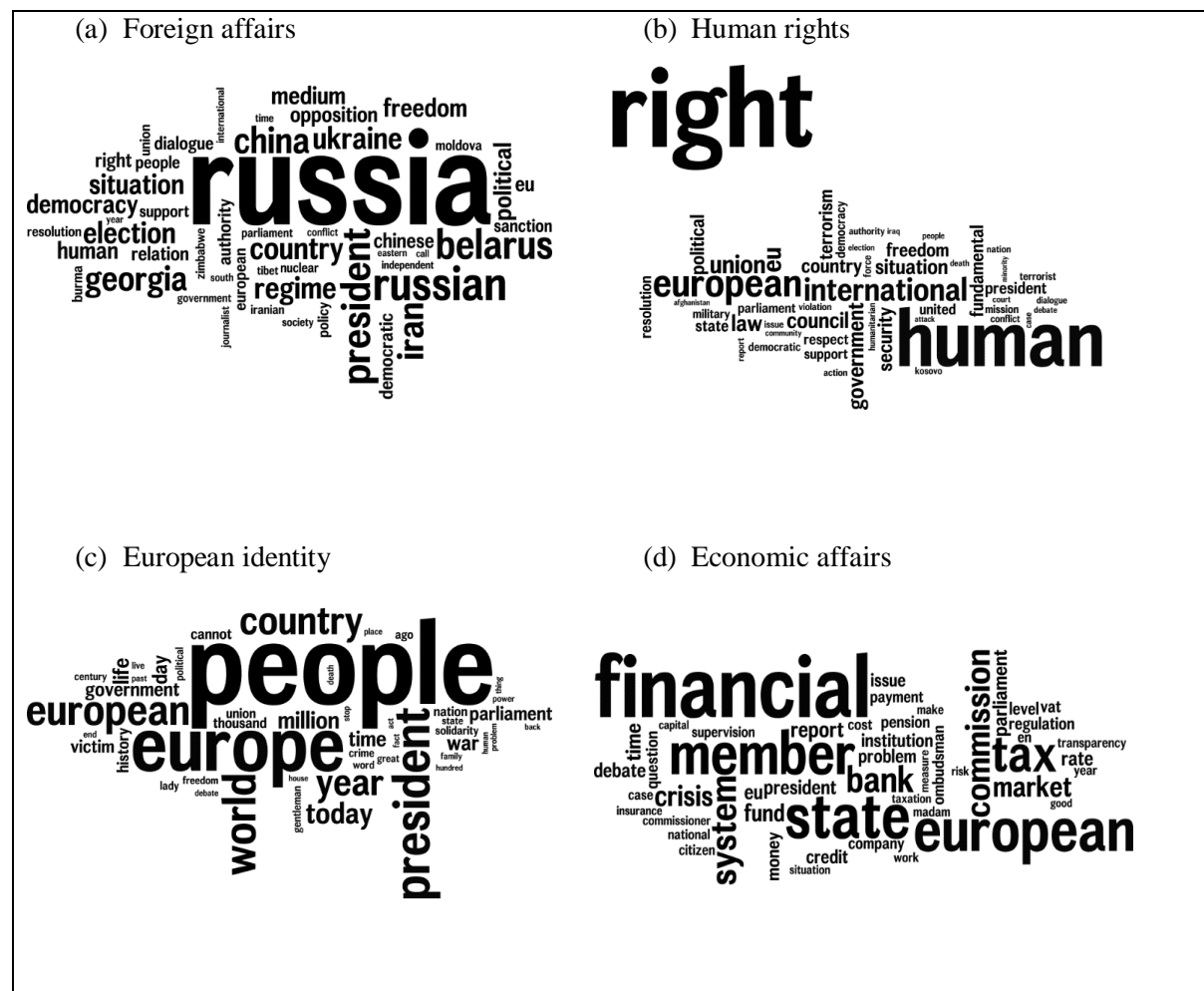
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

**Figure 1. Groups competing over the discourse in the European Parliament:
Illustration**



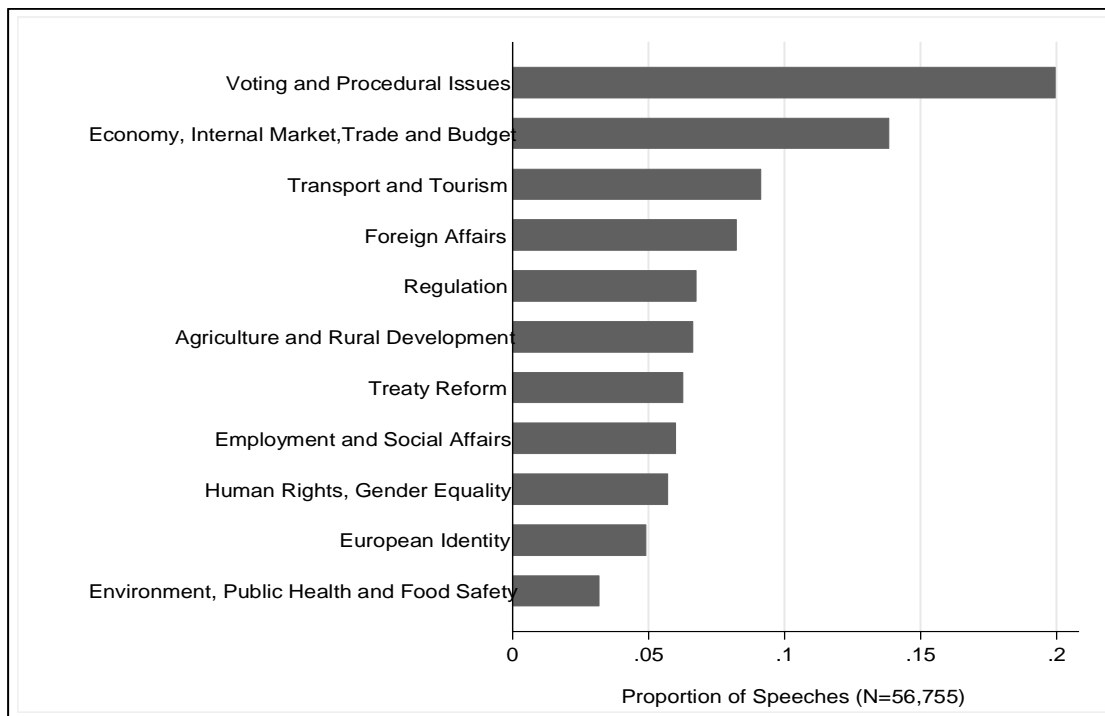
Notes. Figure 1 illustrates our two questions concerning the effect of groups on the discourse in the European Parliament. The three-layered triangle demonstrates the explanatory variables that are hypothesized to affect the EP discourse, which is classified into 25 topics that constitute the dependent variables. The inner triangle demonstrates that each MEP has three group affiliations: *Country*, *EP party* and *National party*. The first question is which of these identity-group affiliations come to the fore in MEPs discourse on different topics. The triangle in the middle presents the sub-groups; e.g., *EP parties* are subcategorized as small and big, while *Countries* – as weak and strong. The second question, represented in the middle triangle, relates to the type of EP parties that control the discourse in the European Parliament.

Figure 2. Word clouds of topics



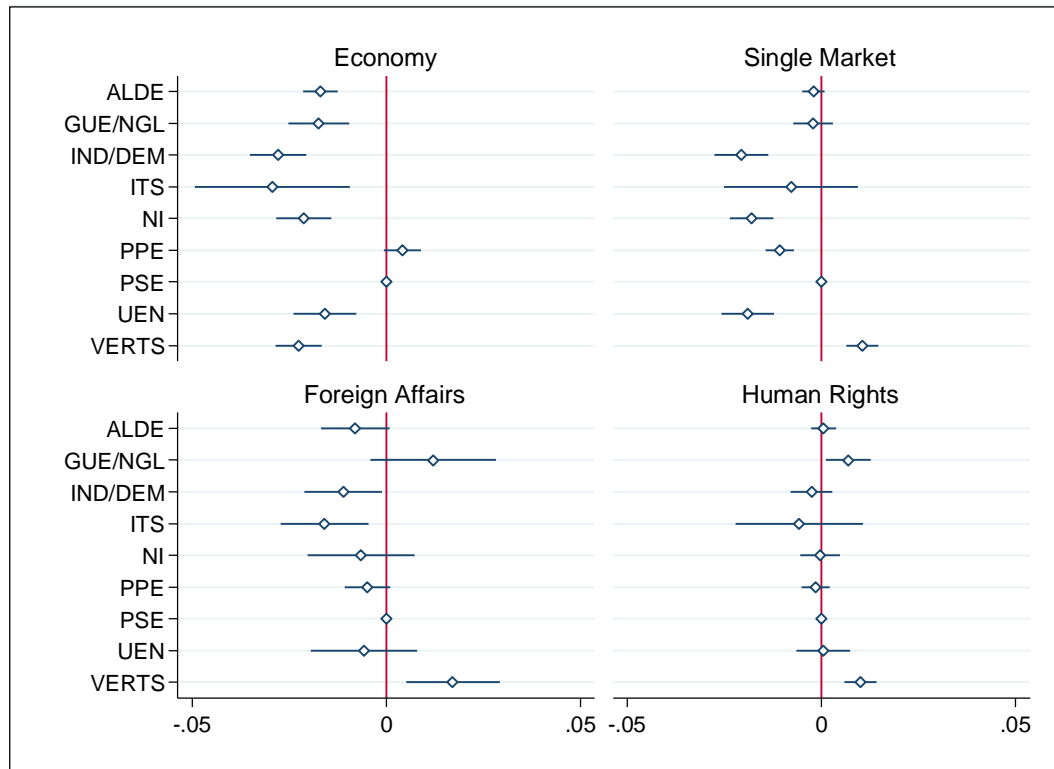
Note. These are the top 50 words for 4 out of 25 topics computed using LDA for speeches in the 6th EP plenary session. Size of words represents their probability within a given topic.

Figure 3. Speeches by topics, 6th European Parliament (2004–2009)



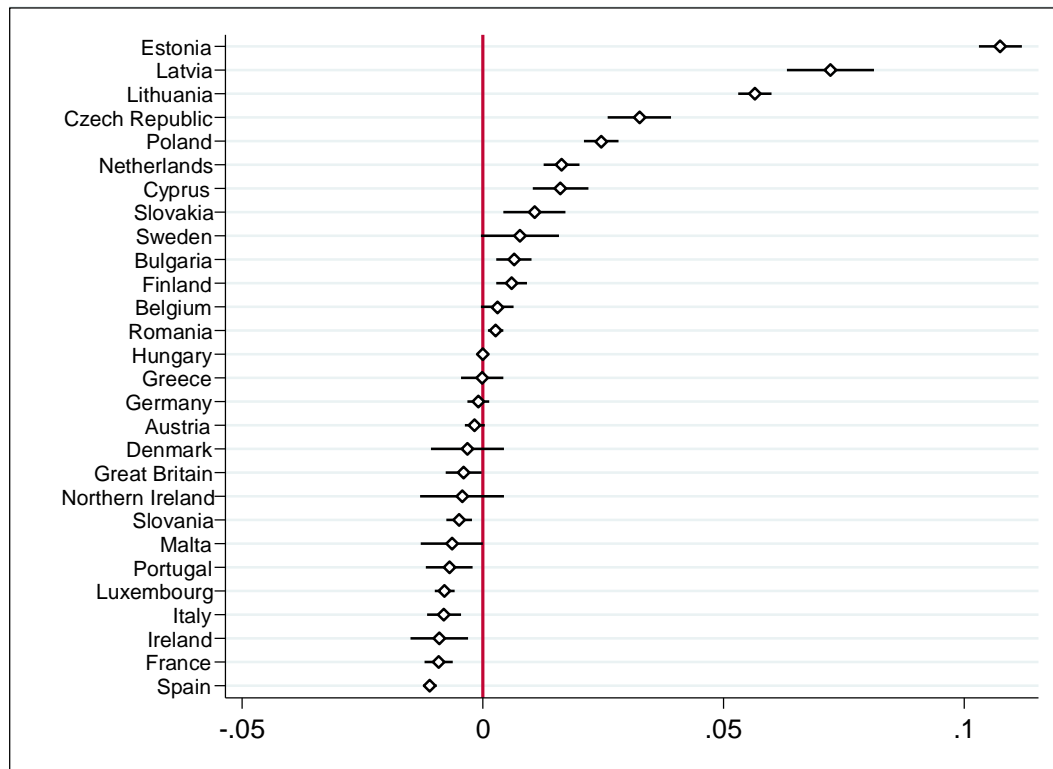
Note. This Figure shows topics identified by our LDA model in the corpus of 56,755 speeches given in the 6th European Parliament. The two largest categories are *Voting and Procedural Issues* and *Economic Issues*. The category of *European Identity* is one of the less salient topics in the corpus.

Figure 4. The effect (displayed as regression coefficients) of European groups on discourse in the EP (2004–2009)



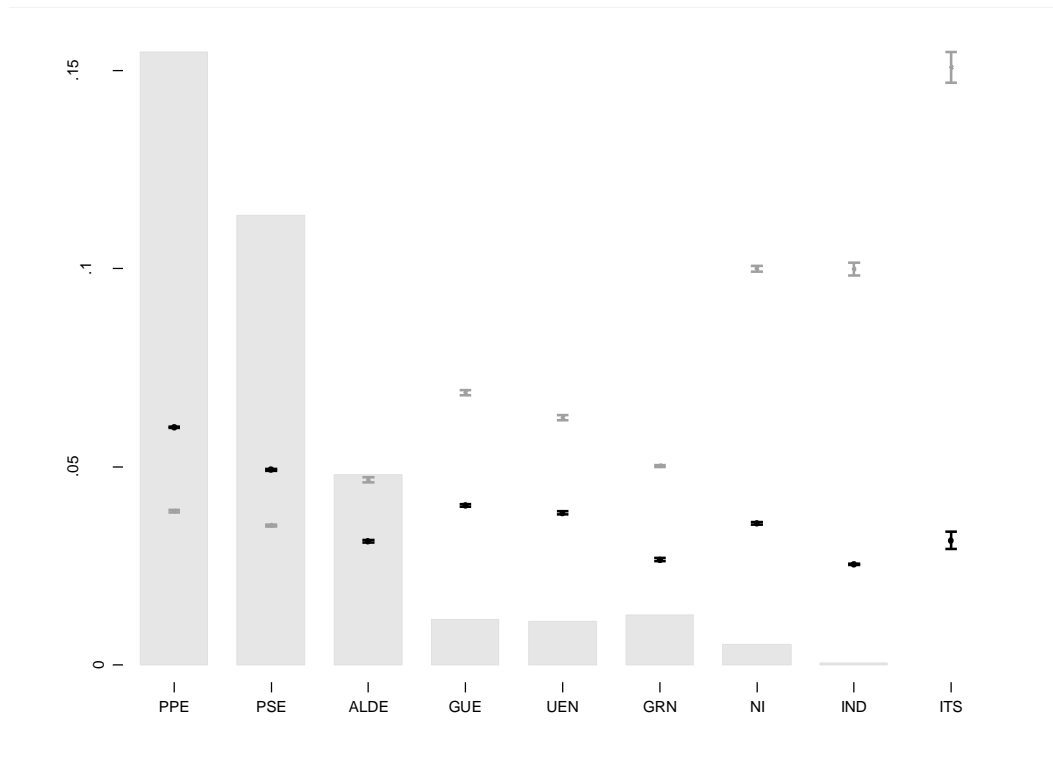
Note. The effects and CIs are taken from Table 4; they represent regression coefficients of EP parties on different discourse topics. The reference category in these regressions is the PSE European party. It is shown that, while European parties have almost no impact on the discourse on *Foreign affairs* and *Human rights*, they do have an effect on issues related to *Economy*.

Figure 5. The effect (displayed as regression coefficients) of countries on the discourse on *Foreign affairs and security* issues



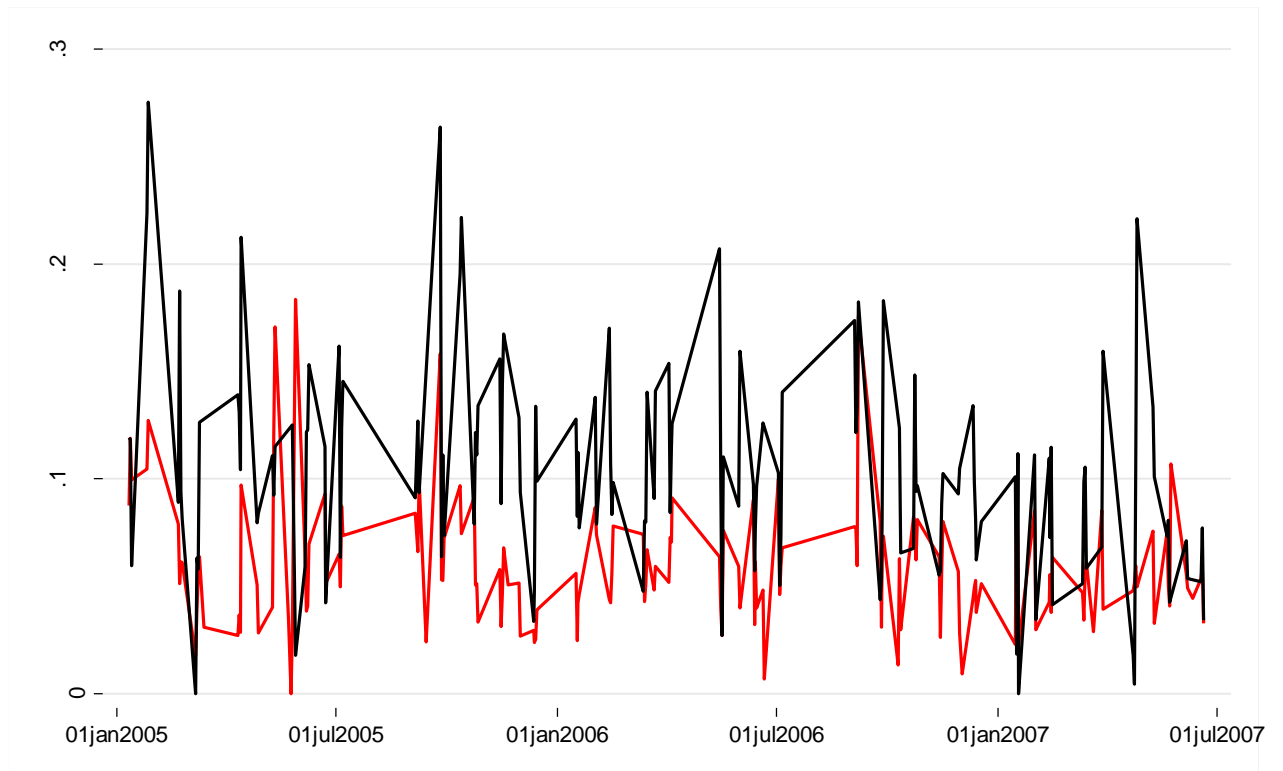
Note. Germany is the omitted category. The black lines indicate two standard error intervals around the estimates. By and large, results show that East European countries lead the discourse on *Foreign affairs and security*, while old member states have less effect on these issues or refrain from discussing them altogether. Debates on *Foreign affairs* in the EP encompass such issues as the European security and defense policy, the Mediterranean region (most notably, the Barcelona process, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict), relationship with Russia, conflict prevention in Kosovo, Darfur and Iraq, ACP-EU cooperation (Cotonou Agreement), immigration and neighborhood policy.

Figure 6. Predicted (mean) values for European parties to discuss issues on *European identity* (grey) and *Economy* (black)



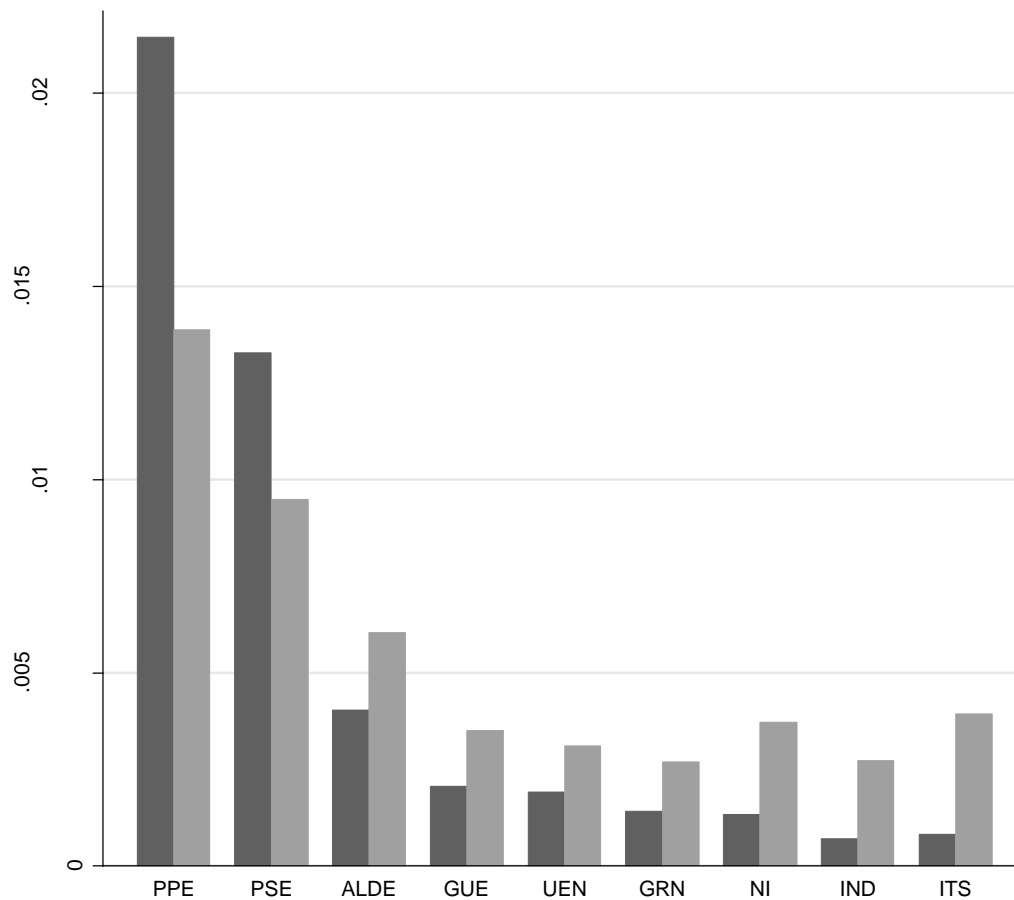
Note. Fig. 6 displays the predicted discourse, as well as CIs for the mean legislator, for each party. Results show that the two biggest EP parties, PPE and PSE, devote more discussion to issues related to *Economy* (presented in black) and less so to *European identity* matters (presented in grey). It is also evident that *European identity* is discussed more by the three Eurosceptic parties and nonaffiliated legislators (NI, IND, and ITS), while issues of *Economy* less so. Grey bars represent parties' relative size in the EP.

Figure 7. Proportion of the topic of *European identity* in the discourse of PPE and NI parties over time



Note. Fig.7 is a time series plot of the proportion of *European identity* discourse produced by the PPE and NI European groups. Black line represents the discourse for the NI party, while red line – for PPE party.

Figure 8. Parties' expected share of discourse on issues related to *Economy* and *European identity*



Note. Fig. 8 presents the expected share of discourse on issues related to *Economy* (dark-grey bars) and *European identity* (light-grey bars) for each European party. The expected discourse share is calculated by multiplying the predicted mean value for all legislators in a given party by the latter's relative size in parliament, estimated by its vote share. To illustrate, the predicted discourse of a representative PPE legislator is multiplied by the PPE's relative vote share in parliament.

Appendix

Table A1. Correlation Matrix

	Liberty/authority	Left/right	EU anti/pro
Liberty/authority	1		
Left/right	0.72*	1	
EU anti/pro	-0.26*	0.04*	1

Note. Table A1 is a matrix of bivariate correlations of three national-party categories. It demonstrates that the liberty-authority measure and the left-right scale are closely correlated, but the left-right and EU anti/pro measures are only barely so. The reason is that Eurosceptic parties belong to both the radical right and radical left.

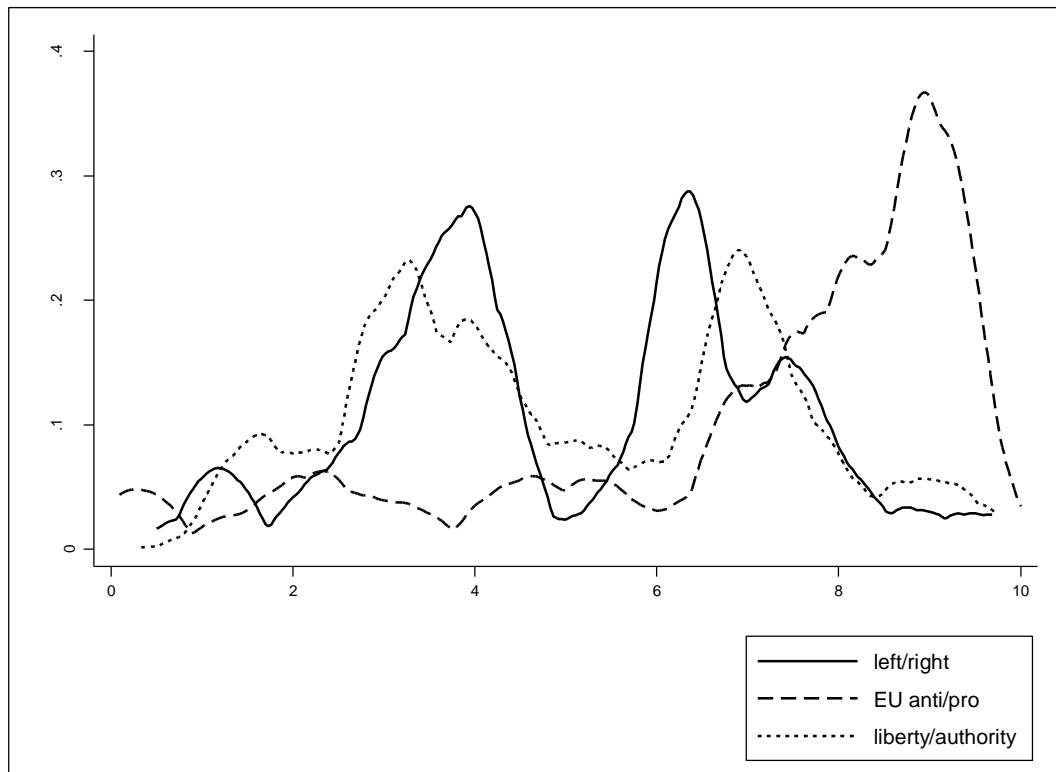


Figure A1. Kernel density plot of the three measures for national parties' ideology: left/right, liberty/authority, and EU anti/pro scales.

Note. The X axis is the scale (0–10) of the three measures. The Y axis represents the proportion of parties. The two measures relating to left/right and liberty/authority are strongly mutually correlated; on the other hand, the correlation between the first two measures and the third measure (EU anti/pro) is low.

Figure A2. Predictive validity for three of the topics

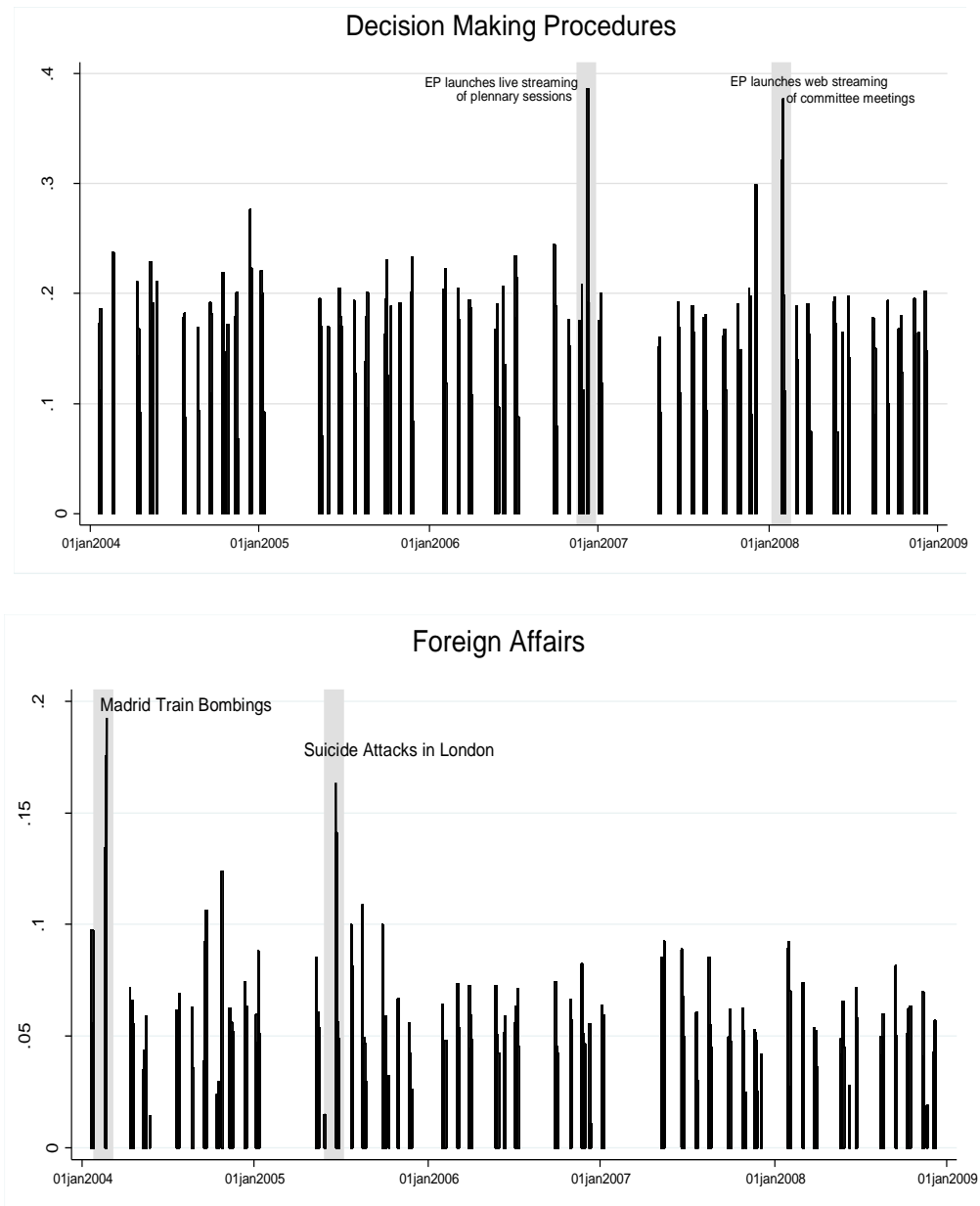


Figure A3. This graph plots the percent of speeches given each day on two topics: *Decision-making procedures* (top plot), and *Foreign affairs* (bottom plot), with the date plotted on the horizontal axis. The two panels show that external events predict swings in the attention MEPs devote to the respective topic. For example, the bottom plot shows that discourse surged upward at the time of terror attacks in Europe. The procedure of scrutinizing discourse and juxtaposing it against real events makes it possible to validate the topic, such that external events can explain a sudden increase in attention to a topic (Grimmer 2010; Quinn et al. 2010). This is also a way of validating our LDA model and the human labeling of topics.