



Changing the output: The logic of amendment success in the European Parliament's ENVI Committee

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Steffen Hurka

University of Konstanz, Germany

Abstract

This study tests three hypotheses on factors driving the success and failure of amendments in the European Parliament's ENVI committee. The hypotheses, which are derived from different theories of legislative organization, are tested with an original dataset containing 550 amendments from 55 ENVI members. Contrary to existing empirical evidence on the structure of political conflict in plenary, the results suggest that a committee member's general ideological orientation on the left-right dimension is not decisive for his prospects to change the committee output. Instead, it seems like ENVI members with ties to green interest groups play a greater role in the formulation of environmental policies than committee members without comparable affiliations. Finally, the empirical evidence indicates that rapporteurs are only rarely challenged successfully by competing amendments. However, they are often willing to accept compromises.

Keywords

Amendments, committee decision-making, European Parliament, legislative organization, multinomial regression, rapporteurs

Introduction

In 2005, the Italian Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Guido Sacconi drafted his first reading report on the new European Chemicals Regulation (REACH) on behalf of the institution's Committee on the Environment, Public

Corresponding author:

Steffen Hurka, Chair of Comparative Public Policy and Administration, University of Konstanz, P.O. Box D 91, Konstanz 78457, Germany.

Email: steffen.hurka@uni-konstanz.de

Health and Food Safety (ENVI). The report comprised 68 pages when the rapporteur presented it to the committee for consideration. After the presentation, the committee members tabled an unprecedented amount of 2289 amendments, listed on a total of 735 pages. After a long and tough amendment phase in the committee, the finalized report, which was forwarded to the EP plenary, only remotely resembled the initial draft report Sacconi had proposed. The committee members had altered the committee position to a significant extent. This study is the first systematic attempt to identify the factors that help to explain which types of legislators and amendments are likely to prevail in this very important phase of decision-making within the European Parliament (EP).

So far, EP research on the committee level has mainly looked at the allocation of procedural power. Most importantly, scholars have developed models for the distribution of rapporteurships (Benedetto, 2005; Hausemer, 2006; Hoyland, 2006; Hurka and Kaeding, 2012; Kaeding, 2004, 2005; Mamadouh and Raunio, 2003; Yoshinaka et al., 2010), committee assignments (Bowler and Farrell, 1995; McElroy, 2006; Yordanova, 2009) and the influence of interest groups (Bouwen, 2004; Marshall, 2010) and national party delegations at the committee stage (Whitaker, 2001, 2005). Those studies strongly enhanced our understanding of the political process in the EP's committees, but they largely left the legislative content aside. Yet, in order to be able to assess and compare the political impact of different Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), it is essential to shift the analytical focus to concrete legislative activity instead of equating procedural power with actual influence. This can be considered a logical next step in the research program on the internal dynamics of the EP.

Individual MEPs play a central role at the committee stage. This is not only true for procedurally powerful actors like rapporteurs and group coordinators, but also for regular committee members, who enjoy the privilege to challenge the state of affairs and exercise control over the rapporteur by tabling amendments. Accordingly, the amendment can be described as the most valuable tool at the disposal of any individual committee member. Even though finalized committee reports can still be changed by the plenary as a whole, "typically, although not universally, plenary follows the substantive position of the committee in question" (Farrell and Héritier, 2004: 1196). Therefore, committees are in a strong position to set the terms of debate on a given policy proposal. Surprisingly, however, even though the success and failure of amendments can be thought of as an indicator for the actual power of individual MEPs in the legislative process, amendments at the committee stage have never been analysed systematically. This article aims to address this gap by putting the analytical focus explicitly on amendments tabled before the report is finalized and sent to plenary for consideration. Accordingly, this study is a micro-level complement to studies that deal with amendment success on the level of EU institutions (e.g. Burns et al., 2012; Finke, 2012; Kreppel, 1999; Tsebelis and Kalandrakis, 1999). Those studies more or less analyse the EP as a unitary actor and attempt to explain adoption rates by the other institutions of amendments the EP has already agreed upon internally. This study seeks to

contribute to our understanding of how the EP position is shaped in the institution's legislative workshops.

In this contribution, I examine three hypotheses on the legislative success of individual MEPs in the EP's ENVI committee: the "*median hypothesis*", the "*interest group hypothesis*" and the "*rapporteur hypothesis*". The hypotheses are tested by means of multinomial regressions using an original dataset of 550 amendments tabled by 55 different MEPs to all ENVI co-decision reports drafted between 2004 and 2009. ENVI was chosen for two reasons: first, the committee enjoys substantial powers under the co-decision procedure, which has become the "ordinary legislative procedure" with the Lisbon Treaty. Accordingly, the procedure will become more regular in the future also in other committees. Second, membership in ENVI is associated with high political prestige (Kaeding, 2005) and as a result, ENVI is the second largest committee in the EP. It might be the case that membership prestige is a relevant factor for amendment success when different committees are compared. However, the empirical test of this possibility cannot be carried out in this study. Despite this qualification, the hypotheses tested in this article are derived and formulated in a way that allows future research to test their validity also for other EP committees.

Theory and hypotheses

In this section, I develop three research hypotheses. The *median hypothesis* is presented as an implication of the informational theory of legislative organization (Gilligan and Krehbiel, 1990; Krehbiel, 1990, 1991), whereas the *interest group hypothesis* is derived from the competing distributional theory (Shepsle and Weingast, 1987). Finally, the *rapporteur hypothesis* tests the extent to which rapporteurs enjoy gate-keeping powers over their draft report.

The relevance of the median

According to the informational logic of legislative organization, parliaments create committees as microcosms of themselves (Gilligan and Krehbiel, 1990; Krehbiel, 1990, 1991). The plenary's motivation to set up such representative committees is grounded in the expectation that the committees' output should be located at the plenary median. If this logic holds, the plenary can trust that if it had formulated the policy itself, it would have produced the same policy output. Furthermore, by setting up representative committees, the plenary is able to save time and thereby benefit from efficiency gains. With regard to the ENVI committee, McElroy (2006: 25) maintains that "despite conventional wisdom, the Environment Committee is no more left-wing or green than the Assembly taken as a whole". Also Kreppel and Tsebelis (1999: 954) subscribe to this view by arguing that "committees have the same ideological composition as the whole EP". In addition, as we shall see in the empirical section, ENVI's membership does not differ significantly from the plenary when we look at the distribution of left-right positions of its full members.

Therefore, at least with regard to general ideological orientations, the assumptions of the informational logic are fulfilled in ENVI. Given those similarities in ideological make-up, we should accordingly expect similar dynamics at the plenary and committee level of the EP.

But is the left vs. right dimension relevant to decision-making in the EP? Different analyses of EP voting records on the plenary level have for the most part settled on the same result: the EP has become a truly supranational institution with members who compete for the best policy along ideological – not territorial – lines (Attinà, 1990; Hix and Noury, 2009; Hix et al., 2007). More specifically, the political contest in the plenary is largely carried out along the traditional poles of left vs. right (Hix, 2002; Hix and Noury, 2009; Hix et al., 2003, 2007; Lindgren and Persson, 2008; Scully, 1998). But despite those widely accepted findings on the structure of political competition in the EP plenary, it has so far never been questioned to which extent they also apply to the committee level. Yet, exploring whether ideology figures prominent in the *formulation* of legislative texts should be at least as instructive as exploring whether ideological orientations play a role in *final votes*. After all, final votes on the consolidated texts are only the end of a lengthy political process that largely takes place in the committees of the EP, which have been called the “legislative backbone keeping the institution upright” (Neuhold, 2001).

Given these observations, we should expect left-right dynamics to play a role when EP committees go about their business. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that more extreme committee members should be less influential in the formulation of the committee output than mainstream MEPs. More precisely, if ideology is the decisive factor at the committee level in the EP, members closer to the committee’s median position should be able to exert more influence over the committee output than members who are located at the margins of the political left-right spectrum. The combination of the two arguments outlined above leads to the first research hypothesis. If (a) the traditional left-right dimension structures political competition in the EP plenary and if (b) the committees are representative microcosms of the full chamber in terms of left vs. right, we should observe that the left-right position of individual committee members is a determining factor for the MEPs’ influence over the committee’s policy output. The corresponding hypothesis reads:

H1 (Median hypothesis): The closer a committee member is located at the committee’s median position on the left-right scale, the higher the committee member’s amendment success.

Interest group influence

As suggested above, the argument that EP committees are generally representative of the plenary as a whole is contested. While the broad left-right orientations represented in the EP committees are similar to those of the plenary as a whole, a range of scholars hold that the committees’ working procedures and assignments are impacted by specialization effects (Kaeding, 2004, 2005; Yordanova, 2009).

In fact, recent research suggests that instead of being representative microcosms, the composition of many EP committees follows the distributional logic of legislative organization (Shepsle and Weingast, 1987). According to this logic, legislators seek membership in committees which cover issues that are of particular concern for their constituents. In practice, this implies for example that legislators from coastal areas should be interested to serve on the fisheries committee and legislators from rural areas should seek membership in the agricultural committee. The underlying causal mechanism for this logic of legislative organization is the “electoral connection” between constituents and legislators (Mayhew, 1975), according to which legislators have a natural incentive to seek committee assignments, which help them to reap benefits for their constituents in order to increase their re-election prospects. Yet, with regard to the EP, the empirical relevance of the “electoral connection” has been refuted long ago, mainly because European elections are second-order contests in which voters decide based on national issues and not in response to their MEP’s performance in Brussels (Reif and Schmitt, 1980). Nonetheless, MEPs self-select into certain committees, but they mainly do so based on their affiliations to relevant interest groups (Yordanova, 2009).

With regard to ENVI, especially legislators with a strong interest in environmental protection seek membership (Kaeding, 2004, 2005; Yordanova, 2009). Conversely, MEPs with an industry or farming background tend to *avoid* the ENVI committee and seek membership in committees with jurisdiction over economic or agricultural matters. Those patterns contribute to an imbalance with regard to the interests represented in the various committees of the EP (Kaeding, 2004, 2005; Yordanova, 2009). As a result, the committees of the EP are not representative of the full chamber. Instead, if the committee assignment process indeed follows the distributional logic of legislative organization, many committees are composed of an agglomeration of “high demanders” (Kaeding, 2004) who share similar policy goals, *regardless of their partisan and general ideological background*.

This implies that the committee’s policy output does not necessarily have to be in line with the preferences of the full chamber. On the contrary, if the distributional logic holds, the committee output can at times be severely biased into a certain direction. Yet, the output should only be biased if interest groups enjoy privileged access to the relevant committee members.¹ Marshall (2010) has demonstrated that this is the case especially during the amendment phase at the committee level. Interest groups provide their affiliated MEPs with their positions on the respective policy issue and thereby seek to exert influence over the policy’s direction. Even more importantly, he shows that the amount of attention an MEP receives from lobbyists is strongly related to the MEP’s perceived legislative influence at the committee stage. In a case study on business lobbying in the EP’s Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs (ECON), Bouwen (2004) demonstrates that lobby groups seek access to individual MEPs especially at the committee stage because the hurdles to alter the policy are much lower than in plenary. Yet, access should not be equated with influence. So far, all empirical research on EP committee assignments stops short of asking the “so-what-question”: If a

committee is composed of preference outliers, what, if any, are the implications for the legislative output?

With regard to ENVI, MEPs who care strongly about environmental protection and are associated with the corresponding interest groups tend to join this committee in disproportionate numbers (Yordanova, 2009). Accordingly, one should expect that those preference outliers have a profound impact on the policy output. As Yordanova (2009: 262) points out, “it is not unreasonable to expect that if, for example, the Environment committee is staffed with members with green ties it may propose policy in the direction of more environmental regulation than is preferred by the EP median.” While this is a reasonable expectation, it has yet to be validated empirically.

In combination with the argument that interest groups play a central role during the committee amendment phase by providing their MEPs with their views on the draft report (Bouwen, 2004; Marshall, 2010), I expect that MEPs who are affiliated with green interest groups should enjoy an advantage during the committee amendment phase. Yet, ENVI not only deals with environmental legislation but also with matters of public health and food safety. In those areas of public policy, there is no reason to expect that ties to green interest groups or have the same effect on amendment success as in environmental legislation.

H2 (Interest group hypothesis): In the ENVI committee, an amendment tabled to environmental legislation should be more successful if the amendment’s sponsor has ties to green interest groups than if the sponsor lacks such ties.

Are rapporteurs the gate-keepers?

In the past, legislative success in the EP was implicitly equated with the allocation of influential positions, most importantly rapporteurships (Benedetto, 2005; Hausemer, 2006; Hoyland, 2006; Kaeding, 2004, 2005; Mamadouh and Raunio, 2003; Yoshinaka et al., 2010). On the one hand, this is due to the fact that rapporteurships can be easily counted, whereas the actual extent of a rapporteur’s legislative influence on a given policy issue is distinctly harder to measure and requires more effort in terms of data collection. On the other hand, rapporteurs actually *do* wield substantial power, especially when it comes to the procedural aspects of the political process in the EP. For instance, rapporteurs receive more speaking time in the plenary (Slapin and Proksch, 2010) and may negotiate with the other EU institutions on behalf of their committee (Costello and Thomson, 2010; Rasmussen, 2008). Yet, while we continue to learn about the factors that determine the selection of rapporteurs, our knowledge about the rapporteurs’ actual influence over the final policy output is very limited. A recent study identifies rapporteurs as the key actors at the proposal stage, where they forge legislative coalitions (Finke, 2012). Also, Costello and Thomson (2010) have demonstrated empirically that rapporteurs in fact play a central role in formulating the final EP position. However, they also noted that the rapporteur’s “agenda-setting power is severely constrained by the open amendment rules in both the committee and the plenary”

(Costello and Thomson, 2010: 235). In the same vein, Marshall (2010: 572) claims that “the open amendment phase has at least as much impact on a committee’s final outcome as the rapporteur’s report.”

Thus, what is still lacking in the scholarly debate on the power of the rapporteurs is a link between the rapporteurs’ prerogatives in the legislative *process* and the rapporteurs’ actual influence over the legislative *output*. In addition, even though a range of studies concluded that the recent strong increase of early agreements with the other institutions is associated with increasing influence of the rapporteurs (Costello and Thomson, 2010; Farrell and Héritier, 2004), at least in the ENVI committee the vast majority of those informal trilogue meetings take place after the initial committee vote (Yordanova, 2013) and therefore, any rapporteur who engages in inter-institutional bargaining does so on behalf of the responsible committee. Therefore, there is good reason to assume that the “negotiation mass” a rapporteur brings to the table in inter-institutional negotiations is not the content of his draft report but the text the committee as a whole has adopted after the inclusion of the other MEPs’ amendments. Accordingly, truly powerful rapporteurs are those who prevail in the formulation of the committee output, even if their position is challenged.

From the viewpoint of the other committee members, this means that they should be more successful in getting their amendments adopted, if the respective rapporteur has not tabled a competing amendment to the same part of the policy proposal. If, however, the rapporteur *has* introduced a competing amendment in his draft report, we should expect the rapporteur’s amendment to prevail, if rapporteurs are not only powerful on paper.

H3 (Rapporteur hypothesis): Amendments of regular committee members are more likely to get adopted if they do not have to compete with an amendment tabled by the rapporteur.

Measurement, method and sampling

Measurement: The dependent variable

The dependent variable “amendment success” consists of three categories: full success, partial success and failure. In the most straightforward of all cases, an amendment is either adopted word by word (full success) or it is rejected by the committee members (failure). An amendment is deemed adopted (rejected) if a simple majority of the present committee members approves (disapproves) the amendment. Thus, adoptions and rejections always occur if an amendment is actually voted upon. However, this is not always the case.

EP committees constantly struggle to make the voting process as efficient as possible and therefore advise their secretariats to draw up voting lists that bring amendments in order with regard to the magnitude of the changes they propose. The amendments are then voted upon in the same order in which they are listed on the voting list and once an amendment is adopted, all other less extreme and

non-compatible amendments fall. This can have the effect that there is no vote on a whole range of amendments. Most importantly, however, there is not always a clear binary outcome in the sense of adoption vs. rejection. Amendments can fall, but a fallen amendment can be a *partial success* if its content either goes into the same direction as the adopted amendment or its wording is even *included* in the adopted amendment. Therefore, sponsors of fallen amendments may at times be quite satisfied with the voting result, if the content of their amendment is very close to the content of the adopted amendment.

Ultimately, whether a fallen amendment has been a success, partial success or a failure can only be established through a careful comparison of the fallen amendment with the content of the finalized committee report. What matters is whether the amendment's wording and/or intention is taken into account in the final committee output or not. To make matters even more complicated, however, amendments can also fall due to the adoption of compromise amendments (CAs), which are often prepared by the rapporteur. CAs are *always* voted upon first and if adopted, all amendments which had been tabled to the respective part of the Commission proposal fall. A compromise does not necessarily satisfy all stakeholders and the extent to which the intentions of the original amendments are taken into account by the compromise is very hard to measure precisely. In the end, the degree to which an original amendment is represented in the CA can again only be established by comparing the wordings of the two. In a quantitative study, such a comparison cannot take into account every nuance of the proposed policy, but it is at least possible to determine roughly whether an original amendment is rather represented in the compromise, or whether an entirely different direction was taken.

Independent variables

H1 postulates that the success of an amendment should be related to the *ideological orientation* of its sponsor: the more extreme an MEP's position on the left-right scale, the lower his or her chances to get an amendment adopted by the full committee. The most useful (albeit far from ideal) way to approximate the position of an MEP on the left-right scale is to equate it with the position of the MEP's national party. While it is clearly possible that an MEP's individual position is different from the position of his national party, the proposed measure is nevertheless the only viable one for the purpose of this study for three reasons. First, the national party usually controls ballot access (Hix, 2002; Thiem, 2009), which creates a natural incentive for the individual MEP not to deviate too strongly from the party position. Second, other than measures that are based on observed voting behaviour in roll-call votes (e.g. NOMINATE scores), the party position does not suffer from comparable endogeneity and selection problems (Carrubba et al., 2006). Finally, there is simply a lack of alternatives. Ideally, the position of an individual legislator should be measured by self-placements of those legislators (Hix, 2002). Since such data are only available in an anonymous form, this study had to rely on existing estimates and it was therefore decided to make use

of Benoit and Laver's (2006) expert survey data on the left-right placement of national parties.

The second research hypothesis seeks to explain amendment success on *environmental matters* through the *interest group affiliations* of the amendment sponsors. Both variables are coded in a binary way. The information on interest group affiliations was taken directly from Yordanova (2009) and the question of whether an amendment was tabled to a matter of environmental policy was coded by the author on the basis of the ENVI committee's activity report for the sixth legislative term (European Parliament, 2009).

Finally, the challenge with regard to H3 was to determine whether an *amendment tabled by the rapporteur* was competing or compatible. This was unproblematic for cases in which the voting lists were available. In all other cases, however, this assessment was distinctly harder to make. When the voting list was missing and it could be established from the draft report that the rapporteur had tabled an amendment to the same text the amendment addressed, the only way to find out whether the rapporteur's amendment was compatible or competing was to read both amendments carefully and assess whether they put forward different intentions and suggestions.

Control variables

The study includes the control variables *reintroduction* (amendments at second reading, which had already been successful at first reading), the *number of competing amendments* to the same part of the draft report, the *number of the co-sponsors* of an amendment and the *legislative experience* of the amendment sponsor.

Due to the varying scopes of the amendments, it is also important to introduce a categorization of *amendment types*. Amendments whose political impact is usually negligible include changes to recitals, technical specifications, definitions and clarifications. Other amendments are more political in nature and can roughly be distinguished by whether they seek to expand or contract the policy proposal. For the purpose of this study, *expansive* amendments are defined as amendments that add new provisions to the proposal, strengthen the proposal's wording, impose tighter standards or deadlines, strike derogations or enhance the power of the EU vis-à-vis the member states. On the other hand, *contractive* amendments seek to water the original proposal down by deleting provisions, weakening the wording of the Commission proposal, loosening standards or deadlines, introducing derogations or enhancing the power of the member states vis-à-vis the EU. This categorization is rather crude but should at least capture some of the variance that is due to the amendments' varying political scopes.²

Method and sampling

The dataset was compiled using stratified random sampling. This technique was originally motivated by the suspicion that the chances of amendments which are

tabled by the same MEP or the same party group could be correlated and that this interdependence must be accounted for by multi-level modelling. As we will discover later, the variance between and within the clusters do not confirm this suspicion as a single-level multinomial regression produces almost exactly the same coefficients. Given the fact that the hypothesis tests require the inclusion (and therefore collection) of a range of highly important control variables, the data collection was limited to the 55 full ENVI members during the entire sixth term of the EP. For every MEP, ten amendments were drawn and accordingly, the dataset contains 550 amendments. In order to keep the influence of report-specific factors low, the amendments were drawn for every sponsor from as many different reports as possible.

Empirical evidence

Descriptive statistics

As Figure 1 shows, 249 amendments in the dataset failed, which corresponds to a share of 45.27%. Another 129 amendments (23.45%) were partially successful in the sense that their direction and intention was taken into account in the final output. Finally, 172 amendments or 31.27% of all amendments in the dataset were adopted word for word. The figure indicates an astoundingly high share of failed amendments drafted by members of the conservative EPP-ED and the liberal

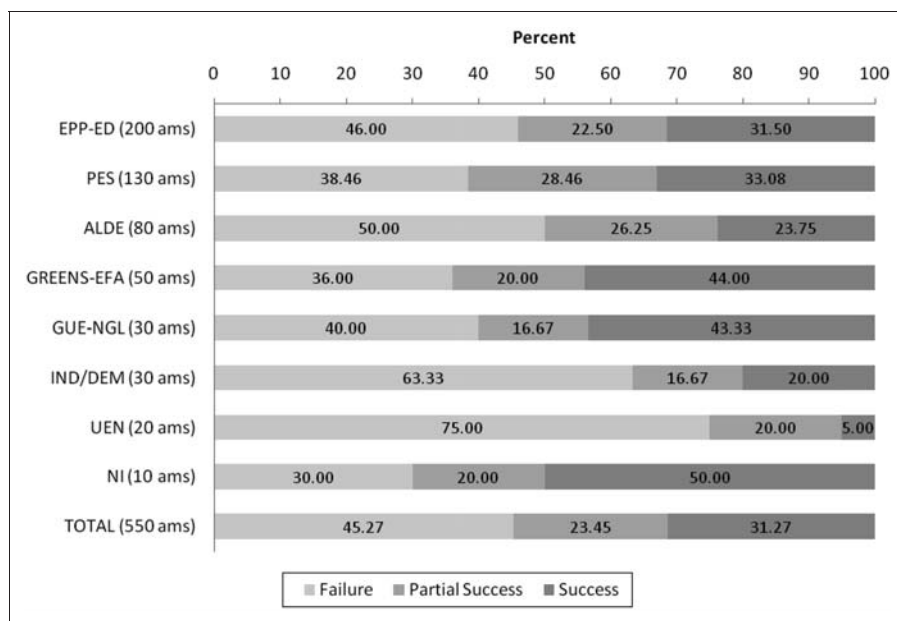


Figure 1. Amendments per success category by political group.

ALDE groups. After all, during the time period under consideration, the EPP-ED was by far the largest group in ENVI.

It is also noteworthy that the PES, the Greens and the leftist GUE-NGL had the smallest shares of failed amendments (if we ignore the one non-attached MEP for a moment) and especially the latter two groups got a comparably large share of their sampled amendments adopted word for word. The least successful groups were the rather small UEN and IND/DEM groups. Despite those observations, the differences between the political groups seem small given their diverse voting power.

Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of the left-right positions of the individual committee members in the sample. The scale corresponds to Benoit and Laver's (2006) measurement and is bounded between 0 (left) and 20 (right). The figure shows that the membership of the two largest groups is fairly cohesive in terms of left vs. right. While all MEPs in the EPP-ED group are located slightly to the right of the committee median, the PES members are all located slightly to the left. The picture is also very clear for the GREENS-EFA and the GUE-NGL, whose members are found farther away from the committee median, but consistently on its left. Only the membership of the liberal ALDE group seems somewhat more diverse with MEPs located on both sides of the median. All in all, this distribution is similar to the ideological make-up of the plenary as a whole (McElroy and Benoit, 2010).

Green interest group ties are not an exclusive attribute of MEPs in the GREENS-EFA group, as could be suspected. Although the majority of GREENS-EFA MEPs uphold links to green interest groups (4 out of 5), we observe that also MEPs from the EPP-ED (6 out of 20), PES (3 out of 13) and GUE-NGL (1 out of 3) are affiliated with green interests. Of the five largest political groups in the ENVI committee, only the liberal ALDE has no MEP with green ties in its ranks. In sum, 14 out of the 55 committee members in the sample are affiliated with green interests. It is important to make clear that green interest group ties are not related to left-right positions. Of the 14 MEPs with green ties, six are located on the right of the left-right median and eight are located on the left.

Finally, with regard to H3, 24% of the sampled amendments addressed the same part of the policy proposal as a *competing rapporteur amendment*.

Hypothesis tests

As outlined above, the statistical analysis interprets the three outcomes of the dependent variable as nominal categories. While it is tempting to interpret the three categories "full success", "partial success" and "failure" as ordinal, the disadvantages associated with such an interpretation outweigh the benefits. Using nominal categories makes the interpretation of the statistical results more complicated and implies the danger of obtaining less efficient estimates, but "the potential loss of efficiency in using models for nominal outcomes is outweighed by avoiding potential bias" (Long and Freese, 2006: 223). Another statistical reason for choosing the multinomial model is that the parallel slopes assumption is partially

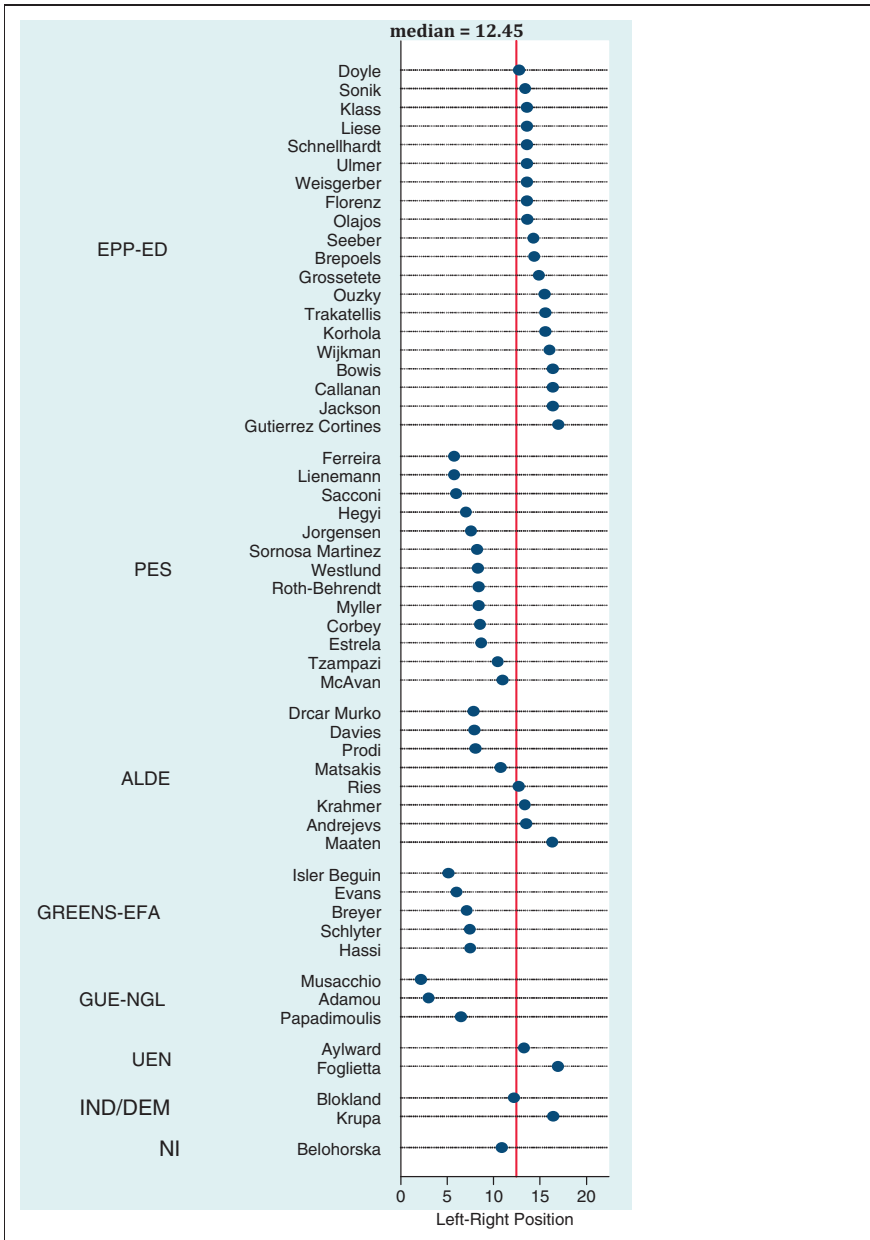


Figure 2. Left-right positions of the sampled committee members.

Note: Sinnott (IND/DEM) missing (independent on the national level).

Source: Benoit and Laver (2006). The data for the national parties of five MEPs (Grossetete, Ferreira, Lienemann, Andrejevs and Isler Beguin) were missing in the Benoit/Laver dataset and were therefore taken and transformed from the Chapel Hill expert surveys (Hooghe et al., 2010), which are highly correlated (Proksch and Lo, 2012).

violated. Given the design of the research hypotheses, I decided to define failed amendments as the baseline category against which partially successful and fully successful amendments can be compared (Table 1). The table displays the estimates obtained from single-level multinomial regressions, because they are almost identical to the ones obtained from multi-level specifications which define MEPs as level 2 and party groups as level 3.³

With regard to the *median hypothesis* (H1), the results clearly indicate that an amendment sponsor's distance from the committee's left-right median has no effect on amendment success (Model 1). No matter how extreme the left-right position of an MEP, the model's success prediction is essentially the same. For the median committee member, the fully specified model predicts an amendment to fail with a probability of 52%. This predicted probability only increases by roughly four percentage points for the most extreme members in the dataset. Likewise, the cumulative probability to get an amendment partially or fully adopted decreases by the same low margin as we move from the committee median to the most extreme MEPs. Yet, as the regression coefficients and their standard errors show, none of those changes reaches conventional levels of statistical significance.⁴

What explains these results? One possible explanation could be that ENVI members simply are not representative delegates of their national parties. As outlined before, however, MEPs have no long-term incentive to pursue a personal agenda that is not in line with the general ideological orientation of their national party. Furthermore, Whitaker (2005) has shown that national parties seek to ensure high levels of representativeness among their committee contingents, especially in legislatively powerful committees, such as ENVI.

It is also conceivable that the views of median MEPs are already accommodated by the initial report, which would render the remaining amendments from median MEPs no more likely to succeed than the ones tabled by more extreme members.⁵ Yet, the strong assumption behind the argument is that rapporteurs are always interested in drafting reports which please the committee median, regardless of their own position. Given the fact that draft reports are written by MEPs that cover the entire ideological spectrum, I consider this unlikely. There is no way this possibility can be ruled out, however, because this would require the specification of a selection model for the tabling of individual amendments. In order to specify such a model, deeper knowledge about the specific intent and content of every single amendment would be needed.

Therefore, I consider it more likely that ideological turf wars simply are not the primary mode of political conflict during ENVI's amendment phase. Thus, while previous research has shown that ideological cleavages can at times have a profound impact on voting behaviour in plenary, it seems like differences in general ideological orientations only play a minor role at the committee level. This means that although the ENVI committee's membership is representative of the plenary's left-right structure in the sense of the informational logic of legislative organization, this does not imply that the committee's policy output is necessarily close to the position of the median MEP in the plenary. Note, however, that this finding

Table 1. Multinomial regression models

Variable	Partially successful vs. failed amendments						Successful vs. failed amendments					
	Model 1			Model 2a			Model 2b			Model 3		
	b (SE)	RRR	b (SE)	RRR	b (SE)	RRR	b (SE)	RRR	b (SE)	RRR	b (SE)	RRR
H1												
Distance from Left-Right Median	-.06 (.05)	.94					-.06 (.05)	.95	.02 (.05)	1.02		.01 (.05)
H2												
Green Ties		-.21 (.51)	.81		-.16 (.52)	.85				-.44 (.45)	.64	-.46 (.45)
Environmental Policy		-.14 (.27)	.87		-.22 (.28)	.80				-.37 (.25)	.69	-.34 (.26)
Green Ties X Environmental Policy		.16 (.60)	1.17		.15 (.61)	1.16				1.08** (.53)	2.96	1.08** (.54)
H2 (Alternative)												
Env. Sceptic Position			.09 (.06)	1.09						.03 (.05)	1.03	
Environmental Policy			1.10 (.89)	3.01						1.50** (.74)	4.48	
Env. Sceptic Position X Environmental Policy			-.11 (.07)	.90						-.14** (.06)	.87	
H3												
Rapporteur Amendment				.68*** (.25)	1.98	.70*** (.25)	2.01			-1.11*** (.35)	.33	-1.14*** (.35)

(continued)

Table 1. Continued

Variable	Partially successful vs. failed amendments						Successful vs. failed amendments					
	Model 1			Model 2a			Model 2b			Model 3		
	b (SE)	RRR	b (SE)	RRR	b (SE)	RRR	b (SE)	RRR	b (SE)	RRR	b (SE)	RRR
Controls												
Reintroduction	.48 (.48)	1.61 (.47)	.40 (.53)	1.50 (.53)	.71 (.53)	2.04 (.48)	.39 (.48)	1.47 (.49)	.47 (.49)	1.60 (.39)	.51 (.39)	1.66 (.38)
# Competing Amendments	.20*** (.04)	1.22 (.20)	.20*** (.04)	1.22 (.20)	.20*** (.04)	1.22 (.17)	.17*** (.04)	1.19 (.04)	.17*** (.04)	1.18 (.11)	.56*** (.11)	.60 (.11)
# Co-Sponsors	-.03 (.06)	.97 (.06)	-.02 (.06)	.98 (.06)	-.02 (.06)	.98 (.05)	.00 (.05)	1.00 (.05)	.00 (.05)	1.00 (.05)	-.03 (.05)	.97 (.05)
Legislative Experience	-.04 (.11)	.96 (.12)	-.03 (.12)	.97 (.12)	-.03 (.12)	.97 (.11)	-.03 (.11)	.97 (.12)	-.03 (.12)	.97 (.14)	.16 (.10)	1.17 (.10)
Expansion	.10 (.27)	1.11 (.26)	.07 (.28)	1.08 (.28)	.23 (.28)	1.25 (.26)	.09 (.26)	1.10 (.28)	.13 (.28)	1.14 (.24)	.08 (.24)	1.08 (.24)
Contraction	-.42 (.30)	.66 (.30)	-.39 (.31)	.68 (.31)	-.27 (.31)	.76 (.30)	-.38 (.30)	.69 (.30)	-.38 (.30)	.69 (.29)	-.53* (.29)	.59 (.29)
Reference Category: Non-Policy												
Constant	-.75*** (.34)	-.88*** (.34)	-.95*** (.80)	-.88*** (.80)	-.84*** (.40)	-.18*** (.31)	-.25 (.31)	-.84*** (.40)	-.84*** (.40)	.00 (.31)	-.25 (.31)	.00 (.31)
Log Likelihood	-.512 540	-.519 550	-.460 490	-.519 550	-.509 550	-.509 550	-.512 540	-.495 540	-.495 540	-.519 550	-.460 490	-.509 550
Observations												

Notes: *** significant at 1 %, ** significant at 5 %, * significant at 10 %, baseline category: failure. RRR: Relative Risk Ratio.

does not preclude the possibility that successful amendments from both ends of the political spectrum outbalance each other and that the net output is the median. Accordingly, the informational theory should not be dismissed altogether for ENVI based on the empirical evidence presented in this article. However, the following paragraphs show that the distributional logic is more likely to be at work.

Model 2a suggests that the *interest group hypothesis* (H2) bears more explanatory power than H1. Since the interpretation of interaction effects is not straightforward (Norton et al., 2004), it is advisable to look at how the predicted probabilities for different combinations of the interaction's constitutive terms ("green ties" and "environmental policy") change. Since both constitutive terms of the interaction are dummy variables, there are four different possible combinations, which can be compared against each other (Table 2).

The predicted probabilities indicate that environmental amendments tabled by MEPs with green ties are more successful than environmental amendments tabled by MEPs without green ties. But how large is the actual effect? In order to answer this question, the main quantity of interest is the relative risk ratio of "success" vs. "partial success/failure" when we compare only environmental amendments tabled by MEPs with and without green ties.⁶

The resulting figure (1.87) captures the effect of green interest group affiliations for environmental issues, holding all other variables at their means. In essence, this means that an environmental amendment's "risk" of getting fully adopted (vs. *not* fully adopted) is 1.87 times higher if it is tabled by an MEP with green interest group affiliations. This figure reduces to 1.37 if we compare all amendments that were *at least partially adopted* to amendments that were rejected. Interestingly, the corresponding ratio is reversed for *non-environmental* amendments (.67 for "success" vs. "no full success" and .75 for "at least partial success" vs. "failure"), indicating that MEPs with green interest group affiliations exert lower influence when issues of public health or food safety are at stake. It should be made clear, however, that even though the effects are significant for fully successful amendments, they fail to reach conventional levels of significance for partially successful amendments.

Table 2. Predicted probabilities for H2

			Environmental amendment	
			Yes	No
Green ties	Yes	Success	29.99%	16.74%
		Partial Success	20.26%	25.35%
		Failure	49.75%	57.91%
	No	Success	18.66%	23.19%
		Partial Success	23.75%	26.08%
		Failure	57.58%	50.73%

In order to test the robustness of the findings, environmental positions of the MEPs' national parties were used as a similar measure for preferences on the environment dimension (Benoit and Laver, 2006) and interacted with the environmental amendment variable (Model 2b). The coefficients have the same direction and significance levels like the ones obtained from the original Model 2a-specification and therefore support the argument that pro-environment forces enjoy an advantage when it comes to the formulation of environmental legislation in the ENVI committee. The lower an MEP's commitment for environmental protection, the lower her chance to get amendments fully adopted. This additional insight also complements the findings on H1, since it suggests that successful amendments from more extreme members are usually not outbalanced by successful amendments from members on the other end of the extreme. This further buttresses the suspicion that ENVI outputs could be systematically biased in favour of environmental concerns.

Thus, we can tentatively conclude that ENVI members with green interest group affiliations have a stronger influence on the committee's environmental policy output than other ENVI members. It therefore seems like the findings presented by Yordanova (2009) and Kaeding (2005) not only bear relevance for ENVI's structural make-up but also for the quality of the committee's legislative output. Considering the fact that interest groups play a vital role during the committee's amendment phase (Marshall, 2010), the finding that MEPs with green interest group ties are relatively more successful indicates that ENVI's environmental legislation is potentially biased in favor of environmental protection and to the detriment of other stakeholders like the industry or farmers.

Those findings create an interesting follow-up question for future research: Do the biased committee amendments prevail in plenary or does the plenary step in and correct the committee output? Recent findings hint to the possibility that this could be the case (Yordanova, 2013). Yet, in order to understand the interplay between the committees and the plenary of the EP during the formulation of the EP position more precisely, additional evidence is required.

Finally, the *rapporteur hypothesis* (H3) clearly bears the most explanatory power of the three research hypotheses (Model 3). However, the picture provided by the estimation results is quite nuanced and deserves closer investigation. On the one hand, the risk of an amendment being *partially* adopted is doubled if the amendment must compete with another amendment tabled by the rapporteur ($e^{0.7} = 2.01$). On the other hand, the risk of an amendment being *fully* adopted is reduced by two thirds if the rapporteur has tabled a competing amendment ($e^{-1.14} = 0.32$).

This discrepancy is not as mysterious as it might seem at first glance. The empirical evidence simply suggests that the ENVI committee often resorts to compromise solutions when the rapporteur's position is at odds with the position of other committee members. The positive relationship for partial adoptions is based on the fact that the category includes many compromise amendments. This becomes especially clear when we look at the relative risk ratio of partial adoption vs. full

adoption ($e^{1.83} = 6.23$), conveying the message that amendments which challenge the rapporteur position are hardly ever adopted word for word, but they also rarely get fully rejected. Instead, they are very often worked into compromises in order to maximize the cohesion within the committee. At the same time, this finding clearly demonstrates that the rapporteurs are not as powerful as they are often depicted. They often find it necessary to take conflicting views of their committee colleagues into account, which qualifies earlier sorrows expressed by various stakeholders that the power of the rapporteurs might have reached a level that threatens the democratic legitimacy of the EP due to the increasing dominance of early reading agreements (Farrell and Héritier, 2004).

Thus, the relationship is more complex than the rapporteur hypothesis (H3) suggests. The results lend strong support to the argumentation put forward by Settembri and Neuhold (2009) and Benedetto (2005) who see the main task of rapporteurs in the facilitation of consensus in order to maximize the cohesion of the EP in inter-institutional bargaining. Apparently, rapporteurs prefer a well-crafted compromise to pushing through their own position at any cost. The underlying reason for this preference might be that having a cohesive committee in their back enables the rapporteurs to exert stronger influence when negotiating with the other EU institutions. Unveiling the causal mechanisms of this claim and buttressing the theoretical argument with more empirical evidence could be an interesting task for future research. For the ENVI committee, the empirical evidence suggests that the argument holds.

Finally, the *control variables* are for the most part insignificant, with the number of competing amendments being the only notable exception. As expected, the more amendments are tabled to a specific part of the policy proposal, the lower the chance of any single amendment to succeed *word by word*. At the same time, however, the number of competing amendments is positively related to the chance of a single amendment to get *partially* adopted, because the chance for a compromise increases with the number of competing amendments. Thus, also this control variable lends additional support to the finding that ENVI is strongly committed to compromise.

Furthermore, it seems as if ENVI is more inclined to expand the original policy proposal than to reduce its scope. While this control variable is certainly only a very rough indicator for the amendments' legislative content and only partially reaches levels of statistical significance, it gives rise to the suspicion that the committee generally prefers to strengthen the wordings proposed by the Commission (or the Council at second reading) instead of watering them down.

All in all, the results suggest that ENVI places a high value on consensual solutions in order to maximize the committee's cohesion. MEPs from the entire left-right spectrum participate to a similar extent in the formulation of the ENVI output. In addition, there seems to be a tendency to favor environmental protection over economic considerations, which is not only supported by the strong influence of MEPs with green interest group backgrounds but also by the finding that expansive amendments are more likely to succeed than contractive ones. Furthermore,

amendments that challenge the rapporteur position are very often taken into account in compromises in order to increase ENVI's cohesion. This latter finding is especially relevant as a possible explanation for the often very high voting cohesion on final reports in the EP committees (Settembri and Neuhold, 2009). When many amendments are tabled to the same part of a legislative proposal and also when the rapporteur's position is at odds with some of those amendments, the chance that the rapporteur seeks a compromise among those competing views is much higher than the chance that he seeks to push through his own position. This finding suggests that the rapporteurs expect to be in a stronger position in inter-institutional bargaining if they can claim that they negotiate on behalf of a united committee. By maximizing the committee's cohesion, they arguably aim to get into a position that allows them to engage in a two-level game with the other EU institutions by claiming that they cannot move away from their position, because their committee would not follow them (Putnam, 1988; Schelling, 1960; for a similar argument see Costello and Thomson, 2010). While this argument clearly needs more theoretical elaboration, it may be one possible way forward both in research on the internal organization of the EP and in research analyzing the role of rapporteurs in inter-institutional bargaining.

Conclusion

As previous studies have repeatedly highlighted, the EP's standing committees are crucial institutions for the efficient working of the legislature (Bowler and Farrell, 1995; Neuhold, 2001; Settembri and Neuhold, 2009). Any Commission proposal submitted under the ordinary legislative procedure is forwarded to them for consideration and amendment. By performing this exclusive task for the EP plenary, the standing committees enjoy substantial powers in setting the terms of debate. Yet, while our understanding of the allocation of procedural power in committees has developed significantly over the past decades, little is known about the determinants of legislative influence within those committees. In an attempt to close this gap, this study sought to identify factors, which increase and decrease committee members' influence over the committee output, operationalized as amendment success.

Based on overarching theories of legislative organization and recent empirical findings, three hypotheses on the determinants of amendment success in the EP's ENVI committee during the sixth legislative term of the institution were developed. The hypotheses attributed the source of amendment success to the ideological extremeness of the sponsors (*median hypothesis*), their affiliations to green interest groups (*interest group hypothesis*) and to the question of whether the respective rapporteur has tabled a competing amendment (*rapporteur hypothesis*). In order to test those hypotheses empirically, 550 amendments were drawn by means of a stratified random sample for 55 ENVI members and coded by the author with respect to their properties of interest. The hypotheses were tested with multinomial regressions.

Several results stand out: First, it has been found that ideology does not seem to play a decisive role during the amendment phase in the ENVI committee. Different sponsors from all across the political spectrum do not distinguish themselves significantly with regard to the amount of amendments they get adopted, partially adopted or not adopted. This is interesting especially against the background that the left-right dimension clearly structures political competition in the EP plenary (Hix et al., 2007). Second, the empirical evidence suggests that MEPs with green interest group affiliations seem to be more influential in the formulation of environmental legislation than others. Arguably, green interest groups not only enjoy privileged access to ENVI (Yordanova, 2009) they also seem to be able to translate this access into influence over the committee's legislative output, at least as far as fully adopted amendments are concerned. Finally, the empirical evidence confirms the rapporteur hypothesis partially. While a rapporteur's position is only very rarely challenged successfully by an amendment tabled by an ordinary ENVI member, many challenges often lead to a compromise solution. This indicates that rapporteurs are powerful and dominate the political process, but it also suggests that rapporteurs prefer to settle on a compromise before endangering the cohesion of the committee by pushing through their own position at any cost. This finding nicely complements recent findings on the rapporteur's role as a coalition-builder at the proposal stage (Finke, 2012).

The empirical evidence presented in this study constitutes a first step and should serve as an inspiration for the research community to test the validity of the results across time as well as for other committees. For instance, future studies might investigate whether MEPs with farming backgrounds are similarly successful in the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI) or whether business interests dominate the amendment phase in the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs (ECON). In addition, future research should build on the findings presented above and examine the extent to which the plenary steps in and corrects biased committee legislation towards the median of the full chamber.

On a final note, the study has shown that legislative amendments constitute an excellent pool of information, which should be exploited more systematically by EP scholars. Many applications could help to shed more light on the relationships discussed in this study. For instance, network analysis might prove to be a powerful tool in this context, because it could help to identify empirically the most central MEPs across committees and in the EP as a whole. Also survival analyses could help to embed research in a broader context that exceeds the committee level and encompasses multiple stages of the legislative process.

The recent decades have resulted in a large number of studies on the internal organization of the EP and many of those studies have put a major emphasis on the institution's committees as the workshops of the plenary. I have demonstrated that committees can indeed make a crucial difference for legislative outputs and argue that research on legislative decision-making would benefit from a stronger focus on the dynamics that precede the plenary stage.

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Notes

1. One could argue that interest group affiliations could be interpreted as a proxy for expertise, which would make the argument consistent with the informational logic. However, I firstly assume that interest-free expertise cannot be provided by interest groups by definition. Second, and even more importantly, we would still observe a biased committee because of the lack of farmers and industry representatives (Yordanova, 2009). This clearly violates the heterogeneity assumption invoked by the informational logic.
2. An inter-coder reliability test for a sub-sample has resulted in a Cohens κ of 1.00 (co-sponsors), 0.91 (re-introduction), 0.65 (rapporteur amendments), 0.80 (outcome), 0.48 (competing amendments) and 0.47 (amendment types). In the case of competing amendments, the comparably low score can clearly be attributed to the difficulty to distinguish compatible and competing amendments. A dichotomization of the variable lifts κ to 0.81. As outlined above, also amendment types are often hard to distinguish from each other without deeper knowledge on the broader context of the policy proposal. Yet, since scores between 0.4 and 0.6 are generally interpreted as indicative of “moderate agreement” (Landis and Koch, 1977) and since the variable does not adversely affect the model’s robustness, it remained part of the analysis. It should also be noted that Cohens κ is a relatively conservative measure for inter-coder agreement.
3. Please consult the online appendix for both dataset and do-file. The commands used to estimate the multi-level models and a range of post-estimation commands are included. Most of the corresponding results are listed in detail in Hurka (2012).
4. The results hold if actual positions are used instead of distances to the median.
5. I thank one of my anonymous reviewers for pointing this possibility out to me.

$$6. \text{Relative risk ratio} = \frac{\frac{\Pr(\text{success}|\text{green ties})}{1-\Pr(\text{success}|\text{green ties})} \cdot \frac{.2999}{.7001}}{\frac{\Pr(\text{success}|\text{no green ties})}{1-\Pr(\text{success}|\text{no green ties})} \cdot \frac{.1866}{.8134}} = \frac{.4284}{.2294} = 1.87$$

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