

General patterns of women's representation at the European Parliament: did something change after 2004?

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Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to analyze social and political features of women among members of European Parliament during its Sixth legislature. Beyond statistics aggregation, we will try to adopt a comparative perspective which includes three dimensions. The first one is historical. How can we understand evolutions in the composition of this sample? The second is cross-cutting and focuses on differences between women and men and evolutions of those diverging patterns. The third dimension attempts to analyze structural oppositions between national delegations on the path to feminization. Together, these interrogations will allow us to discuss general patterns of women's presence at the European Parliament after the 2004 and 2007 Eastern enlargements. The paper is based upon quantitative and qualitative data collected within the framework of a long-term sociological study of MEPs conducted at the University of Strasbourg.

Keywords: Gender and politics, MEPs, European elections, political paths, parliamentary works.

Résumé :

Notre article se propose d'analyser les caractéristiques sociales et politiques des femmes membres du Parlement Européen pendant la sixième législature. Il s'agit de tenter d'aller au delà de la simple collecte statistique et d'adopter une perspective comparative, qui tient compte de trois dimensions. La première est historique : comment pouvons-nous comprendre les évolutions de la composition de cet échantillon ? La deuxième est transversale et consiste à examiner les différences entre hommes et femmes et leurs évolutions. La troisième dimension vise à éclairer les oppositions structurelles entre les délégations nationales dans le processus de féminisation. Ces interrogations nous amèneront à nous pencher sur les modalités générales de la présence des femmes au Parlement Européen après les élargissements de 2004 et 2007. Cette étude repose sur des données quantitatives et qualitatives collectées dans le cadre d'une importante étude sociologique des députés européens menée à l'Université de Strasbourg.

Mots-clés : Genre et politique, députés européens, élections européennes, trajectoires politiques, travail parlementaire.

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Introduction

The feminisation of the European Parliament (EP) is often emphasized by the literature available on the subject (Vallance, Davies, 1986; Norris, Franklin, 1997; Hix, Lord, 1997; Bryder, 1998; Norris 1999; Mather, 2001; Freedman, 2002). However, gender is seldom put in perspective with what the members of the European Parliament (MEP) are. Indeed, in the study of political personnel, it is impossible to study gender differences without embedding them in the matrix of the properties that favour a political career (Achin, Levêque, 2006), be it socio-professional properties (intellectual professions such as lawyers, academics, etc.) (Dogan, 1999; Willemez, 1999; Gaxie, 1996), or former political experience of the profession of politician, leading to a positioning within the political field. Who are these women MEPs? What are their social and political features, their former paths? What are the identifiable variations according to nationality? Do women in the EP distinguish themselves from men through their practices and involvements? These questions only have meaning in the configuration formed by all MEPs, within a context of institutionalisation of the EP, which, like a fishing net, after Norbert Elias's metaphor (1978), varies according to a set of variables (political positioning, nationality, time, etc.)

Our paper is based on a comparative approach essentially centred on four dimensions. First, we carry out a historical comparison of MEPs, focusing on the evolution of recruitment patterns and of the profiles, legislature after legislature. We will see that these profiles are far from unchanging; the analysis singles out the emergence of a new type of recruitment, in which women appear particularly valued, in contrast with most member states. We compare the features of men and women elected in the EP and uncover a number of contrasts. The third dimension strives to explain the gaps between national delegations, notably between the "old" and the "new" countries which accessed the EU in 2004. Finally, the fourth dimension focuses on a more qualitative assessment of what women MEPs do in their practice.

We posit the hypothesis that for women, the EP constitutes a privileged space of investment and acquisition of significant political resources. The EP is a space of political professionalisation, especially for women who, having generally less properties favourable to political professionalisation than their male counterparts, tend to get involved in the game that is played in this arena, secondary compared to national arenas. Thus, in the EP and elsewhere, the study of gender differences necessarily entails taking into account social and political backgrounds.

We will first study the feminisation of MEPs as a factor of the emergence of the EP as a space of political professionalisation (I), and proceed to compare the women MEPs' socio-political features with those of men, and then their involvements and practices in the assembly (II).

For the purposes of our study, a database was constituted from the biographies of MEPs between June 2004 and December 2006 (n=736),¹ using the EP's website "Your MEPs" section and biographical dictionaries: it does not take into account Bulgarian and Romanian MEPs who joined in 2007. There are indicators related to socio-demographical properties (gender, age, level and type of degree), dispositions for internationalisation (foreign degrees), political paths (types of mandates, career features), professional paths (former profession), as well as involvement in the European assembly: committees in which they sit, number of mandates and years in the EP, leadership positions (presidencies and vice-presidencies of committees, groups, membership in the Bureau, presidencies of delegations), number of reports, interventions in plenary sessions, questions asked, propositions of resolutions and written statements, over a three-year period (between June 2004 and June 2007).² Given the strategies of self-presentation used for part of this data, information was double-checked, notably via Internet.

Semi-directive interviews constitute another type of data. Those carried out with MEPs provide essential information and a first-hand approach. However, aside from the difficulties in securing appointments, it is hard to get MEPs to put aside their role of representation and to obtain a "non-formatted" discourse. In this respect, the staff – parliamentary assistants – is useful to give other information on the practices of MEPs and their staff. More than a hundred interviews with MEPs and collaborators were used here.

¹ 736, not 732, as four MEPs who resigned during the first half of the legislature are taken into account.

² Elements available on the website of the EP: www.europarl.eu.int

I - The European Parliament as a space of political professionalization

The variations of the socio-political features of MEPs lead us to question a set of appreciations generally formulated about them: mandate to end political careers, turn-over, inexistence of European political careers, dependence on national contexts, weak institutionalisation of the European parliamentary arena. An in-depth study of the population actually reveals an increasing stabilisation of the mandates and beyond the national diversity, a tendency towards the homogenization of their features. The feminisation of the population is one of the illustrations of these phenomena. The gaps mentioned by the MEPs from countries which accessed in 2004 strengthen the thesis of a political professionalisation.

1) Stabilisation of the mandates and increasing specialisation of paths to Europe

First observation: European mandates tend to become more stable. During the fifth legislature, nearly one out two MEPs was re-elected (Bryder, 1998; Corbett, Jacobs and Shackleton, 2000) and less than 15% resigned during their mandate (24% during the first legislature). In the 6th legislature, 43% of MEPs had already been previously elected (56% from the Fifteen older member states). Especially starting from the 3rd legislature (1989-1994), MEPs joined the Parliament for longer periods (Marrel & Payre, 2006). Halfway in the 6th legislature (late 2006), MEPs from the 15 averaged 2.0 mandates and 7.1 years of presence.

The stabilisation of the mandates is accompanied by a perceptible modification of the political properties, with a tendency towards the emergence of a new typical figure. Whereas in the 1980s, MEPs were

often characterized by a national political experience, in the 1990s, regardless of the country of origin, the access to the EP tended to be a means to access political professionalisation: it was more frequently a first mandate (a bit more than 1/3 in the 6th legislature), or a first significant mandate (1/4 had only held a local mandate). A growing number of MEPs access a mandate that enables the practice of a paid full-time political activity through Europe.

At the same time, political careers appear to be a lot more specialized on European matters. MEPs indeed combine increasingly fewer national mandates with their European mandate: in the first legislature (1979-1984), 31% held a double mandate (national parliament and EP) – 7% in the fifth legislature (1999-2004). Similarly, 45% of MEPs in 1979, 35% in 1984 and only 28% in 1999 have already been members of parliament in their country; respectively 17%, 13% and 10% have been ministers (Scarrow, 1997; Corbett, Jacobs and Shackleton, 2000). If these proportions have slightly increased in 2004 (36% of former members of parliament and 16% of former ministers), it is notably because of the different profiles of MEPs from countries of the 2004 enlargement, who hold more national political resources. Figures are rather similar to those of the 5th legislature for MEPs from the Fifteen (respectively 31% and 12%).

While they underline convergences taking shape in the modes of recruitment of MEPs, these results also point to disparities in the population and correlatively, provide information on the characteristic tensions of the parliamentary space. They depend less from strictly national oppositions (a German type vs. a French type) than from global evolutions of the mode of recruitment of MEPs and historical disparities affecting new member states. De facto, MEPs who have strong national political experience tend to be men, rather

older, right wing and to come from countries of the 2004 enlargement. 40% of men have been elected in national parliaments (29% of women), and 18% are ex-members of government (11% of women).

A majority of the older MEPs have held a national mandate: 57% of those over 60 years old, 39% between 55 and 60 years old, 24% for the under 45 years old; more precisely, 27% of the over 60 have been members of a government, 17% of the 50-60, and only 3,5% of the under 45. More than 1/3 of the UEN MEPs have been members of a government, 1/5 in the EPP – UEN and EPP being the two main right wing groups – only 1/8 in the ESP, one Green MEP, none in the GUE. These gaps follow an axis based less on nationalities than on historical discrepancies related to the enlargements. Predominantly male, older, and right wing,³ the MEPs from new member countries have in majority a parliamentary experience at the national level (56% - 31% for the Fifteen), be they Latvian, Estonian, Slovakian, Slovenian, Lithuanian, Polish, Hungarian or Czech. Among the 15, only the Portuguese (71%) and the Finns (77%) distinguish themselves through their higher rates, in comparison to the Dutch (7%), German (14%) and British (16%). Similarly, the former members of government represent 78% of Latvians, 50% of Estonians, 43% of Slovenians, and only 5% of British and 0% of Germans and Dutch MEPs. Among the 15, only the Irish and, again, the Portuguese, are exceptions. Consequently, the MEPs from states that have accessed the EU in 2004 have profiles that are

³ Right wing political groups benefited from the enlargement: while MEPs from the ten new member countries in 2004 represented 22% of the assembly, the UEN group is constituted in majority by MEPs from new member countries, EPP by ¼, and only 15% in the three left wing groups (only 2% in the Greens, 17% in the ESP, 20% in the GUE).

comparable to those of MEPs in the mid-1980s.

2) Transformation and homogenization of socio-demographical properties

The transformation of political properties since the first universal suffrage vote goes hand in hand with the transformation of socio-demographical variables (age, original profession, training, gender). The relative homogenization of the profiles found in political paths can also be seen, as a tendency and with nationality-related differentiations, in the socio-demographical features on four levels: the narrowing of the population pyramid, the persistence of an intellectual elite, the growing internationalization of individual profiles, and feminisation.

A narrowing population pyramid

When it comes to the age of European representatives, the EP is no exception to the usual observations on political professionals: MEPs mainly correspond to middle age profiles (Best & Cotta). In 2006, the average age was 53.3 years (standard deviation 9.8 years) – the oldest being 82, and the youngest 29 – the modal age group is 50 to 60 years (40% of MEPs). Only ¼ are less than 45 years old. Such is always the case, legislature after legislature. In 1979, very old MEPs represented a more important share of the European political personnel, the figure of the MEP at the end of his/her career being then very common. In the late 1990s, on the opposite, the majority of MEPs (73%) were between 40 and 60 years old, only 14% were less than 40 and 13% more than 60 (Hi & Lord, 1997). These results have to be qualified according to nationality: Luxembourgers – the oldest, ten years above average – Cypriots, Estonians, French and Italians distinguish themselves with higher averages (more than 55 years),

unlike the Maltese, Hungarians, Dutch and Swedes.

An intellectual elite

Professional backgrounds are also similar to those of the political personnel (Dogan, 1999). MEPs have a very middle-class profile, with a prevalence of legal professions (12% of the entire assembly in 1996) and teaching professions (22%) (Franklin & Norris, 1997; Hix & Lord, 1997; Westlake, 1994). These tendencies are confirmed in the 6th legislature.

The level of higher education of MEPs is rather high compared to national averages: half of them have completed at least five years of higher education, a quarter have a PhD. The majority of them have followed curricula related to the “sciences of power”: law (26%), political science (8%), economy (16%), human sciences (31%) rather than science and technology (mathematics, physics, etc. 13%) or health (mostly medicine 6%). They have massively practised intellectual professions: 21% scientific professions (academics and researchers such as Lipietz, Weber), 13% professions in information, communication and arts (Cavada, Geringer de Oerdenberg, Cashman, Goebbels, Piks), 11% liberal professions (Gaubert, Leinen), 10% teachers in secondary schools (Fruteau, Wurtz, Martens, Simpson, Foltyn-Kubicka). The proportions of farmers (2%) (Daul, Coveney, Ashworth) and intermediary or lower class professions have steadily decreased in comparison to the preceding legislatures: 6% of intermediary professions and less than 3% of employees and workers. The differences between nationalities should also be underlined. Holding higher degrees, the MEPs from new member countries have more often studied economy, science and technology or health than law or human sciences. Logically, in light of their level of higher education, they have more often

practised scientific professions (39% - 16%) and been high officials or diplomats than business owners or directors, secondary school teachers, middle management executives, employees and workers.

Internationalisation of the profiles

In keeping with the internationalisation of academic markets and the elites (Wagner, 1998; Lazuech, 1998), some MEPs have increasingly international profiles. They were until then restricted, but are now more durable within the assembly. In the 6th legislature, 12% of MEPs have obtained a degree in another country than their own – European but also American and sometimes Russian for a few MEPs from Eastern European countries. This internationalisation is slightly more characteristic of MEPs from countries that have a more peripheral position within the European Union, notably Hungarian, Czech, Maltese as well as Portuguese and Greek MEPs (42% of them).⁴

Relatively numerous women

Feminisation is another aspect worthy of mention. The proportion of women, which is higher than in most national parliaments, doubled between the first legislature and the last two: 16% in 1979 and 30% between 1999 and 2004. While the EP remains one of the most feminized assemblies in Europe, parity is still not effective there.

Variations according to nationality should also not be overlooked. There are fewer women MEPs from Cyprus, Malta, Poland, Italy, the Czech Republic and Latvia. Conversely, there are more than

40% of women sitting in the EP from Sweden (the only country where women are more numerous than men), the Netherlands, Denmark, Estonia, Slovenia and France.

As a rule, MEPs from countries of the 2004 enlargement are less feminized than those of the Fifteen (less than ¼ of women – 1/3 for those of the Fifteen). That said, the women's share in the EP is almost always more important than within national parliaments. Like in the case of MEPs without former political experience or the so-called "Euro-regional" MEPs (Kauppi, 1995), this factor tends to make of the Parliament a full-fledged space of political professionalisation, to a great extent occupied by actors whose socio-political profiles are less favourable to political competition than in the various national political spaces.

II - Women in the European Parliament: MEPs like the others?

In the EP, women distinguish themselves through two aspects: first, their social and political backgrounds less favourable to the exercise of a political mandate, because less legitimate; secondly, differentiated involvements in the parliamentary activity – these differences should be tied to their differentiated political and social resources.

Differentiated social and political backgrounds

The feminisation of the European political personnel was, from its early stages, spurred by left wing parties (Norris, Franklin, 1997). In the French delegation in 1979, women represented more than 22% of the socialist and communist MEPs. The feminisation rate of the Green, socialist and communist personnel then

⁴ If the internationalisation of curricula is prevalent for Greek MEPs, for instance, it is also very geographically localized, Greek MEPs belonging first and foremost to the intellectual elite holding American, British or French degrees more than ex-Yugoslavian ones, for example, following certain types of internationalisation – see Panayotopoulos, 1998.

continually increased: 26.5% in 1984, 32% in 1989, 42% in 1994 and 49% in 1999. The feminisation of right wing MEPs occurred much later and in a more random way. From 18% in the first legislature, the rate dropped to 14,5% during the second, and even less than 12% in the third. It progressed again from 1994 (16%), and reached more than 31% between 1999 and 2004, progressively attaining levels characteristic of left wing parties. Similarly, regardless of nationality, in the 6th legislature, women are found more in centre-left groups (ESP (40% of MEPs), Greens-EFA (46.5%)), and liberal ones (ALDE (41%)) than in other groups (GUE (30%), EPP (23%), and especially IND/DEM, UEN and non-registered (between 11 and 16%)).

In contrast with the traditional weakness of female representation in political institutions – barring a few exceptions such as Sweden – the high proportion of women elected in the EP raises questions about the mechanisms of selection and recruitment of MEPs. Unlike in other assemblies, gender constitutes a positive and distinctive social property in the EP. Younger than men (average in 2006: 51.4 – 54.2 for men) and endowed with less social resources, women MEPs also have less political mandates, notably among the most legitimate. These variations should be qualified for MEPs from countries of the 2004 enlargement.

Less socio-cultural properties

No more than MEPs taken as a whole distinguish themselves from the national political elites in this respect, they mostly belong to the upper categories of the social space. Women are however much more strongly positioned in the cultural and recent fractions of the upper categories than their male counterparts.

Less often company managers (2% - 9%), high officials (4% - 8.5%) or practising a liberal profession (8% -

12.5%), they are more frequently teachers in primary or secondary schools (14.5% - 7.5%), employees (5% - 1.5%), with an intermediary profession (8.5% - 5%) or a profession in information, communication or the arts (journalist, television presenter) (14.5% - 11.5%). MEPs from countries of the 2004 enlargement had rather different profiles: 45% were academics (14% for those from the Fifteen) – the differential was however closer for men (36% - 16%).

An examination of paths and educational properties leads to similar conclusions: MEPs have less high educational resources than their male counterparts. Despite the important proportion of academic paths (more in political science and human sciences than law, economy, health, science and technology), they have less educational capital than men. They have less PhDs (23% - 28%) and have less often completed five years of higher education (52% - 59%), and more often three or four years. Once again, MEPs from countries of the 2004 enlargement are an exception as they have higher degrees than their female and male counterparts of the Fifteen, as well as than their male counterparts from the new member states: 55% have a PhD – 16% and 22% of women and men from the Fifteen, 46% of men from the new member states; 82% have completed five or more years of higher education – respectively 45%, 53% and 76% for the others.

Less political capital

Political paths are also cleaved according to gender. Women MEPs are endowed with less symbolic properties, as suggest decorations at the international or national level, or those related to specific sectors (academic, professional, etc.) (17% - 26%). They are also endowed with less political capital. Upon their accession to the EP, women's political careers, national and

local, are shorter than men's careers.⁵ Women MEPs have less frequently held a governmental function (11% - 18% for their male counterparts), a national (30% - 42%) or local political mandate (50% - 62%). The women's access to politics occurred more through positions of political collaborators (27% - 16%) and associations (37% - 28%).⁶

The repartition of former mandates, modes of accession to political careers and symbolic properties thus point to a differentiation according to the gender of MEPs: women have less political capital. The European mandate in itself represents more often an opportunity for political professionalisation to women. But once again, this observation should not be hastily homogenized. MEPs from the 10 countries of the 2004 enlargement distinguish themselves through better experience, including than the man from the Fifteen: among them, 20% have been ministers – 9% of MEPs from the Fifteen (31% - 14% for men); 35% have been members of national parliaments – 27.5% of MEPs from the Fifteen (63% - 32% for men). While they are endowed with less of the most legitimate political resources than their male counterparts from new member states, they still have more resources than women MEPs from the Fifteen.

This comparison of the social and political properties of MEPs therefore suggests that Europe is a key space for the promotion, political involvement and strengthening of the place of women in

political life. A more qualitative approach confirms this hypothesis.

2) Eagerness to get involved into European parliamentary activity

The in situ observation of women MEPs in the assembly enables to continue the reflection engaged on the modalities of their election, and to stress the social logics of involvement in the mandate and of construction of European parliamentary roles. Hoping to increase, thanks to the European mandate, their stocks of political resources and credit, women have also strongly contributed to the specialisation of the function and its professionalisation. This observation should however be qualified, as mechanisms of sexual division still remain within political arenas.

The modes of involvement and modalities of appropriation of the mandate by women MEPs are arguably far from uniform: they vary heavily depending on social and political features. Indeed, women MEPs whose political paths are directly focused towards the centre of the political field (former ministers or national members of parliament, considered and considering themselves first and foremost as “national” representatives) and generally waiting for a lasting position in their national parliament or in the government, are as a rule little involved in the EP. It remains for them a secondary stage (Michèle Alliot-Marie, Roselyne Bachelot, now members of government in France). In their case, the duration of the European mandate is generally short, from a few months to a few years, and resignations during the mandate are frequent in favour of a political alternation or a legislative election (e.g. the case of Emma Bonino, who left the EP to integrate Prodi's government in the beginning of the 6th legislature). Their effective presence in the EP is also more episodic, and their parliamentary activity often reduced to votes in plenary sessions. The concrete

⁵ The case of Frenchwomen illustrates this particularly well: 4% of women MEPs have a national career of more than 15 years, 19% for their male counterparts. 15% have a local career of more than 15 years – 28% for the men.

⁶ The right/left divide is not very relevant for social and educational properties, but more so in terms of political background. Right wing women MEPs have more frequently been ministers (16% - 5% left wing) and members of national parliaments (32% - 26%). These discrepancies are however close for men as well.

practices of those women MEPs tend to be assimilated to forms of dilettantism often denounced by the more involved women MEPs – a very similar process happens for the men.

These are however not the most characteristic postures of women MEPs. Indeed, the study of the modes of recruitment of women in the EP shows a relative weakness of their resources, be they social, cultural (notably educational) or political, which differentiates them – relatively - from their male counterparts. The over-involvement in roles can therefore represent a strategy of compensation of a less favourable structure of resources and political, parliamentary and European legitimacy. The dispositions of those MEPs, regardless of their political group (Aline Pailler, Françoise Grossetête, Marie-Claude Vaissade being French examples) are characterized by a form of “goodwill” towards the institution and the roles that are prescribed within the institution. With fewer political resources, less familiarity through their political and social paths with the workings of political spaces and the know-how of professionals of representation, numerous women MEPs claim to be “hard workers”, even “industrious”, almost like “students”. They frequently emphasize the very “time-consuming” aspect of their work, like in this example:

“When you arrive here, you have a lot of things to discover. You can’t arrive thinking that you’ll be familiar with everything right away. And you need to make your mark, the French don’t always have the reputation to be hard workers, so on top of everything you need to make your mark by working hard. Here, if you work, there is no problem (...) I’ve worked an awful lot, for sure, I’ve worked very, very much. But I like what I do. I never pause to catch my breath all year, I never stop, I work all the time.”⁷

⁷ Interview with a woman MEP, cited by Akrivou and Lysoe, 1998.

Such involvements can be embedded in very diverse domains, according to their personal or political interests, within diverse commissions. Indeed, these forms of devotion to the institution and over-involvement in their roles by newcomers in the political field offer the possibility to reinforce a sometimes fragile legitimacy, within the perspective of a recognition liable to lead to the access to positions of leadership (i.e. vice-president of a group, like F. Grossetête before 2004, presidency of the institution like N. Fontaine during the 5th legislature) and to the acquisition of a genuine political credit, a capital specific to the European institution, which can then be reconverted in the national political field, at least insofar as it contributes to the renewal of the mandate. As long as the resources acquired within the institution can be reinvested into party organisations, the European parliamentary space can represent an alternative path of political professionalisation. In this sense, if one goes beyond ideologically negative opinions – characteristic, for instance, of far left wing MEPs whose refusal to play the parliamentary game constitutes a mode of management of the mandate of the constraints of representation – the subjective relationships to the institutions are always very positive as they coincide with ascending political and social paths, and because the EP, although it is at the periphery of the political field, constitutes an excellent position and means substantial symbolic and financial retributions.

The political approach of many women appears very entrepreneurial in relation to social spaces outside the political field, as well as to the Parliament where involvements are intense. Given the structure of their political and social properties, women tend to join secondary committees, which are not the most legitimate ones. Despite their lack of legitimacy, these committees are however still liable to confer important gains in

political capital, notably within the assembly itself. De facto, while men and women are not differentiated according to the average number of EP mandates (1.75 – 1.76 year), such is not the case for the repartition in parliamentary committees, the positions of power within the assembly, and legislative activity. In the 6th legislature, women MEPs are over-represented in committees that may be less prestigious, but are still at the core of the European legislative activity – Environment, public health and consumer policy (48% of women – 30% in the entire assembly), Internal market (48%), and especially Culture, youth, education, media and sport (47%) and Civil liberties (39%).⁸ On the opposite, they are under-represented in the most prestigious committees, where the MEPs endowed with the most political capital sit – Constitutional affairs (14% of women), Foreign affairs (18%), Economics and monetary affairs (25%) – but, for some of them, are less central in European political activity.

Correlatively to the emergence of a European space of public policies, the succession of treaties and the apparition of new legislative procedures, the Parliament's place in European policy-making has been strengthened (Costa, 2001), along with the centrality of commissions such as Environment, public health and consumer policy, Industry, Foreign trade, Research and energy, Internal market. The latter constitute spaces which enable to reuse, with strong chances of success, intellectual resources and socio-political dispositions for political involvement. They provide the possibility to follow issues and draft highly "technical" reports, submitted to the co-decision procedure and therefore quite valued from the late 1980s. Beyond their less prestigious character on a symbolical

level, they occupy a valorised place in the institution's internal hierarchy,⁹ the production by the Parliament of a technical expertise liable to compete with that of the Commission in fields that are supposedly much more technical than political is de facto at the core of institutional strategies. With the intensification of European construction from 1986 and especially 1992, genuine opportunities to acquire a new type of political capital emerged for actors who were socially and politically inclined to "play the game" and be massively involved, among which there were many women. It follows that the history of the institution cannot altogether ignore this coincidence between on the one hand relatively unexpected political paths in a parliamentary institution that had long lacked legitimacy, and on the other hand very specific legal procedures (Beauvallet, 2007).

The parliamentary practices of women MEPs cannot be understood outside of their social and political properties. More than a characteristic of femininity in politics, as some suggest, the forms of involvement in Europe should rather be related to the specificities of their political recruitment. The processes at work are similar to those of men, but with a more scattered recruitment.

The fact remains that – and this should be emphasized – mechanisms of sexual discrimination specific to political life do not disappear within the EP regarding the access to internal rewards in the institution, notably positions of power (presidency, vice-presidency of committees, groups, member of the Bureau): according to our calculations for MEPs in 2004, women have less often held leadership positions than men (21% of women – 28% of men), be it member of the bureau (4% - 5%), president of a group

⁸ Practices characteristic of other political assemblies are also found: Achin, 2005.

⁹ On the role of the Parliament and the Committee on budgetary control in the crisis of the Commission in 1998-1999: Georgakakis, 2000.

(1% - 2%), president of a committee (2.5% - 5%), vice-president of a committee (12% - 17%).¹⁰ These variations also illustrate the limits of the legislative action in favour of the promotion of gender equality at all levels of political action. In this respect, we can suppose that the promotion of gender on the European political market partly answers its instrumentalisation by party organisations for electoral reasons.

The effect of the differential distribution of political capital between men and women (see *supra*) should also not be overlooked, as the distribution of the number of parliamentary reports tends to indicate. On the whole, men have drafted slightly more parliamentary reports (1.79) than women (1.74) despite similar lengths of mandate; women MEPs from new member countries, endowed with more educational and political resources than their counterparts from the Fifteen, have drafted an average of 1.28 reports – 0.90 for their male counterparts (1.85 for women from the Fifteen – 2.05 for men from the Fifteen).

The analysis of the differences between men and women requires going beyond the genre variable, and taking into account the related effects of political background.

Conclusion

The present research shows that, for women, Europe constitutes a privileged space of access to political professionalisation. On the whole, women tend to profit from the less central character of the EP in the various political fields in order to circumvent the structural resistances they encounter in national

¹⁰ Whereas gender inequalities tend to decrease in the access to the EP, as the strong feminisation of certain delegations compared to the trends in national assemblies, they tend to reappear within the institution itself. On this topic, see notably Kauppi, 1999.

political spheres. The statistic study enables us to point out that with equal resources, they access the European parliamentary arena more easily than men. On this market, gender thus seems to be a positive characteristic in the political competition – one might say, an asset – we have tried to show this in the French case.¹¹

The study also shows that, for them, Europe constitutes a privileged space of involvement and acquisition of political resources. The weaker involvement in European levels by actors endowed with strong political capital, together with the widening of the Parliament's competences following the institutional transformations that have affected the Union since the Single Act Treaty, creating a structure of opportunities for representatives who access political professionalisation through the Parliament (including many women). The case of women thus shows very precisely the consequences of the emergence of a European level of electoral representation on political spheres. A genuine opportunity of advancement and acceleration of a political career submitted to strong constraints in the respective countries, the involvement in the Parliament of members of intermediary fractions of the political personnel also contributes, to a large extent, to feed the development of the institution and accelerate its professionalisation.

Finally, the study shows that the modes of recruitment characteristic of various member countries tend to converge towards a shared pattern, which favours the progressive identification of a new parliamentary figure. Within this framework, indeed, the major oppositions that are characteristic of the population can be found in most delegations. We have however revealed a perceptible difference between older member states and the new ones. In the new member states (since

¹¹ See Beauvallet, Michon, 2008.

2004), women are both less numerous and closer to the political elite, while the average age is higher and the differentiation of European and national paths is weaker. The standard profile of MEPs from the new member states is very close to that of MEPs from the older member states in the early 1980s, after the first universal suffrage election. This is the

first opposition that is characteristic of the space in terms of national belonging. All signs show that the arrival of new national delegations in the Parliament has led to the emergence of a specific cleavage. The concrete consequences of this cleavage on parliamentary life should be analysed further, with a more in-depth qualitative research.

Tables

Table 1: Distribution of degrees according to the type of country of election for MEPs elected in 2004

	Fifteen		New member countries	
	Total	%	Total	%
Higher education degree (1 to 5 years)	250	51%	112	77%
PhD	113	20%	75	48%
Graduates in:				
- Economy	63	14%	33	23%
- Science/technology	48	11%	31	22%
- Health	18	4%	18	13%
- Law	128	28%	23	16%
- Human sciences	151	34%	30	21%

Table 1: Repartition of MEPs from the 6th legislature according to their country of origin (descending ranking of the proportion of women per country)

		Men		Women		All	
		Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
1	Sweden	9	45.0%	11	55.0%	20	100.0%
2	Netherlands	15	55.6%	12	44.4%	27	100.0%
3	Denmark	8	57.1%	6	42.9%	14	100.0%
4	Estonia	4	57.1%	3	42.9%	7	100.0%
5	Slovenia	4	57.1%	3	42.9%	7	100.0%
6	France	45	57.7%	33	42.3%	78	100.0%
7	Ireland	8	61.5%	5	38.5%	13	100.0%
8	Lithuania	8	61.5%	5	38.5%	13	100.0%
9	Hungary	16	64.0%	9	36.0%	25	100.0%
10	Finland	9	64.3%	5	35.7%	14	100.0%
11	Slovakia	9	64.3%	5	35.7%	14	100.0%
12	Luxembourg	4	66.7%	2	33.3%	6	100.0%
13	Spain	36	66.7%	18	33.3%	54	100.0%
14	Austria	12	66.7%	6	33.3%	18	100.0%
15	Germany	67	67.7%	32	32.3%	99	100.0%
16	Greece	17	70.8%	7	29.2%	24	100.0%
17	UK	58	74.4%	20	25.6%	78	100.0%
18	Belgium	18	75.0%	6	25.0%	24	100.0%
19	Portugal	18	75.0%	6	25.0%	24	100.0%
20	Latvia	7	77.8%	2	22.2%	9	100.0%
21	Czech Rep.	19	79.2%	5	20.8%	24	100.0%
22	Italy	64	81.0%	15	19.0%	79	100.0%
23	Poland	46	85.2%	8	14.8%	54	100.0%
24	Malta	5	100.0%	0	0.0%	5	100.0%
25	Cyprus	6	100.0%	0	0.0%	6	100.0%
	Total	512	69,6%	224	30.4%	736	100%

Table 3: Repartition of professions and socio-professional categories of MEPs of the 6th legislature (whose profession is mentioned) according to gender

	Men		Women		Total	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Farmer	11	2.6%	1	0.5%	12	2%
Craftsman-retailer	6	1.4%	1	0.5%	7	1.2%
Company manager	37	8.9%	4	2.1%	41	6.8%
High official, diplomat	36	8.6%	8	4.2%	44	7.2%
Scientific profession	90	21.5%	38	20.1%	128	21.1%
Teacher in primary or secondary schools	31	7.4%	27	14.3%	58	9.6%
Information, communication or arts	49	11.7%	27	14.3%	76	12.5%
Liberal profession	52	12.4%	15	7.9%	67	11.0%
Senior executive – private sector	54	12.9%	28	14.8%	82	13.5%
Senior executive – public sector	24	5.7%	15	7.9%	39	6.4%
Intermediary profession	20	4.8%	16	8.5%	36	5.9%
Employee	6	1.4%	9	4.8%	15	2.5%
Worker	2	0.5%	0	0.0%	2	0.3%
Total	418	100%	189	100%	607	100%

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