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## **Understanding MEPs (varying) use of written parliamentary questions: domestic political culture and MEPs career patterns**

*Randour François (Unamur), Olivier Rozenberg (SciencesPo), Jérémy Dodeigne (Unamur), Ferdinand Teuber (UCLouvain)*

**Abstract:** Despite a growing scholarship focusing on the use of parliamentary questions in the EP, we still know little about the personal motivations as well as national cultural political differences that drive MEPs to invest time in the use of parliamentary questions. The paper provides an analysis of MEPs' use of written parliamentary questions (WpQ) in the 28 member states covering the 4<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> legislative terms, i.e. from 1994 to 2019 (about 163.894 WPQ). In particular, this paper investigates the impact that the domestic parliamentary culture of MEPs (i.e. macro-level variable) in combination with MEPs career patterns (i.e. individual-level variable) have on the use of WpQs. We argue that MEPs, when they enter the EP, bring their 'vision' of how to behave and act in parliament as per their own domestic parliamentary culture (i.e., how things are done in my country). In addition, for MEPs who have been directly socialized in such culture (because of former direct domestic experience in parliaments and/or executives), we expect that the 'replication' of such work habits would be even stronger. Our (preliminary) findings highlight that MEPs originating from a country having a strong culture of using written parliamentary questions ask more questions in the EP. In addition, the data also outlines that the effect of the parliamentary culture is even stronger when considering the previous domestic experience of MEPs (i.e. previous 'domestic' socialization).

**\*\*\* Very first draft \*\*\***

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## Introduction

Parliamentary representation has become a central feature of the European Union. The European Parliament's (EP) formal authority has considerably expanded since 1979 and is now on an equal footing with the Council of the European Union regarding the ordinary legislative procedure (OLP). Today's behavior of Members of the EP (MEPs) has very concrete effects on the European Union (EU)'s policy-making and has consequently attracted a growing attention from scholars. In this wake, various scholars have established that the parliamentary behavior of MEPs impact upon the EU policymaking (e.g., see. Hix et al., 2007; Hix and Noury, 2009; Kreppel, 2002). While these studies made important contributions in our understanding of legislative politics in the EP, our knowledge on how MEPs behave besides voting behavior remains, however, limited.

In particular, the reasons why MEPs decide to invest time in the use of parliamentary questions is still a topic relatively understudied (Brack and Costa, 2019). Since the pioneer studies of Raunio (1996), Proksch and Slapin (2010) and Jensen et al. (2013), there has been a growing interest in the use and or focus of (written) parliamentary questions by MEPs. While parliamentary questions are clearly not the most powerful legislative instrument available for MEPs (Brack and Costa, 2019; Navarro, 2019), their analysis is an interesting method for gathering additional information on the preferences, behavior and focus of representation of parliamentarians (Rozenberg and Martin, 2011; Martin, 2011). Considering the other instruments available to MEPs (e.g., voting, amendments, speeches in plenary, rapporteurship etc.) and knowing that MEPs have scarce resources and time, the reasons why they decide to devote time to an activity of a (a priori) weak scope deserve attention.

Overall, the literature focusing on MEPs' use of written parliamentary questions has already established the decisive roles of several *structural-level factors*, such as the impact of the electoral system (Chiru, 2022; Sozzi, 2016a; Koop et al., 2018), government-opposition dynamics at the national (Proksch and Slapin, 2010; Jensen et al., 2013) and European levels (Kaniok and Kominkova, 2019), (the size of) EPGs (Navarro, 2019; Sozzi, 2016b; Sorace, 2018; Brack and Costa, 2019), the position towards European integration (Proksch and Slapin, 2010) but also committee membership (Sozzi, 2021, Navarro, 2019). Yet, we still know little about the impact of *macro-level factors* (i.e., national cultural political differences) as well as of *individual-level factors* (i.e., MEPs individual career patterns) that drive MEPs to invest time in the use of written parliamentary questions in the European Parliament.

In this wake, the objective of the article is to analyze MEPs' use of written parliamentary on two accounts. First, the paper provides a longitudinal analysis MEPs' use of written parliamentary questions over the last five legislative terms (i.e., 1994-2019), accounting for about 163.000 parliamentary questions. Second, the article also aims at expanding our

understanding of MEPs use of parliamentary questions by investigating the impact of the domestic parliamentary culture of MEPs (i.e. macro-level variable) in combination with MEPs career patterns (i.e. individual-level variable). Therefore, the research question of this paper is the following: *How can we explain the variation in the use of WPQs across MEPs?*

The article contributes to the existing research theoretically and empirically. Theoretically, despite the fact that some authors highlighted in the past the importance of the domestic political culture and highlighted differences across countries (see. Raunio, 1996; Proksch and Slapin, 2010, Sorace, 2018; Brack and Costa, 2019; Chiru, 2022), scholars have not yet tested the argument of domestic parliamentary culture in a systematic and causal manner (i.e., findings are mainly descriptive). Overall, the rationale of these studies is that MEPs from countries that are accustomed to written parliamentary questions will be more active in using this kind of parliamentary tool. This was the intuition of Raunio (1996) and was confirmed by Proksch and Slapin (2010). Other studies also took country differences into account but they limited their analysis to a control variable of all countries (e.g., Sorace, 2018) or for some countries, like in the study of Chiru (2022) that control for 'new' EU-13 MEPs or the study of Sozzi (2016b) that control for UK, as these MEPs come from a country with a recognized tradition in using parliamentary questions (Farrell and Scully, 2007; Katz, 1997).

In addition, in the wake of the seminal contribution of Schlesinger (1966), the paper also analyses the influence of career orientation (Scarrow 1997) in combination with the domestic parliamentary culture of MEPs. On this regard, several scholars already discussed the impact of MEPs career patterns on their legislative behavior, yet they never focused on non-legislative activities (i.e. WPQs), a tool that is less constrained by EPGs leadership. Overall, while analyzing parliamentary questions, some authors looked at proxies aiming at capturing to some extent the impact of MEPs career patterns, such as seniority, MEPs tenure (in days) or being a newcomer/incumbent but scholars still need to reflect on the interaction between MEPs career patterns – limited in this version of the article to the distinction between domestically experienced MEPs and the others<sup>1</sup> – and their domestic parliamentary culture.

Empirically, while existing studies made important contributions to understand the use of WPQs, they are also limited in their empirical scope and do not offer a comprehensive and longitudinal analysis of the use of written parliamentary questions over time. Studies are often restricted to a small number of countries (e.g., Sozzi, 2016b), and/or limited to the analysis of

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<sup>1</sup> The literature on MEPs career patterns is more developed than what we achieve in this version of the paper. In forthcoming versions of this paper, we will analyze in depth the impact of various career patterns on the use of parliamentary questions. Indeed, existing research, notably the one of Meserve et al. (2009) showed that 'nationally-oriented' MEPs are less disciplined than 'EP-oriented' MEPs in terms of voting. Høyland et al. (2019) analyzed the relationship between career ambition (i.e., national, European and non-political career) on voting and speeches in debates and outlined that MEPs who seek a European level career participate more than national-oriented MEPs. Van Geffen (2016) – analyzing attendance, amendments and motions – found similar results.

specific legislative terms (e.g., Sorace, 2018; Sozzi, 2016a; Proksch and Slapin, 2010; Raunio, 1996), on the analysis of a sample of parliamentary questions (Chiru, 2022; Brack and Costa, 2019; Jensens et al., 2013) or finally, they focus on certain EPGs, categories of MEPs (i.e., female MEPs or Eurosceptic MEPs) (Cornacchione and Tuning, 2020; Kaniok and Kominkova, 2019, 2020) or on certain policy fields (see. Kluger Dionigi, 2020; Michon and Weill, 2022; Meijers and van der Veer, 2019).

The remainder of the article is organized as follows. Section 2 presents the analytical framework and discusses how the variation in MEPs use of parliamentary questions can be explained by looking at the career orientations of MEPs (individual-level) and at domestic parliamentary culture. The next section discusses why it is pertinent to focus on written parliamentary questions and introduces the data, operationalization of variables and the method of analysis. Subsequently, we provide a preliminary analysis and provide a short discussion of the findings and the future steps of our research project.

## **2. Understanding MEPs' use of WPQs: MEP's career patterns and domestic political culture**

Following the seminal contribution of March and Olsen (1989, see. also Lowndes and Roberts, 2013), this paper rests on the assumption that institutions matter. Indeed, institutions constrain but also offer opportunities to actors within a particular organizational context (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) and they show resilience over time, producing 'stable, valued and recurring patterns of behavior' (Huntington, 1968). Therefore, the variation in the behavior of MEPs – and in this case, the use of WPQs – can be understood by considering institutional framework in which they operate. In this paper, we conceptualize MEPs career patterns and the domestic parliamentary culture of MEPs as (complementary) institutions impacting on their behavior.

On the one hand, while entering the EP, MEPs bring with them the political culture of their home countries and in particular, their domestic parliamentary culture. The 'institution' of (domestic) parliamentary questions (Raunio, 1996) can also impact on how MEPs will deal with parliamentary questions in the EP. Indeed, MEPs may act at the EU level as 'things are done' at the domestic level, as they come with their work habit and as the latter are perceived as 'natural, rightful, expected and legitimate' (March and Olsen, 2004:3). To some extent at least, 'actors are able to look back and learn from past experience, and can look forward and attempt to influence events in the future' (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013: 44). On the other hand, a MEP career experience as well as anticipation of future offices can impact the way she/he acts once serving in office. In this respect, career patterns are thus more than the succession of different positions: career patterns are 'institutions in their own right' (Borchert 2011). In the wake of Daniel (2015), we consider that career patterns allow those in office to learn the 'rules

of the game'. Going back to a seminal sociological perspective, a career is thus a dynamic concept providing cognitive and interpretative meaning schemes which in turn shape one's behavior (Hughes, 1937). Quite importantly, as underlined by Ostrom (1986), no institution stands alone: they are interconnected with other institutions which can reinforce its effect or complement them. In practice, it means that an MEP career pattern may as well interact with the domestic (parliamentary) culture of its country. Indeed, as underlined by Raunio (1996), some MEPs have had previous experiences in domestic parliaments and/or in executives. Their domestic work habit and behavior in the EP may as well 'reflect their experiences in national politics' (Raunio, 1996:358), thereby combining the institution of 'career pattern' together with 'the domestic parliamentary culture'.

## **2.1 MEPs domestic parliamentary culture and parliamentary questions**

An institution that may impact on the activity of MEPs is the domestic parliamentary culture (Raunio, 1996). In fact, several studies (see Raunio, 1996; Proksch and Slapin, 2010, Sorace, 2018; Brack and Costa, 2019; Chiru, 2022) already highlighted the existence of country variance but have not yet tested, in a systematic manner, its impact on the use of parliamentary questions. Most of the time, the findings on this matter are descriptive and 'only' control for the existence of country variance.

Overall, while parliamentary question is a tool available in all EU national legislatures, there exist important cultural differences across parliaments regarding the procedure to submit a question as well as the type of written parliamentary questions. Indeed, we know that the institutional style of the parliament can be more or less favorable to oversight activities and, within the set of available oversight tools, to specific instruments such as written questions. Within political systems focused on the representational ideal type of parliamentary politics, written questions are more likely in order to cultivate the electoral link between citizens and legislators (Palonen 2018). While parliamentary written questions are not necessarily effective for getting reelected (Lazardeux 2005), they may enable yet legislators to signal their constituents that they are active and mobilized. For example, it often put forward in the literature that UK is a special case, recognized as having an important tradition in the use of parliamentary questions (Sozzi, 2016b; Farrel and Scully, 2007).

The differences between the institutional rules organizing the procedure reflect this variation in the dedication towards these instruments. There are countries where the possibility to ask questions is limited, either through the total number of questions that can be asked or through some thresholds. In other cases, such as Israel, written questions do not have a specific status: all questions are asked in writing, some are answered orally, and the remaining ones receive a written answer. As a result, existing datasets indicate that the volume of written

questions varies greatly from an assembly to another. There were, around 2015, around 70 questions yearly asked by legislator from the House of Commons in the UK vs. only 5 in most European legislatures<sup>2</sup>. To sum up, there exist important variation at the domestic level regarding the parliamentary culture of written question.

Consequently, when they enter the EP, MEPs bring their ‘vision’ of how to behave and act in parliament as per their own domestic parliamentary culture (i.e., how things are done in my country). It can also be the case of their staff that typically, at least for some of them, originate from the same Member States and that are tasked with drafting a large number of questions (Michon 2018). We therefore expect that the behavior of MEPs will reflect – at least at the start of their mandate – the parliamentary culture of their home countries. In practice, it means that **the more MEPs originate from a country with a tradition of using written parliamentary questions, the more written parliamentary questions asked (H1)**.

## **2.2 MEPs career patterns, parliamentary culture and written parliamentary questions**

Another institution that may impact MEPs’ behavior is their career patterns. Indeed, as outlined by Dodeigne et al., (2022), in comparison to other multilevel democracies (Stolz 2011; Dodeigne 2018), the EP can be categorized as an “integrated electoral arena” – like Belgium or Spain for instance – as it displays relatively strong interactions between European and domestic electoral arenas. This makes the EP an interesting example of multi-level career paths (Hoyland et al., 2019). Overall, we expect that different types of MEPs would display different levels of activity, as they have different prior experience and career goals. Indeed, previous studies focusing on career paths and legislative activities – but not on parliamentary questions – already showed a link between career ambition and parliamentary activities (Hoyland et al., 2019; Meserve et al., 2009; van Geffen, 2016). We therefore turn to the question of how and in which direction can MEPs’ career patterns impact on the use of written parliamentary questions.

In particular, considering that the EP is an integrated electoral arena, it also means that there are an important number of MEPs bringing their domestic parliamentary culture and, for some of them, their parliamentary ‘work habit’ into the EP. In this respect, the distinction between MEPs having prior domestic political experience and the ones having no prior experiences is particularly interesting, as it allows to distinguish between MEPs having experienced their domestic parliamentary culture compared to ‘domestic virgin’ MEPs (i.e., MEPs embedded in a parliamentary culture, yet without having experienced it). More precisely, for MEPs who have been directly socialized in such culture (because of former direct domestic

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<sup>2</sup> Source: Olivier Rozenberg, Eleni Tsaireli, *Vital Statistics on European Legislatures*, 2016. See: <https://statisticslegislat.wixsite.com/mysite/data>

experience in parliaments and/or executives), we expect that the 'replication' of such work habits would be even stronger. Therefore, we expect that **the more MEPs originate from a country with a tradition of using written parliamentary questions and having experienced it, the more written parliamentary questions asked (H2).**

### **3. Case selection, data and operationalization**

#### **3.1 A focus on written parliamentary questions**

Parliamentary questions serve several functions: it can be used to obtain information as well as to control the European Commission, the Council (Raunio, 1996) and more recently, the ECB. Other authors also highlighted the role of questions as a form of obstruction (Jensen et al., 2013) as well as a tool to promote MEPs' reputation among relevant groups (i.e., constituency, interest groups, national party or the EPG) (Sozzi, 2016; Martin, 2011). Finally, parliamentary questions have also been described as a two-way information channel (Raunio 1996), as they can also be used to send information to the executive (Rozenberg and Martin 2011). Overall, and compared with other parliamentary instruments available to MEPs, written parliamentary questions are not the most powerful legislative instrument available for MEPs. In this regard, some authors consider parliamentary questions as serving a symbolic purpose as they have a limited impact on EU policy-making (Brack and Costa, 2019).

The focus of this article is on written parliamentary questions. This choice is explained by several reasons. First, written parliamentary questions are the most popular form of questioning in the EP. Their number has constantly been on the rise between 1979 and 2014, with a peak during the 2009-2014 legislative term (LT). In particular, for the period covered in this article, our comprehensive datasets 163.705 WPQs that are split over accordingly over the five last legislative terms: 13.096 WPQs during LT4, 15.000 questions during LT5, 18.723 WPQs during LT6, 30.292 WPQs during LT7, 31.000 during LT8, 55.742 WPQs during LT9 and finally, 54.000 during LT10 and 45.852 WPQs during LT11 (see. appendix 1). This increase in the number of questions leads to wonder why are MEPs using such an important amount of written parliamentary questions and what can explain their use over time. Second, as underlined by Navarro (2009, see also Brack and Costa, 2019), the procedure for written parliamentary question in the EP is the most stable one (at least until 2014), and this allows to make comparison over time. Defined in Article 130 of the EP's Rules of Procedure, there exist two sub-types of written questions: non-priority (E) and priority (P) questions. While the number of priority questions is limited to 1 question per month per MEP, up until the 8<sup>th</sup> legislative term, there was no limit regarding the number of non-priority questions an MEP could ask. However, given the important increase in the number of questions asked, modifications were introduced in the EP's Rules of procedure for LT11 (Brack and Costa, 2019). More precisely, from July 2014 to December 2016, MEPs could



as a maximum of five questions per month. This number changed again in the course of the legislative term (EP's rule of procedure of December 2016) and fixed the limit to 20 questions over a period of three months (i.e., 80 per year). Another distinction between priority and non-priority questions is the time allowed to the Commission and the Council to answer them. In the case of priority questions, they shall be answered within a three-week period whereas non-priority questions shall be answered within six weeks after they have been forwarded to the addressees. Finally, and most importantly, when compared to other parliamentary instruments available to MEP, written parliamentary questions offer several advantages. They are accessible at the individual level (1) and are independent of control from the party leadership (2). In addition, there are few institutional constraints in their use (but see. LT8) and require little effort or skills (3).

### **3.2 Presentation of the data**

The empirical analysis is based on the combination of several original datasets. The first dataset includes the total number of written questions by each MEP during the 1994-2019 period and was scraped from the official website of the EP. For each question, we collected the following information: the date, the EP's rule and title of the question as well as the author(s) and addressee of the question. In total, this amounts for 163.894 WPQs over 25 years (1994-2019). Second, to establish the nature of domestic parliamentary culture across Member states, we compiled a dataset gathering information on the use of written parliamentary questions at the domestic level in all EU Member States over time (Randour, Rozenberg and Dodeigne, 2022). For each Member States, we gathered data on the number of written questions asked per year in the lower chambers, up to five years before the Member State entered the EU in line with the period analyzed (i.e., 1995-2019). For example, it means that for EU-15 Member States, we collected yearly the number of WpQs asked between 1990 and 2019 while for most EU-13 countries, the data collection period starts in 1999. These data were directly retrieved on the website of the national parliaments – when available – or via contacts with the different parliamentary administration<sup>3</sup>. The third dataset focuses MEPs career patterns since 1979 (Dodeigne, Randour, Kopsch, 2022) and includes information of EU-28 3,654 MEPs having served in the EP since 1979. In particular, for each MEP, we collected empirical data regarding the duration (in months) of their parliamentarian and governmental career at the domestic and European levels before, during (dual mandates) and after their EP mandates. Because a significant number of Member states sending delegations of MEPs to the EP are federations

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<sup>3</sup> With this procedure, we could retrieve 'complete' data for 17 out of 28 parliaments, and 'partial' data (covering on average at least 10 years) for an additional 6 parliaments, making a total of 23 parliaments. At this stage, for the other countries, we used as a proxy data collected by Rozenberg and Tsairaili for the year 2014 or 2015. Data are currently missing for Bulgaria and Czech Republic.

or regionalized states in which regional tiers present a high degree of authority (see. Regional Authority Index; Hooghe et al., 2010), the dataset also includes systematic information related to subnational political offices for 7 out of the EU-28 Member States (i.e., Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, UK). Finally, for information related to committee chairs, EPG, EP leadership positions and rapporteurship, we updated the dataset of Hix and Høyland (2011), respectively for LT7 and LT8.

### 3.3 Operationalization of the variables

The **dependent variable** ‘use of written parliamentary questions’ is operationalized as the total number of questions asked by each MEP in each of the five legislative terms covered by this study. The independent variable ‘**MEPs career patterns**’ makes a distinction between MEPs with previous domestic political experience in the legislature and executives and the other MEPs. In particular, to this end, we relied on the categorization developed by Dodeigne et al. (2022) which makes a distinction between four broad types of career orientation: (1) “political dead-end”, (2) “domestic-oriented” MEPs, (3) “European-oriented” MEPs and (4) MEPs with a “mixed orientation” (see. Appendix 1). While we do not use (yet<sup>4</sup>) this more elaborate distinction in the current stage of our paper, the categorization is still useful as it allows to make a distinction between career patterns of MEPs having previous domestic experience and MEPs having no prior-political experience. In practice, and relying on this categorization, we included as MEPs with prior domestic experience ‘Euro-two track MEPs’ (i.e., MEPs serving at least 1,5 terms in the EP after their domestic career (regional or national), ‘accumulating MEPs (i.e., MEPs holding dual mandates and sharing their time between the EP and domestic parliaments) and ‘EP retiree’ (i.e., MEPs with a substantial domestic career ending their career in the EP). These three categories of MEPs represent almost all MEPs having prior domestic political experience before entering the EP.

Regarding the independent variable **domestic parliamentary culture**, we created a categorical variable distinguishing between 3 types of domestic parliamentary culture (see. Appendix 2). In practice, for each Member States, we calculated the degree of parliamentary activity in terms of mean of WpQs asked by MPs. Based on this, we made a distinction between MEPs originating from countries having a ‘low’ domestic parliamentary culture (i.e., these MPs asked on average less than 10 written parliamentary per year in their national parliament, N=12), with MPs originating from countries having a ‘medium/high’ one (between 11 and 35 written questions, N=13) with countries labelled as ‘extreme’ and composed of countries asking

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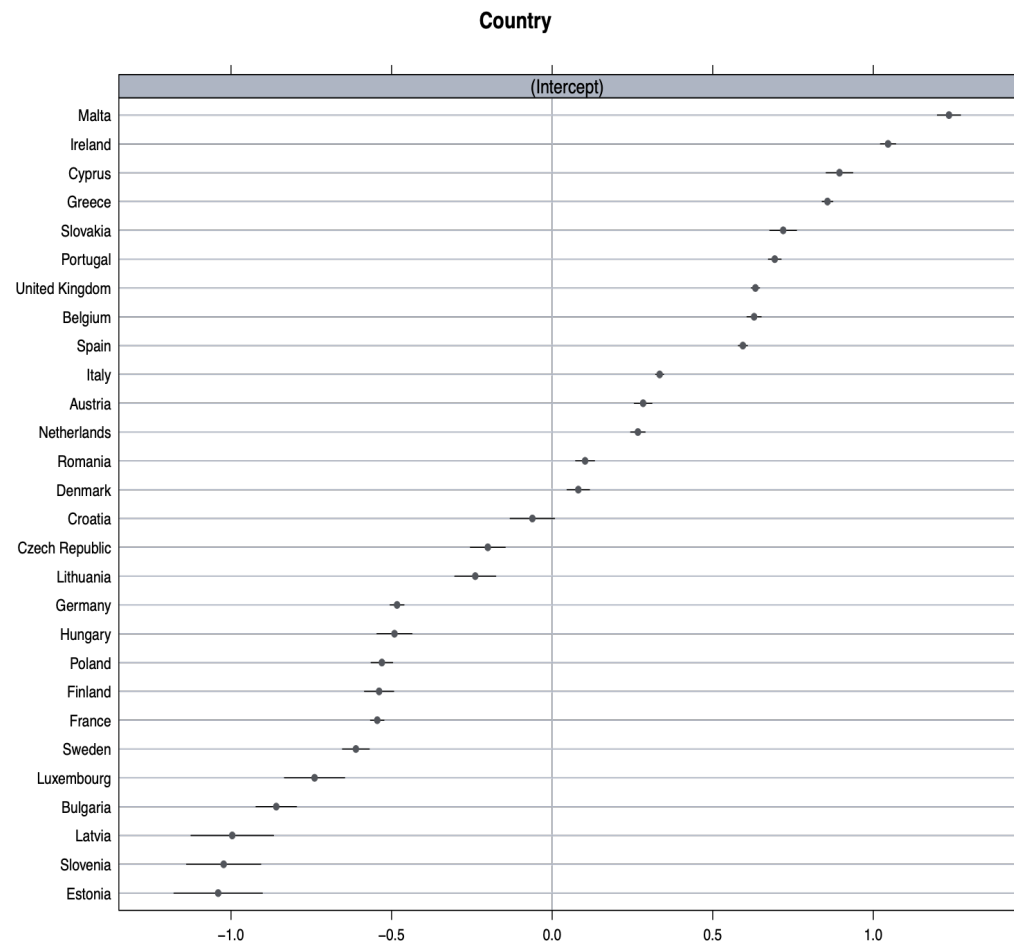
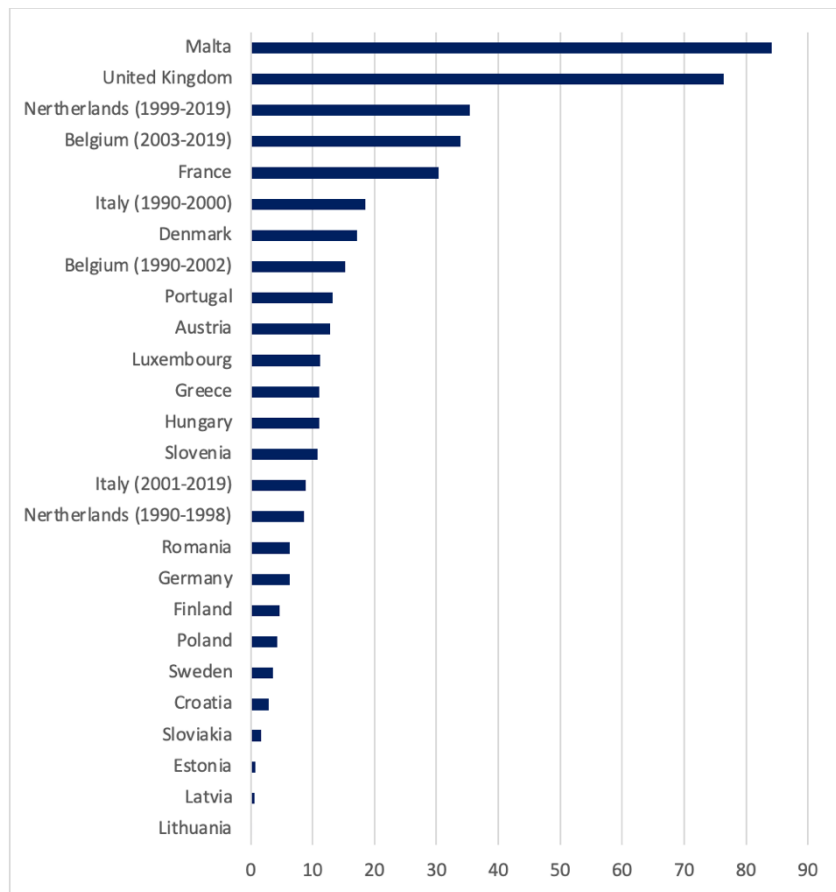
<sup>4</sup> In forthcoming versions of the paper, our objective is to use more in-depth this categorization, for example, by making a distinction between different types of MEPs.

more than 75 questions per year (N=3; UK, Ireland and Malta). Finally, as we collected data over time, we could also take into consideration important modifications in the domestic parliamentary culture of WpQs explaining why some countries, depending on the time period, have been coded twice (e.g., Belgium before 2002 and after 2002, as an electoral reform and the personalization of politics impacted a lot on the use of WpQs in the national parliaments). A first look at the data (table 1, figures 1-2) shows that MEPs from these four domestic parliamentary cultures behave significantly differently, with MEPs originating from a country with a 'low' domestic parliamentary culture asking significantly fewer WPQs in the EP than MEPs from an 'extreme' domestic parliamentary culture.

<b>Domestic Parliamentary Culture</b>	<b>MEPs (N)</b>	<b>Mean of WPQs in the EP</b>	<b>Std</b>
Low	1 110	61.81	155.98
Medium/High	828	72.29	163.99
Extreme	271	120.06	208.21

**Table 1:** Mean of WpQs in the EP by domestic parliamentary culture.

In addition, the relation between domestic parliamentary culture and the use of WPQs can also be visualized in the figures 1 and 2, respectively presenting the variation in the use of written parliamentary questions at the domestic and European levels. While not a perfect match, the comparison between the two figures already tend to indicate that there exists a strong relation between domestic parliamentary culture of MEPs and their use of WpQs in the EP. For example, if we look at the bottom of both figures, we can see some similarity for countries like Estonia, Latvia or Sweden. To a certain extent, a similar observation can be done for some countries classified as having a high (like Belgium) or extreme political culture (i.e. Ireland, Malta or UK). Of course, these preliminary observations will be more systematically tested in the statistical models (see. Below).



**Figures 1 and 2:** Variation in the use of domestic written parliamentary questions (left) and of EP written parliamentary questions (right)

Finally, as summarized in the following table, we also controlled for the impact of several variables at both the individual and meso levels. At the individual level, we took into consideration gender, the age of 1<sup>st</sup> office in the EP, the overall experience in the EP, prior domestic experience as well as the impact of some leadership positions in the EP (i.e., committee chair, responsibilities in the EPG or for the EP) (*to be further developed*). As argued by Sorace (2018), looking at key position held in EPG, the EP or at positions like committee chairs allows to account for the selective nature of a parliamentary activity.

In addition, we also controlled for meso-level factors, and in particular variation across EPGs and electoral systems. Regarding EPGs, we included a dummy variable for each EPG in order to test whether group affiliation is a relevant factor in shaping legislative behavior as well as to see whether MEPs from Eurosceptic groups behave differently (i.e. Eurosceptic model of Proksch and Slapin, 2010)<sup>5</sup>. Regarding the electoral system variable, we followed Hoyland et al. (2019) – but also colleague that outline the importance of electoral motivations (see. Sozzi, 2016a; Navarro, 2019; Chiru, 2022; Koop et al., 2018) – and controlled for the impact of the electoral system of the country of origin. Overall, the argument put forward by these studies is that there will be a difference in the activity of MEPs based on the domestic electoral systems. Yet, actual findings on this variable are mitigated<sup>6</sup>. Regarding the operationalization of electoral systems, we followed Farell and Scully (2007) and Sozzi (2016) (see. Appendix for more details).

Independent variables	Operationalization	Descriptive stats
<b>Individual MEP factors</b>		
Gender	Binary variable	1579 male MEPs (ref.) 698 female MEPs
Age (1 <sup>st</sup> office in the EP)	Continuous variable (in years, before log. transf.)	Min-Max: 21-88, Mean: 47.9, std: 10.1
XP in the EP	Continuous variable (in months, before log. transf.)	Median: 59, Mean: 93.8, std: 64.4
Domestic XP	Binary variable	No XP in domestic politics (ref.), N=1589 XP in domestic politics, N= 688

<sup>5</sup> At this stage of the article, we relied on a ‘simple’ estimation based on the membership of MEPs whereas Proksch and Slapin used an expert survey on the positions of national parties on European integration conducted by researchers from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill in 2006.

<sup>6</sup> For instance, Sozzi (2016a) – but see also Navarro (2019) – find that MEPs elected under a candidate-centred electoral system ask more questions than parliamentarians elected via a party-centered system. However, this finding is not corroborated by Chiru (2022), as the author find no evidence of more activity of MEPs originating from candidate centred system.

Committee chair	Binary variable	Never rapporteur (ref.)= 3423 At least once, n= 214
Rapporteurship	Binary variable	Never rapporteur (ref.)= 1185 At least once, n= 2452
EPG leader	Binary variable	Never rapporteur (ref.)=3613 At least once, n=24
EP leadership	Binary variable	Never rapporteur (ref.)= 3569 At least once, n= 68
<b>Meso &amp; macro factors</b>		
EPGs	Categorical variable	Conservatives (ref) N=182 EPP N=685 Euroceptics N=134 Greens_EFA N=158 GUE/NGL N=159 Liberals N=212 Non-inscrit/Technical N=110 Socialists N=637
Domestic Parliamentary culture	Categorical variable	Low (ref.), N=1110 Medium/high, N=828 Extreme, N=271
Electoral systems	Continuous variable	Index of electoral systems (score range: 3 to 9)
<b>Control variables</b>		
Legislative terms	Binary variable	Dummy for each legislative term in which MEPs served

**Table 2:** Recapitulative table of variables and their operationalization

#### 4. (Preliminary) Findings

Because of the nature of the distribution of our dependent variable that is skewed to the left (Poisson distribution), we run negative binomial regressions. Given the nested structure of the dataset (MEPs are nested by member states), and our research objective to assess the effects of domestic parliamentary culture across Member states, we specify multilevel models with a varying intercept (i.e. varying total number of WPQs by MEPs across Member States). Our model hence has a level-II structure made of 28 member states for which parliamentary culture can take different values.

For the sake of parsimony, table 3 displays the results for five different models for LT4 to LT8 altogether<sup>7</sup>. The first model is the baseline model and only includes the variable 'domestic parliamentary culture'. The second model adds to the baseline model the meso-level

<sup>7</sup> We also run separate models for each legislative term (see. Appendices 4 to 8). As the findings are pointing in the same direction (with some exception for

factors (i.e., EPGs and electoral system) while the third model includes the individual-level factors (i.e., leadership positions, gender, age, etc.). The fourth and fifth models are the full models, including all independent variables in the model 4 as well as interaction effect between domestic experience and domestic parliamentary culture in the model 5.

Overall, our baseline model indicates that 40.4 percent of the variance is located at the level 2 which is reduced to 36.4 percent by the mere variable domestic parliamentary culture (Model 1). Interestingly, the highest residual variance (43.1 percent) overserved is identified in model 3 which only cover MEPs' individual characteristics, without any meso and macro independent variables (indicating that there is clearly something to be explained at level-II). Furthermore, the model 3 is depreciated with higher AIC score than model 2. In this respect, the inclusion of the other meso and macro determinants (EPGs and electoral systems, model) does substantially improve the goodness of fit in model 2 (significantly better AIC score). Yet, it does not help to explain significantly more variance at the country level than in model 1.

	Model 1 Baseline	Model 2 Baseline + EPG + LT	Model 3 Indiv. factors	Model 4 Full model	Model 5 Full model interaction
<i>Individual level variables</i>					
Female MEPs (ref. category= male MEPs)			-0.14*** (0.01)	-0.13*** (0.01)	-0.13*** (0.01)
<i>Committee chair (ref. category= never)</i>					
Once			-0.29*** (0.01)	-0.17*** (0.01)	-0.14*** (0.01)
Twice			-0.72*** (0.02)	-0.59*** (0.02)	-0.60*** (0.02)
Three times			-1.14*** (0.08)	-0.83*** (0.09)	-0.79*** (0.09)
Four times			-1.41*** (0.27)	-1.28*** (0.27)	-1.27*** (0.27)
Rapporteurship (ref. category=never)			0.10*** (0.01)	0.25*** (0.01)	0.25*** (0.01)
EP Leadership (ref. category=never)			-0.05*** (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.003 (0.02)
EPG leader (ref. category=never)			0.002 (0.02)	-0.21*** (0.02)	-0.19*** (0.02)
Domestic XP (ref. category=none)			0.18*** (0.01)	0.21*** (0.01)	0.19*** (0.01)
Months served in the EP (log.)			0.46*** (0.01)	0.50*** (0.01)	0.50*** (0.01)
Age (log)			-1.07*** (0.01)	-1.00*** (0.01)	-0.99*** (0.01)
<i>Meso-level variables</i>					
<i>EPGs (ref. category= Conservative group)</i>					
EPP		-0.02* (0.01)		-0.05*** (0.01)	-0.04*** (0.01)
Eurosceptics		0.57*** (0.01)		0.71*** (0.01)	0.73*** (0.01)
Greens_EFA		0.32*** (0.01)		0.33*** (0.01)	0.33*** (0.01)

GUE/NGL		0.57*** (0.01)		0.61*** (0.01)	0.62*** (0.01)
Liberals		0.11*** (0.01)		0.13*** (0.01)	0.13*** (0.01)
Non-inscrit_Technical		1.09*** (0.01)		1.12*** (0.01)	1.13*** (0.01)
Socialists		-0.12*** (0.01)		-0.15*** (0.01)	-0.16*** (0.01)
Index of electoral system		-0.03 (0.07)		-0.03 (0.07)	-0.03 (0.07)
<i>Domestic Parliamentary Culture (ref. category= low)</i>					
Medium/high	0.31 (0.24)	0.35 (0.28)		0.30 (0.28)	0.30 (0.28)
<b>Extreme</b>	<b>1.20*** (0.37)</b>	<b>1.02** (0.44)</b>		<b>0.95** (0.45)</b>	<b>0.84* (0.44)</b>
MEPs serving in LT4		-0.02** (0.01)	-0.50*** (0.01)	-0.47*** (0.01)	-0.48*** (0.01)
MEPs serving in LT5		0.32*** (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)	0.02*** (0.01)	0.02*** (0.01)
MEPs serving in LT6		0.41*** (0.01)	0.11*** (0.01)	0.13*** (0.01)	0.13*** (0.01)
MEPs serving in LT7		0.90*** (0.01)	0.54*** (0.01)	0.54*** (0.01)	0.55*** (0.01)
MEPs serving in LT8		0.63*** (0.01)	0.34*** (0.01)	0.30*** (0.01)	0.30*** (0.01)
<i>Interaction</i>					
<b>Domestic XP * Medium/High Domestic Parliamentary culture</b>					<b>-0.09*** (0.01)</b>
<b>Domestic XP * Extreme Domestic Parliamentary culture</b>					<b>0.36*** (0.02)</b>
Constant	3.81*** (0.17)	2.81*** (0.41)	5.60*** (0.15)	4.93*** (0.42)	4.93*** (0.41)
Observations	2,209	2,194	2,275	2,192	2,192
Member states	25	25	25	25	25
Log Likelihood	-156,416.5	-117,454.7	-121,158.3	-108,295.8	-107,924.7
Akaike Inf. Crit.	312,841.0	234,943.4	242,641.7	216,641.6	215,903.5
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	312,863.8	235,040.2	242,432.6	216,783.9	216,057.2

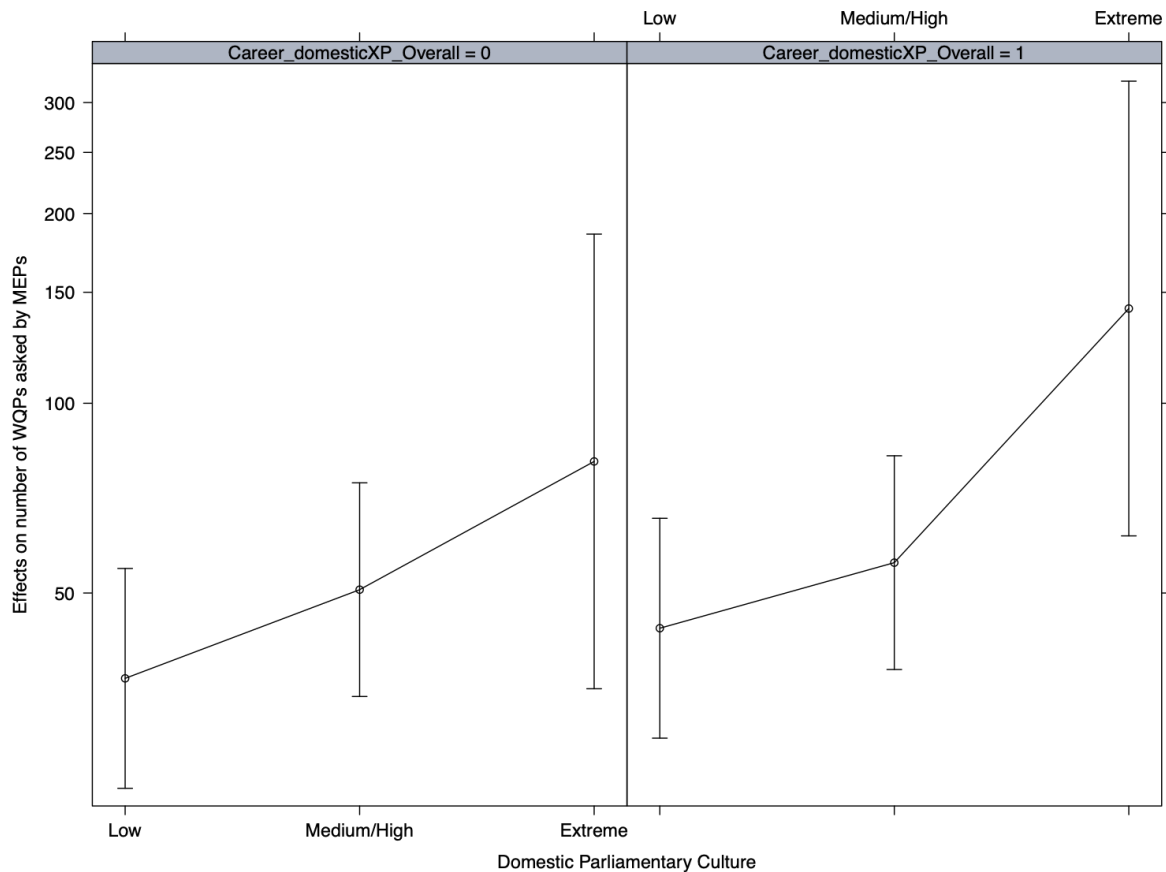
Note: \* $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$

**Table 3: Negative binomial regressions for LT4-LT8**

We now turn to the specific discussion of the results according to our hypotheses based on results for models 4 (full model) & 5 (full model with interaction between MEPs' domestic XP and domestic parliamentary culture). In model 4, hypothesis 1 stating that MEPs originating from domestic parliamentary systems that are accustomed to the use of written parliamentary question will ask more questions in the EP is confirmed for countries classified as 'extreme' in our categorization. Compared to countries categorized as 'low' (ref. category), these MEPs are indeed asking more written parliamentary questions than their colleagues, confirming the findings of models 1 to 3. This confirms the intuition of Raunio (1996) that the 'institution' of (domestic) parliamentary questions impacts on how MEPs deal with parliamentary questions in the EP. In addition, going one step further, Model 5 (see. Also figure 3 below) also depicts



some interesting findings related to hypothesis 2. Indeed, it shows that MEPs who have been socialized by an extreme parliamentary culture – thanks to their prior experience as domestic parliamentarians or in executives – are indeed asking more questions than MEPs having no prior political experience. This finding is particularly visible in the following figure 3, which presents the interacting effect of domestic parliamentary culture with the variable prior-domestic experience.



**Figure 3:** Interaction between domestic parliamentary culture and prior domestic experience

Finally, our control variables are also depicting interesting findings, confirming the results of earlier studies. Regarding meso-level variables, our different models highlight that the biggest EPGs in the EP (i.e., the EPP, S&D and the liberals) are asking on average less questions than smaller EPGs, like the GUE/NL or the Greens (see. On this matter Navarro, 2019; Sozzi, 2016; Chiru, 2022). In addition, the findings also indicate that MEPs from Eurosceptics groups and of technical groups are the one asking the most question, a result that goes in the direction of the Eurosceptic model<sup>8</sup> of Proksch and Slapin (2010) (see. also Chiru, 2022). Finally, regarding electoral system, like Chiru (2022), we do find any evidence that the electoral system has an impact on the use of parliamentary questions. At the individual level, being a committee chair (once or numerous times) show a negative coefficient for the use of written questions,

<sup>8</sup> But see. Footnote 7 (our operationalization is different than the one of Proksch and Slapin).

like having EP leadership positions (i.e., President, Vice President, Member of the Bureau) or EPGs leadership positions. On the contrary, MEPs who have been rapporteurs during their mandate in the EP tend to ask more written questions. This could suggest that more active MEPs overall are also more active in asking WpQs (i.e., activism), but this finding should be substantiated with additional data. Finally, having a prior experience before the EP mandate is also significant and indicates that these MEPs ask more WpQs.

## **Discussion**

Starting from the observation that the country variance was often identified as significant across Member States, but not yet tested in a systematic and causal manner, the objective of this article was to investigate the impact of the domestic parliamentary culture of MEPs (i.e. macro-level variable) in combination with MEPs career patterns (i.e. individual-level variable). Our main assumptions were that (1) MEPs act in the EP as per their own domestic parliamentary culture and behave in a similar way than what is done at home and (2) that this effect would be even stronger if MEPs had prior-domestic experience at the domestic level. Our (really preliminary) findings indeed highlight that MEPs originating from a country having a strong culture of using written parliamentary questions ask more questions in the EP. In addition, the data also outlines that the effect of the parliamentary culture is even stronger when considering the previous domestic experience of MEPs (i.e. previous 'domestic' socialization).

These (encouraging) findings must be further refined in the future on several dimensions. On the one hand, we need to consolidate the data collection and better refine our categorization of the variable 'domestic parliamentary culture', as this is key for our paper. At the moment, we are missing data for a couple of countries or could only retrieve incomplete data for others. In the next months, we will focus on completing the data collection and at refining our categorization of domestic parliamentary culture. On the other hand, there is much more to do with the variable 'MEPs career patterns'. For instance, in the forthcoming weeks, we would like to test whether (1) the impact of the domestic parliamentary culture diminishes over time. Indeed, we would expect that MEPs staying for a long time in the EP would be less influenced by their domestic parliamentary culture over time. In addition, we would also like to control for (2) the duration of the domestic experience, investigating whether an MP having had a substantial career at the domestic level is more influenced by its domestic parliamentary culture than an MP having only had a 'small' domestic experience. Finally, we would also like to control whether MEPs having dual mandates behave differently than their colleagues.



## Appendix

### Appendix 1: Categorization of MEPs career patterns

Political deadend			Domestic orientation		
<b>EP retirees</b> <i>MEPs with extended domestic XP terminating their career in the EP</i>	<b>One-off MEPs</b> <i>MEPs serving less than 1 term in the EP, without XP at other levels</i>	<b>Discrete European MEPs</b> <i>MEPs serving between 1 and 1,5 terms in the EP, with XP at other levels</i>	<b>Stepping-stone</b> <i>MEPs using their mandate in the EP as a stepping-stone towards domestic politics</i>	<b>Transitional domestic MEPs</b> <i>MEPs with a short transitional period at the European level</i>	<b>Domestic Two-track</b> <i>MEPs with subsequent European XP followed by a career at the domestic level</i>
Mixed orientation			European orientation		
<b>Accumulating MEPs</b> <i>MEPs accumulating European offices with domestic one</i>	<b>Discrete two-track</b> <i>MEPs with a short career at both the domestic and EU levels</i>	<b>Integrated career</b> <i>MEPs with a complex career patterns</i>	<b>Euro Two-track</b> <i>MEPs with previous domestic political experience but now committed to the EP</i>	<b>Euro-politician</b> <i>MEPs making their entire career in the EP, for more than 1,5 terms</i>	<b>Transitional Euro-politician</b> <i>MEPs with a short transitional period at the domestic level</i>

### Appendix 2: Categorization of Domestic parliamentary culture

Degree of parliamentary activity in terms of mean of WPQs asked by MPs

Low	Medium	High	Extreme
Germany	Luxembourg	Belgium (2003-2019)	United Kingdom
Sweden	Netherlands (1990-1998)	France	Malta
Finland	Italy (1990-2000)	Netherlands (1999-2019)	Ireland
Estonia	Denmark		
Latvia	Greece		
Lithuania	Portugal		
Poland	Austria		
Slovakia	Hungary		
Roumania	Slovenia		
Croatia	Belgium (1990-2002)		
Italy (2001-2019)			
Spain			

### Appendix 3: Electoral system operationalization

Index	Component scores (ballot, votes, district magnitude)	Description of system	Cases
9	3,4,2	STV	Ireland, Northern Ireland, Malta
8	2,4,2	Quasi-list	Finland
7	2,3,2	Open list, panachage	Denmark, Estonia, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg
5	2,2,1	Ordered list	Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Latvia, Netherlands, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden
3	1,1,1	Closed list	Britain, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Portugal Spain

Source: Farrell and Scully (2007).

## Appendix 4: Full model – Legislative term 4 (1995-1999)

### Multilevel poisson regression - Number of WPQs by MEPs - MEPs serving during LT4

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>
	Total_WPQs_LT4
Gender1	0.28*** (0.02)
Committee_Chair_LT41	0.59*** (0.02)
EP_Leadership_LT41	-0.30*** (0.06)
EPG_Leader_LT41	-0.01 (0.02)
XP_LT1_LT4	0.001*** (0.0002)
Age_First_Office	-0.03*** (0.001)
EPGsEPP	-0.28*** (0.04)
EPGsEurosceptics	-0.03 (0.12)
EPGsGreens_EFA	0.43*** (0.05)
EPGsGUE/NGL	-0.11** (0.05)
EPGsLiberals	-0.08* (0.05)
EPGsNon-inscrit_Technical	1.23*** (0.04)
EPGsSocialists	-0.66*** (0.04)
Electoral_System	-0.14** (0.06)
Career_LT4_domesticXP1	0.24*** (0.03)
Parl_Culture_LT4Medium	0.32 (0.28)
Parl_Culture_LT4High	-1.22** (0.54)
Parl_Culture_LT4Extreme	0.95** (0.41)
Career_LT4_domesticXP1:Parl_Culture_LT4Medium	-0.41*** (0.05)

Career_LT4_domesticXP1:Parl_Culture_LT4High	0.88*** (0.08)
Career_LT4_domesticXP1:Parl_Culture_LT4Extreme	-0.85*** (0.07)
Constant	4.72*** (0.38)
<hr/>	
Observations	629
Log Likelihood	-9,613.34
Akaike Inf. Crit.	19,272.69
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	19,374.90
<hr/>	
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

## Appendix 5: Full model – Legislative term 5 (1999-2004)

### Multilevel poisson regression - Number of WPQs by MEPs - MEPs serving during LT5

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>
	Total_WPQs_LT5
<hr/>	
Gender1	-0.03 (0.02)
Committee_Chair_LT51	0.05** (0.02)
EP_Leadership_LT51	0.28*** (0.02)
EPG_Leader_LT51	0.17*** (0.02)
XP_LT1_LT5	-0.001*** (0.0001)
Age_First_Office	-0.03*** (0.001)
EPGsEPP	-0.35*** (0.04)
EPGsEurosceptics	-0.80*** (0.08)
EPGsGreens_EFA	0.40*** (0.04)
EPGsGUE/NGL	0.77*** (0.04)
EPGsLiberals	-0.01 (0.04)
EPGsNon-inscrit_Technical	0.91*** (0.04)
EPGsSocialists	-0.52*** (0.04)

Electoral_System	-0.04 (0.36)
Career_LT5_domesticXP1	0.59*** (0.02)
Parl_Culture_LT5Medium	0.55 (1.59)
Parl_Culture_LT5High	2.73 (2.11)
Parl_Culture_LT5Extreme	1.55 (2.22)
Career_LT5_domesticXP1:Parl_Culture_LT5Medium	-0.31*** (0.05)
Career_LT5_domesticXP1:Parl_Culture_LT5High	-0.79*** (0.06)
Career_LT5_domesticXP1:Parl_Culture_LT5Extreme	-0.62*** (0.05)
Constant	1.82 (2.18)
<hr/>	
Observations	683
Log Likelihood	-13,326.70
Akaike Inf. Crit.	26,699.41
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	26,803.52
<hr/>	
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

## Appendix 6: Full model – Legislative term 6 (2004-2009)

### Multilevel poisson regression - Number of WPQs by MEPs - MEPs serving during LT6

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>
	Total_WPQs_LT6
Gender1	-0.30*** (0.02)
Committee_Chair_LT61	-0.08*** (0.02)
EP_Leadership_LT61	-0.23*** (0.02)
EPG_Leader_LT61	0.11*** (0.02)
XP_LT1_LT6	0.001*** (0.0001)
Age_First_Office	-0.02*** (0.001)
EPGsEPP	0.04 (0.03)



EPGsEurosceptics	0.78*** (0.04)
EPGsGreens_EFA	1.18*** (0.04)
EPGsGUE/NGL	1.24*** (0.04)
EPGsLiberals	0.49*** (0.04)
EPGsNon-inscrit_Technical	2.53*** (0.04)
EPGsSocialists	0.33*** (0.04)
Electoral_System	-0.06 (0.11)
Career_LT6_domesticXP1	0.16*** (0.02)
Parl_Culture_LT6Medium	0.99** (0.47)
Parl_Culture_LT6High	0.87 (0.66)
Parl_Culture_LT6Extreme	1.20* (0.69)
Career_LT6_domesticXP1:Parl_Culture_LT6Medium	0.13*** (0.04)
Career_LT6_domesticXP1:Parl_Culture_LT6High	0.08 (0.05)
Career_LT6_domesticXP1:Parl_Culture_LT6Extreme	0.84*** (0.03)
Constant	2.93*** (0.64)
<hr/>	
Observations	789
Log Likelihood	-19,768.50
Akaike Inf. Crit.	39,583.01
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	39,690.43
<hr/>	
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

## Appendix 7: Full model – Legislative term 7 (2009-2014)

### Multilevel poisson regression - Number of WPQs by MEPs - MEPs serving during LT7

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	<i>Dependent variable:</i>
	Total_WPQs_LT7
Gender1	-0.13*** (0.01)
Committee_Chair_LT71	-0.01 (0.01)
EP_Leadership_LT71	-0.10*** (0.01)
EPG_Leader_LT71	0.31*** (0.01)
XP_LT1_LT7	0.0001 (0.0001)
Age_First_Office	-0.03*** (0.0005)
EPGsEPP	-0.43*** (0.02)
EPGsEurosceptics	0.29*** (0.02)
EPGsGreens_EFA	-0.35*** (0.03)
EPGsGUE/NGL	-0.29*** (0.03)
EPGsLiberals	-0.13*** (0.02)
EPGsNon-inscrit_Technical	0.35*** (0.02)
EPGsSocialists	-0.79*** (0.02)
Electoral_System	-0.07 (0.11)
Career_LT7_domesticXP1	0.52*** (0.01)
Parl_Culture_LT7Medium	0.83* (0.45)
Parl_Culture_LT7High	0.75 (0.64)
Parl_Culture_LT7Extreme	1.47** (0.67)
Career_LT7_domesticXP1:Parl_Culture_LT7Medium	-0.40*** (0.02)
Career_LT7_domesticXP1:Parl_Culture_LT7High	-1.03*** (0.04)
Career_LT7_domesticXP1:Parl_Culture_LT7Extreme	-0.50***

	(0.03)
Constant	5.26*** (0.62)
Observations	750
Log Likelihood	-39,519.27
Akaike Inf. Crit.	79,084.54
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	79,190.81
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

## Appendix 8: Full model – Legislative term 8 (2014-2019)

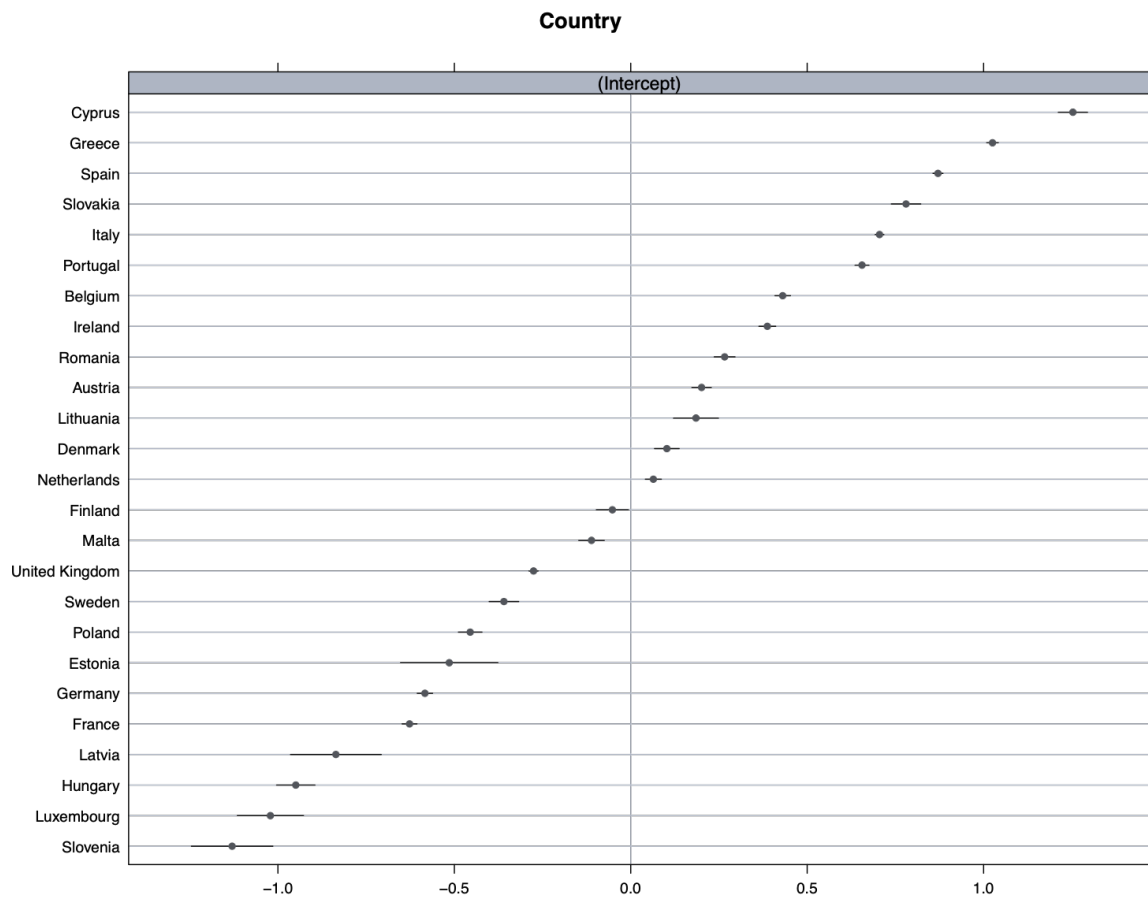
### Multilevel poisson regression - Number of WPQs by MEPs - MEPs serving during LT8

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>
	Total_WPQs_LT8
Gender1	0.001 (0.01)
Committee_Chair_LT81	0.13*** (0.02)
EP_Leadership_LT81	-0.05** (0.02)
EPG_Leader_LT81	0.45*** (0.02)
XP_LT1_LT8	-0.0002 (0.0001)
Age_First_Office	-0.01*** (0.001)
EPGsEPP	0.26*** (0.02)
EPGsEurosceptics	0.57*** (0.03)
EPGsGreens_EFA	0.08** (0.03)
EPGsGUE/NGL	0.66*** (0.03)
EPGsLiberals	0.25*** (0.03)
EPGsNon-inscrit_Technical	0.66*** (0.03)
EPGsSocialists	0.25*** (0.02)
Electoral_System	-0.01 (0.07)
Career_LT8_domesticXP1	-0.11***

	(0.02)
Parl_Culture_LT8Medium	-0.21 (0.31)
Parl_Culture_LT8High	0.08 (0.44)
Parl_Culture_LT8Extreme	0.69 (0.46)
Career_LT8_domesticXP1:Parl_Culture_LT8Medium	0.44*** (0.03)
Career_LT8_domesticXP1:Parl_Culture_LT8High	0.35*** (0.03)
Career_LT8_domesticXP1:Parl_Culture_LT8Extreme	0.50*** (0.04)
Constant	3.68*** (0.43)
<hr/>	
Observations	742
Log Likelihood	-22,720.84
Akaike Inf. Crit.	45,487.68
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	45,593.70
<hr/>	
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

## **Appendix 9: Residual country variance beyond parliamentary culture**

*Country residual variance is not anymore explained by parliamentary culture distribution (but simply random).*



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