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European Parliament as a Cosmopolitan Parliament

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Abstract:

The uniqueness of the European Parliament among other parliaments in the world consists in its cosmopolitan character manifested in many ways. Firstly, the political groups in the European Parliament are transnational structures organized by political affiliation and not by nationality. Secondly, cosmopolitanism of the European parliament is manifested through social and professional background of the MEPs which demonstrates a substantial number of international studies and international professional experience among the MEPs especially among the members of the political bodies of the European Parliament. Thirdly, cosmopolitanism of the European Parliament can be viewed through the Europeanization processes that affect national parties represented in the European parliament. The MEPs are often recognized by their national parties as specialists in EU affairs. Providing an expertise in the EU politics to their national parties, the MEPs can influence the attitude of their national parties towards the EU and the European integration. Fourthly, speaking about the cosmopolitanism of the European parliament, it is important to take into account the socializing role of the European parliament and its cosmopolitan environment for the MEPs independently of their political, professional and educational background even if the possibility of socializing capacities of the European institutions is still subject to debate in European studies due to some methodological problems. As the European Parliament is becoming more powerful and important actor in the political system of the EU, the cosmopolitanism of the European Parliament contributes to the construction of the EU as a post-national order.

Keywords: cosmopolitanism, cosmopolite, cosmopolitan, Europeanization, party politics, European Parliament, MEPs, political groups, socialisation

Introduction

Immanuel Kant, one of the main spiritual precursors of the European integration has also set up philosophical grounds for a cosmopolitan theory in his famous essay "Perpetual Peace" (1795). The spiritual origins of the European integration and cosmopolitanism are linked from their very beginning. The European integration has created a unique political system made up of institutions that combine supranational and intergovernmental aspects in their functioning and composition. The European integration would not be possible without the development of some cosmopolite attitudes within the European political structures.

The European Parliament sets itself apart from traditional national parliaments thanks to the predominance of supranational dimension in its structure and functioning that engenders a specific cosmopolite and multicultural environment of the European Parliament. The uniqueness of the European Parliament among other parliaments in the world consists in its cosmopolitan character manifested in many ways. Cosmopolitan tendencies at the European Parliament do not mean that the MEPs are necessarily becoming "world citizens". This paper will examine whether the MEPs have some prerequisites for forming in the foreseeable future a cosmopolitan community which may be based on the shared European values and the common political system of the EU.

1 - Structure and organization of the European Parliament

Firstly, the cosmopolitan features of the European Parliament as an institution are due to its structure and organization. The political groups in the European Parliament are transnational structures organized by political affiliation and not by nationality. However, political groups are made up of national delegations, and the heads of national delegations are important interlocutors for the political groups chairs. Thus the MEPs are not completely disconnected from their national parties within the transnational political groups of the European Parliament. The national delegations attempt to insert their national perspective into the common position of their political group.

The internal decision-making process of the political groups at the European Parliament represents a series of complex multi-level negotiations which involve several actors of transnational political groups at the European Parliament and implies a frequent communication between them. This communication takes place not only within the same political group but also between the representatives of the rival political groups. In fact the political groups of the European Parliament are obliged to interact and cooperate with their political rivals in order to win majority of votes necessary for taking decisions during the plenary sessions. This cooperation between the rival political groups allows the

European Parliament to carry out its powers jointly with the Council of the European Union and the European Commission.

According to Simon Hix and Christopher Lord, the meetings of the political groups of the European Parliament are functioning in the style of a "qualified supranationalism" which allows to develop common positions that reconcile political preferences of a political group with those of its national delegations. The conclusion of transnational agreements by means of majority voting among the national delegations of political groups during the plenary sessions of political groups is the main aim of various group meetings. However, each national delegation has the right not to support the common line of its political group during the plenary session, so long as this delegation has been openly explained and reasonably justified their dissent to the rest of the group beforehand.[1] This style of a "qualified supranationalism" seeks to maximise transnational agreement while allowing for reasoned national and other political divergences from the group position when necessary.[2]

However, it is possible to suppose that the EU enlargement brought some changes in a "qualified supranationalism" applied to the meetings of transnational political groups. The Polish delegations at the European Parliament are very selective about their affinities with their political groups and the national parties which are the members of their political groups. In case of a voting that is politically sensitive for Poland, Polish delegations which belong to different political groups of the European Parliament try to develop a common position during informal meetings of the so-called "Polish Club" (*Klub Polski*) which was mentioned in the author's interviews with some Polish MEPs.[3] The Polish scholar Wojciech Furman confirmed the existence of the "Polish Club" (*Klub Polski*) and the efficiency and utility of this form of cooperation between the Polish MEPs which transcends the transnational political groups of the European Parliament:

> *"Polish euro-deputies proved to be the only ones in the European Parliament to establish a national parliamentary club – Klub Polski (Polish Club). As much as it was noticed that its name makes a refer-ence to the names of the Polish parliamentary clubs that used to function within the parliaments of the states that had partitioned Poland, some advantages of the club's formula might be identified. It enables systematic consultations concerning bills, identifying in them issues that are important for Poland and negotiating a joint strategy of action."* [4]

An efficient functioning of the political groups is manifested in the voting of their members. The analysis of the voting behaviour of the MEPs allows to appreciate the internal cohesion of the political groups. The main political groups of the European Parliament – Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats), Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats and the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe – are characterised by a sufficient level of internal coherence in order to remain the key actors of the European Parliament and exercise an important influence on the political system of the European Union. The political groups at the European Parliament are obliged to conclude alliances with the rival political groups during the voting of the plenary session because none of the political groups is not in a position to obtain a sufficient number of votes for a simple majority at the European Parliament. This necessity to maintain a dialogue and cooperate with other political groups is reinforced by the demand for a simple majority which allows the European Parliament to influence the decision-making process of the European Union.

However, the presence of dissident votes among the national delegations of the political groups reflects the ideological heterogeneity of the political groups as well as their respective European party federations. The Eastern enlargement of the European Union reinforced centrifugal forces within the political groups of the European Parliament. This process affected mostly the EPP-ED Group and contributed significantly to its split in the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) (EPP) and the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR).

2 – Socio-professional background of the MEPs and cosmopolitanism

Secondly, the cosmopolitanism of the European parliament is manifested through social and professional background of the MEPs which demonstrates a substantial number of international studies and international professional experience among the MEPs especially among the members of the political bodies of the European parliament.

French scholars Willy Beauwallet and Sébastien Michon drew attention to a number of fundamental differences between national political elites and the MEPs from the point of view of their social resources and characteristics like age, education, gender. Approximately since 6th legislature the European Parliament appears to be an alternate space of political professionalization for a partly internationalized intellectual elite which consists of a greater number of women in comparison to the national parliamentary elite. This new European elite is characterized by a predominance of cultural capitals in its structure of social resources.[5]

The MEPs of the 6th legislature present a middle-class profile with a predominance of superior intellectual professions (for example, university teachers, and lawyers). The high level of university diplomas confirms an intellectual profile of an important part of the MEPs. Among the MEPs of the 6th legislature more than four out of five accomplished university studies; a quarter defended a PhD thesis.[6] The MEPs are also characterised by an internationalisation of their profiles which is due mostly to their university studies accomplished abroad. During the 6th legislature more than one out of ten MEPs has obtained a university diploma in a foreign country located in Europe, in the United States and even in Russia for some MEPs from the Central European countries.[7] All these alternative social and political resources of the European parliamentary elite contribute to develop a cosmopolitan character of the European Parliament. An international educational or professional experience, intellectual professions, a relatively younger age are the factors that contribute to the affirmation of the European Parliament as a more cosmopolite body than national parliaments.

It is worth noting that for the members of the political bodies of the European parliament (President of the European Parliament, vice-presidents, quaestors, parliamentary committee chairs, political group chairmen) the level of theirs university diplomas is a significant variable: a high level of university diploma (Master's degree, PhD) increase chances of obtaining a position in the political bodies of the European Parliament.[8]

This paper will show that the below trends are completely valid for the MEPs from the new member states on the example of the Polish MEPs. The tables "The international experience of the Polish MEPs, 2004-2009" and "The international experience of the Polish MEPs, 2009-2014" present the distribution of the international experience among the Polish MEPs of the 6th and 7th legislatures from different political parties. There are two categories of the international experience: a European experience and an experience in the US and Canada. A European experience can take diverse forms: having a post of observer at the European Parliament during the pre-accession period, a professional experience at the European organisations outside the EU (for example the Council of Europe), taking part in the accession negotiations, membership at the European non-governmental organisations, working at the institutional structures responsible for managing the pre-accession aid programmes, membership at the parliamentary committee dealing with the European affairs, a professional experience in a European country.

The average rate of a European experience among the Polish MEPs of the 6th legislature constitutes 63% while the average rate of an experience in the US and Canada reaches 25, 9%. The average rate of a European experience among the Polish MEPs of the 7th legislature rose to 68% whiles their average rate of an experience in the US and Canada fell to 16%. The internationalisation of the socio-professional profiles of the Polish MEPs is due mostly to their Europeanization.

The data from the tables 1 and 2 shows a great importance of international experience as a specific political resource for the Polish MEPs. However, it is worth noting that a European experience is a first priority for the Polish delegations at the European Parliament. Indeed, the Polish political parties tend to recruit candidates for the post of MEP among politicians having a previous European experience.

Table 1: The international experience of the Polish MEPs, 2004-2009

Political party name	Total number of members	European experience		Experience in the US and Canada	
		Total number	Frequency in %	Total number	Frequency in %
PO	15	9	60	4	26,7
LPR	10	5	50	2[*]	20
				3[**]	30
PiS	7	6	85,7	2[*]	28,6
				1[**]	14,3
SO	6	2	33,3	2	33,3
SLD-UP	5	4	80	2	40
UW/PD	4	3	75	0	0
PSL	4	2	50	0	0
SdPL	3	3	100	2	66,7
Total	**54**	**34**	**63**	**14**	**25,9**

Source: data compiled by the author from the personnel websites of the Polish MEPs of the 6th legislature and from the official website of the European Parliament: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/

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[*] June 2004
[**] January 2008

Table 2: The international experience of the Polish MEPs, 2009-2014

Political party name	Total number of members	European experience		Experience in the US and Canada	
		Total number	Frequency in %	Total number	Frequency in %
PO	25	17	68	6	24
PiS	15	11	73,3	0	0
SLD-UP	7	4	57,1	2	28,6
PSL	3	2	66,6	0	0
Total	**50**	**34**	**68**	**8**	**16**

Source: data compiled by the author from the personnel websites of the Polish MEPs of the 7th legislature and from the official website of the European Parliament: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/

3- European Parliament, Europeanization of party politics and cosmopolitanism

The cosmopolitanism of the European Parliament can be viewed through the Europeanization processes that affect national parties represented in the European parliament. The concept of Europeanization is often understood in its broad political or geopolitical dimension as an approximation to the EU membership and the norms and practices of the EU political system. Scholars that examine the Europeanization processes within the framework of a geopolitical approach often establish a link between Europeanization and post-communist transformation in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) leading to the EU membership and continuing after the EU accession:

> "*Europeanisation has, in one form or another, been part of the narrative of post-communist transformation in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) from the outset, in 1989 – or, in some respects even earlier, with the rediscovery of Central Europe during the 1980s and Gorbachev's early hopes of establishing a common European home. The 'return to Europe' was a driving force behind the changes of the 1990s, and increasingly – at least in the more northerly states – with a growing commitment to and practical preparations for joining the European Union (EU), an objective that was achieved for most of these states in 2004. However, this was clearly not the end of the process and it soon became clear that, while EU membership might be part of a process of Europeanisation, it was certainly not the whole thing. Soon after 2004, with the rise of the Kaczyńskis in Poland, the victory of Fico in Slovakia, riots in Hungary and the growing prominence of a number of extremist forces in the region, it became obvious that EU accession was not the whole answer to the perceived problems of patchy post-communist democratisation and its incomplete consolidation. The implication was that the east-central European states were just not 'Europeanised' enough.*"[9]

From this geopolitical perspective most of the authors found little evidence that the EU membership has a considerable impact to the party politics and especially to the political parties of the Central European countries parties. Paul G. Lewis argues that "existing research into European party politics, West, Central and East, suggests that the EU has in fact had little direct influence on party politics."[10] Robert Ladrech insists on the existence of the indirect influence of the EU on the party politics. This influence embraces different aspects of party politics: programmatic change, organizational change, patterns of party competition, party-government relations, relations beyond the national party system.[11]

However, the introduction of direct elections to the European Parliament in 1979 strengthened the political influence of the EU on national parties and party politics. The prominent European politician and scholar Richard Corbett pointed out the revolutionary role of the European Parliament and the MEPs after 1979 for national political parties, their structure and party politics:

> "*None the less, it did mean that almost every main political party in Europe now contained a number of full-time politicians whose primary interest and activity concerned European affairs. The way in which these new political creatures were integrated into the formal structure of each political party varied enormously according to the characteristics of each one and sometimes according to the party's attitude to Europe. None the less, over a period of years, virtually every political party adapted it structure to give a role to MEPs in its organs.*"[12]

It is possible to examine now the Europeanization processes operating in the party politics in the context of the European Parliament from a more sociological perspective. The MEPs are often recognized by their national parties as specialists in EU affairs. Providing an expertise in the EU politics to their national parties, the MEPs can influence the attitude of their national parties towards the EU and the European integration. The impact of the European integration on the party politics can be analysed through organizational changes into party structures. The MEPs are incorporated into party structures as so-called 'European policy specialists'.[13]

The role of national delegations at the European Parliament is not limited to the insertion of national party perspectives into transnational group deliberations. From the point of view of Europeanization processes it is worth noting that the MEPs included in the national delegations at the European Parliament serve as informational conduits in the reverse direction – between the EP and domestic political parties.[14] When the MEPs accomplish the function of informational conduit between the EP and the national political parties they contribute to the Europeanization of party politics. In other words the influence of the European Parliament contributes to a more cosmopolitan character of national parties represented at the European Parliament.

It is worth noting that the influence of the European Parliament and the MEPs on party politics is subtle and indirect. According to Richard Corbett, it is practically impossible to measure the influence of the MEPs on the European policies of their national parties. It is only possible to examine how MEPs are present both through formal structures and through general debate and dialogue within their national parties. The presence and input of the MEPs into national parties discussions must imply some influence especially for regionalist parties who consider the European Parliament to be more important that their national parliament.[15] However, even in major national parties MEPs exert a significant influence on their party's European policy. The example of the Labour Party' conversion to Europe which was fostered by Labour MEPs can confirm the importance of the MEPs influence on the European policies of their parties.[16] The MEPs can also exert an "informal individual impact" which operates from the outside of the formal party structures through writing articles in party newspapers, speaking at party meetings, briefing party spokesmen, publishing leaflets, socializing with party members, giving interviews and taking part in debates.[17]

The MEPs recognized as specialists in European affairs within their domestic political parties provide an expertise in the European affairs, influence the attitude of their parties to the EU and even tend to guide the European policies of their parties because in the EU political system the power is based in many areas on the knowledge and expertise.[18] The transmission of the European informational and networking "assets" of the MEPs to their domestic political parties is a part of the Europeanization of party politics.

4 – Socialization in the cosmopolitan environment of the European Parliament

Speaking about the cosmopolitanism of the European parliament, it is important to take into account the socializing role of the European parliament for the MEPs independently of their political, professional and educational background. The learning of the European affairs by the MEPs takes place in the multicultural and cosmopolite environment of the European Parliament that offers multiple networking opportunities with the MEPs from different member States within the transnational political groups and parliamentary committees, as well as with the representatives of the EP administration and the European interest groups. However, the possibility of socializing capacities of the European institutions is still subject to debate in European studies due to some methodological problems. It would be useful to perceive the evolution of opinions and attitudes of individual MEPs in the European Parliament using qualitative research methods.

More than thirty years of the experience of transnational democracy at the European Parliament started a process of Europeanization of national political and especially parliamentary elites. In the EU political system the European Parliament is often considered to be a socializing and Europeanising machine for parliamentarians and politicians from different member states. Many scholars emphasised the changes of attitudes towards the EU and the European integration that affect a great number of the MEPs during their mandate at the European Parliament. Richard Corbett, himself a former MEP between 1996 and 2009, pointed out the existence of conversion of MEPs from hostility or indifference to support for European integration that can be explained by a process of socialization, a better acquaintance with European realities or career interest.[19]

Nevertheless, traditionally the EU scholars do not confirm the socializing role of the European parliament.[20] Mark N. Franklin et Susan E. Scarrow approve that MEPs, along with members of other institutions of the European Union, are more generally more pro-European than national political elites.[21] However, even this hypothesis is quite plausible, more pro-European attitudes of the MEPs in comparison with national parliamentarians can be explained by three

possible sources: electoral bias, the self-selection of candidates for the European parliament, and the effects of holding office within the Parliament itself.[22]

The French anthropologist Marc Abélès describes the socialization of the new MEPs as a complicated and stressful process even for those interested in the European affairs as the novices at the European Parliament do not know "the rules of play".[23] The learning of legislative procedures, internal administrative rules and even unwritten rules or customs can be acquired by the novices only in the daily parliamentary practice at the European Parliament. The transnational political groups play a crucial role in the process of socialization of the MEPs. However, in practice the links of newly elected MEPs with their national delegations are more important for their socialization than with their transnational political group. Within the transnational political groups especially with a great number of members like the European People's Party (EPP) or the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) nobody knows novices from different member states except the famous political figures. Within the national delegation more experienced MEPs can transfer their experience and expertise to the newly elected MEPs.[24] The specialisation in a parliamentary "dossier" is an important stage of the socialisation process. The newly elected MEPs acquire a specialisation either during their studies and previous professional career or thanks to a learning process within parliamentary committees.

In the framework of my PhD thesis I examined the process of socialization of the Polish MEPs of the 6th legislature (2004-2009). As all the Polish MEPs were novices in 2004 at the European Parliament, the national delegations were not able to contribute to the socialisation process of the Polish MEPs. However, their relatively rapid and successful socialisation in the European Parliament was guaranteed by a cosmopolitan environment of the European Parliament that provides constantly diverse opportunities to interact and communicate with politicians from different member states as well as with a multicultural administration of the European Parliament during the meetings of transnational political groups and parliamentary committees as well as in the cosmopolite context of the daily life of the European Parliament. The socialisation of the Polish MEPs was also operated through the acquisition of the new political roles and specialisation in parliamentary "dossiers".

Even if there is no certainty about the socializing power of the European parliament which may contribute to developing positive attitudes towards the European integration among the most of the MEPs, it is possible to suppose that the internal organisation and functioning of the European Parliament provoke a rise of cosmopolitan attitudes among its members. The MEPs are not necessarily becoming more pro-European politicians but in many cases more cosmopolite.

Conclusion

As the European Parliament is becoming more powerful and important actor in the political system of the EU, the cosmopolitanism of the European Parliament and its prerequisites for forming in the foreseeable future a cosmopolitan community among the MEPs contributes to the construction of the EU as a post-national and to the gradual decrease of importance of national political structures and national identities.

Notes

[1] HIX Simon et LORD Christopher, *Political Parties in the European Union,* London, Macmillan, 1997, p.128.

[2] JUDGE David et EARNSHAW David, *The European Parliament,* New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, p. 129.

[3] Author interviews with Jacek SARYUSZ-WOLSKI and Jan OLBRYCHT, November 2005.

[4] FURMAN Wojciech, « Regional dailies on the activities by the Podkarpacie deputies to the European Parliament », *Polityka i Społeczeństwo,* n°7, 2010, pp.37-38.

[5] BEAUVALLET Willy, MICHON Sébastien, « L'institutionnalisation inachevée du Parlement européen. Hétérogénéité nationale, spécialisation du recrutement et autonomisation. », *Politix,* Vol. 23, n° 89, 2010, p. 153, p. 161.

[6] *Ibid.,* pp. 153-154.

[7] *Ibid.,* p. 155.

[8] *Ibid.,* p. 170.

[9] LEWIS Paul G., "Europeanisation and Party Politics in Central and Eastern Europe", *Sonderforschungsbereich 580 Mitteilungen*, Heft 37, Januar 2011, p. 6.

[10] *Ibid.,* p. 7.

[11] LADRECH Robert, "Europeanization and political parties", *Living Reviews in European Governance*, Vol. 4, n° 1, 2009, pp.8-9.

[12] CORBETT Richard, *The European Parliament's Role in Closer EU Integration,* London, Macmillan, 1998, p. 70.

[13] SZCZERBIAK Aleks, BIL Monika, "When in doubt, (re-)turn to domestic politics? The non-impact of the EU on Polish party politics", *European Parties Elections and Referendums Network Working Paper*, n° 20, May 2008, p.7.

[14] JUDGE David et EARNSHAW David, *The European Parliament,* New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, pp. 145-146.

[15] CORBETT Richard, *The European Parliament's Role in Closer EU Integration,* London, Macmillan, 1998, p. 73.

[16] *Ibid.,* p. 74.

[17] *Ibid.,* pp. 74-75.

[18] See, for example: ROBERT Cécile, "L'expertise comme mode d'administration communautaire : entre logiques technocratiques et stratégies d'alliance", *Politique européenne*, n° 11, 2003, pp. 57-78.

[19] CORBETT Richard, *The European Parliament's Role in Closer EU Integration,* London, Macmillan, 1998, p. 69.

[20] See, for example: KERR Henry H., "Changing Attitudes Through International Participation: European Parliamentarians and Integration", *International Organization,* Vol. 27, n° 1, 1973, pp. 45-83.

[21] FRANKLIN Mark N. et SCARROW Susan E., « Making Europeans ? The Socializing Power of the European Parliament », *in* KATZ Richard S. et WESSELS Bernhard (dir.), *The European Parliament, the National Parliament and European Integration,* New York, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 45.

[22] *Ibid.*

[23] ABÉLÈS Marc, *La vie quotidienne au Parlement européen,* Paris, Hachette, 1992, pp. 207-208.

[24] *Ibid.,* pp. 208-209.

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